

How White Christian Women Make Connections between Faith, Politics and Service

by

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Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up.

Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, p. xxiii

And what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6: 8

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DEDICATION

In loving memory of my mother, Marilyn Carol DeGraw
I miss you mom. But your spirit is present here, on every page.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement and Significance of the Problem

Recent societal events have brought the issue of religion to the forefront of American and campus life. The events of 9/11 and the war in Iraq have increased global religious and political tensions that have produced xenophobic incidents and religious discussions on college campuses around the country (Eck, 2001; Kantrowitz & Naughton, 2001; Nash, 2001; Peek, 2005). These events have forced researchers and scholars to examine the role of religion and spirituality as it intersects with our political and daily lives and has given rise to interesting discussions and questions, such as those found on the Social Science Research Council's blog examining issues related to "secularism, religion and the public sphere" (<http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/>). Just as our larger society is beginning to examine the diversity of the world's religions and the complexities these worldviews bring to human interactions, so too campuses are being forced by recent events to consider the religious and spiritual lives of their students.

Recent research supports the concept that issues of faith and spirituality should also be a concern to educators because they are of interest to today's college students (Astin, Astin, Lindholm, Bryant, Calderon & Szelenyi, 2005; Cherry, Deberg, Porterfield, 2001; Chickering, Dalton & Stamm, 2006; Dalton, Eberhardt, & Crosby, 2006). Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) summarized the findings from early studies of student spiritual development as students' participation in religious activities declined during

college. However some later studies found that while students' religious commitment declined during college, commitment to examining spiritual matters actually increased (Bryant, Choi & Yasuno, 2003). When Pascarella & Terenzini's (2005) broad examination of the student development literature included more recent studies of student's religious or spiritual development they found that students' religious values did not increase or decrease but "became reexamined, refined, and incorporated in subtle ways with other beliefs and philosophical dispositions" (p. 285). Another analysis of literature on the effect of college on students' religious faith and practices states that students are both interested and involved in religious activities while in college (Hartley, 2004). In fact, nearly half of the students in a 2004 study found it essential or very important that their college should encourage their personal expression of spirituality (Lindholm, 2007, p. 13). If students are seeking to grow spiritually, it seems reasonable to suggest that higher education researchers and practitioners should seek ways to challenge and support them in this process.

The spiritual development of students was largely overlooked in the early higher education literature (Collins, Hurst & Jacobson, 1987; Holmes, Roedder, & Flowers, 2004; Love, 1999; Newman, 2004). Some Christian higher education professionals have examined student spiritual growth as it relates to the student affairs profession, (Guthrie, 1997) but this literature has received little attention from secular educators and scholars. This omission in higher education literature addressing spirituality has been noted resulting in an influx of more recent research (Chickering, et al., 2006; Glazer, 1999; Hartley, 2004; Hoppe & Speck, 2005; Jablonski, 2001; Kazanjian & Laurence, 2000;

Lindholm, 2007; Love, 1999; Miller & Ryan, 2001; Nash, 2001; Newman & Smith, 2004; Rogers & Dantley, 2001; Tisdell, 2003).

A majority of the recent literature on spirituality in higher education is focused on the new diversity of religious expressions in American higher education, rather than on encouraging an examination of students' spiritual lives and growth. Current literature examines the *effects and practice* of spirituality at an *institutional* level such as how often students pray and go to church and in what things they are involved. With a few exceptions, examination of *how* and *why* students develop spiritually on an *individual* level is lacking in the higher education literature. The question remains; How do students develop spiritually rather than practice religiously, which is what has been emphasized in the literature.

A further limitation of the existing literature examining the spiritual development of students is that it does not examine the intersection of spirituality with culture or gender (Tisdell, 2003). As will be examined in more detail in the literature review, there is little research examining spirituality as it applies specifically to women (Parks, 1986, 2000; Slee, 2004). Therefore, researchers are calling for further studies that will examine spirituality as it intersects with other identity constructs (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000)

Politics and other social issues provide one context in which to observe the complexities of student spiritual development rather than examining solely religious practice. A 2004 study from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) study found that like the national trends, students' social and political views were related to their spirituality and religious engagement. Not surprisingly, students with high levels of

spirituality and religious engagement were less likely to support abortion, legalization of marijuana, casual sex, and same-sex marriage. They also were conservative on issues such as military spending and taxation. But attitudes about capital punishment and affirmative action were not expected. Students scoring high on spirituality and religious engagement were *more* likely than those scoring lower to oppose the death penalty and *less* likely to support withdrawing affirmative action (HERI, 2004, pp. 12-13). This is surprising as many would expect students who are spiritually engaged to support the death penalty and withdrawing affirmative action. These findings are helpful in that they challenge the common stereotype of highly spiritual and religiously engaged students as being conservative on all societal issues. But the results are limited in that they do not offer deeper explanations as to why and how those students reach these conclusions and how or if these conclusions relate to their spirituality. This dissertation seeks to address these deeper explanations in depth by examining how students make connections.

It is also important to study the connection between faith and political and social engagement of students, since the research suggests that they remain politically apathetic and cynical about politics (Longo & Meyer, 2006). The authors of this literature review state that the studies from the recent past have found “that among the greatest dangers for American Democracy is that politics is becoming a spectator sport, an activity that relegates citizens to the sidelines. Perhaps nowhere is this crisis more dramatic than with our youngest generations” (p. 2). Yet more recent studies, including data from the 2003 Higher Education Research Institute, showed a modest increase of students interested in “keeping up to date with political affairs” (Longo & Meyer, 2006, p. 7). To maintain an active and thriving democracy in the United States, we must encourage the younger

generations to be politically involved. Yet the literature is ambiguous at best in determining the political involvement of modern students.

This lack of political engagement is even more acute for female students. While more women than men are voting (Center for American Women and Politics, 2007; Lopez, Kirby & Sagoff, 2005), female college students continue to be less interested in politics generally and have less overall political engagement than men (Bernstein, 2005; Verba, Burns & Schlozman, 1997). These gender differences are significant and need to be examined to ensure equal political voice for women.

Research Questions

Overall research question

To address the problem and some of the limitations discussed above, this dissertation will examine some of the unexamined connections between student spiritual development and political and social beliefs and issues. This dissertation will also further examine the possible influences of gender on how women students make these connections. Therefore, the major research question of this inquiry is:

How do undergraduate Christian women students connect their spirituality to political and social issues, in their beliefs and their actions?

This question is framed so as to examine the *process* of how students make connections, rather than simply the *content* of what they believe about political and social issues. Do they make these connections in community and if so, what communities are influential in that process? Do they make these connections through referring to the Bible primarily, or do they include other texts and sources? Do they process with mentors, peers or in other communities? And in explaining the process, are there

common themes or patterns utilized? Are there formational experiences that have helped make these connections?

The overall research question is also intentionally stated to examine the process of connecting spirituality with students' beliefs and actions on political and social issues. This will allow the examination of what students say they believe, but also how (or if) they put these beliefs into action. Students will define what they think a political action is but based on the literature, this could include voting, membership in a political party, membership in a political group on campus, writing or calling a political representative, raising money for candidates, following a campaign in the news, watching a debate, or working for a political campaign. As examined in the political empowerment literature, the students' motivation to be involved in these issues can be addressed. Is their Christian faith one of those motivating factors? What groups or political activities are they involved in and why? Do students feel like they must choose between their faith communities or their political communities when responding to social issues?

Lastly, the research question is intentionally designed to examine students' views on both political and social issues. There are two reasons it is important to examine both of these areas with today's Christian students. First, as the literature on the trends of college students and politics outlines, involvement in traditional political activities has declined in recent years, yet their participation in community and civic service has increased (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Jarvis, Montoya & Mulvoy, 2005; Levine & Cureton, 1998; Longo & Meyer, 2006). This has resulted in one major literature review calling this involvement in community service an "alternative to politics" (Longo & Meyer, 2006). If students see their involvement in the community and the resulting social issues

as an alternative to political involvement, then it is important to address these beliefs as part of my examination.

Secondly, working with Christian students, specifically, enhances the need to examine both social and political issues. There is a belief in some Christian traditions that politics and religion should be separate. There is a conflict within Christianity surrounding an individual's belief in either a private or a public God. The findings of another poll supported the existence of this conflict when it found that 46% of Americans believed that the church should not express its views on day-to-day political and social issues (Pew Forum, 2006). Wallis (2005) shares a poignant example of this worldview. As a young man he was having a discussion with an elder in his church about racism, and the elder responded, "Christianity has nothing to do with racism; that is a political issue, and our faith is personal" (p. 34). Because this faith is personal, others cannot tell you how it should be enacted in public life. It is thought to be inappropriate for pastors or others to state their views in church on politics and to suggest how others should respond.

But these same Christian traditions that encourage separation between faith and politics encourage involvement in other issues they consider morally imperative. The same Pew Forum poll found that clergy spoke out on a number social issues including poverty (92%), abortion (59%), the situation in Iraq (53%) and laws regarding homosexuals (52%) (Pew Forum, 2006). For some churches, abortion, for example, would not be thought of as a political issue but rather a moral issue. Yet their motivations for being involved in these social issues may be very similar to those of other Christian students who are involved politically. Because of this, both students' political and social beliefs and actions need to be examined.

Research sub-questions

As discussed in the selected literature review below, there is evidence that indicates that how students make these connections may differ for students based on various social identities, especially those of gender and race. To examine these possible influences the following sub-questions will be addressed:

- 1. What is the impact of gender on how women students connect their spirituality to political and social issues, in their beliefs and their actions?**
- 2. What is the impact of race on how White students connect their spirituality to political and social issues, in their beliefs and their actions?**

These sub-questions were chosen because this inquiry is interested in the intersection of multiple identity constructs. It is important to support the call of previous researchers to further develop the complexity of spiritual development theory by examining how it intersects with multiple identities such as race and gender. The literature suggests that individuals experience the influence of multiple identities at any given moment and that these identities are mutually influencing (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991; Tisdell, 2003). To gain the most accurate portrait of how identities intersect with how students express their spirituality in different contexts, researchers must include multiple identities in the examination.

But including multiple identities in a single qualitative study design could create an overwhelming number of interviews and a prohibitive amount of data to examine, and would limit any possibility of examining implications for a broader group of people beyond individuals. Therefore, this study has narrowed the research focus to include two identity constructs: race and gender.

Definitions

To begin this proposal, it is important to consider what exactly is being examined when discussing the spiritual development of students. When studying spiritual development literature, it becomes clear that deciphering the differences between *religion*, *spirituality* and *faith* is central to this inquiry for a number of reasons. Confusion can result when these terms are used interchangeably so it is important for researchers to use the most precise language possible to be clear on what construct they seek to examine (Anderson, 1995; Astin, 2004; Love, 2001; Newman, 2004). It is also important to use the terminology that is consistent with previous researchers to build on their previous findings.

While historically the terms *religion* and *spirituality* have overlapped in meaning (Pargament, 1999), academics have developed increased differentiation between them (Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, Rye, Butter, Belavich, Hipp, Scott & Dader, 1997; Zinnbauer, Pargament & Scott, 1999). Most definitions present religion as related to an institutionalized practice or the behavioral aspects of attending to one's search for meaning (Astin, 2004; Chickering et al., 2006); while spirituality is seen as personal, unattached to formalized religion and is most often a measure of self-identification or subjective personal practice (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Mattis, 1995; Sanchez & Carter, 2005). In addition, the term religion seems often to have negative connotations, while the term spiritual has more positive connotations in contemporary society. Johnson, Kristeller and Sheets (2007) state that spirituality is often characterized as "good, individualistic, liberating, and mature" while religion is characterized as "bad, institutionalized and constraining" (p. 3).

While this polarization in terms is discussed by researchers, it is not reflected as clearly in how students and other individuals view themselves. In general, individuals see spirituality and religiousness as overlapping, but not the same concepts (Miller & Thorensen, 2003). For example, Zinnerbauer et al. (1997) found that a majority of people thought of themselves as both religious and spiritual (74%) and that almost everyone believed themselves to be spiritual. Yet Rayburn (2004) states that women are more likely to see themselves as spiritual and religious than men, and men are more likely to see themselves as religious but not spiritual.

Research on college students also suggests that they usually prefer to describe themselves as spiritual, although many also think of themselves as religious (Anderson, 1995; Astin et al, 2005; Cherry et al, 2001; Schwartz, 2001). Zabriskie (2005) found that many students thought of themselves as spiritual and religious, but this percentage was even higher for women (50% compared to 38% of men). This still leaves a number of students who considered themselves spiritual but not religious supporting the premise that some students' spiritual development is no longer identified with a specific religious tradition. As Cherry et al. (2001) state,

Undergraduates that we encountered . . . could be characterized as spiritual seekers rather than religious dwellers, and many of them were constructing their spirituality without much regard to the boundaries dividing religious denominations, traditions, or organizations (p. 276-277).

These findings further reinforce the need to examine student spirituality outside of the confines of their specific religious settings. Higher education institutions offer one such context for examination.

Definitions commonly used by student development theorists when discussing spirituality vary greatly. Love (2001) defines religion as “a shared system of beliefs,

principles, or doctrines related to a belief in and worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) and governor(s) of the universe” (p. 8). Because this definition is inclusive of a reference to an individual, supernatural power, it is certainly more limited in its applicability to students seeking spirituality outside of a theistic tradition. Chickering et al. (2006) define spirituality and religion in their work but prefer the term *authenticity* because it is “more straightforward and less loaded” (p. 8). This concept is very broad and seems to lack a key component of spirituality; some sort of connection outside of oneself. In his recent research on spirituality in college students, Astin (2004) states “there’s little point in trying to develop a precise definition” (p. 34). Astin instead provides a broad definition of “spirituality” as being concerned with our interior, subjective life and qualitative or affective experiences. With this broad definition Astin hopes “virtually everyone qualifies as a spiritual being.” (p. 34).

Faith is the preferred term of early academic faith development theorists (Fowler, 1981, 1984, 1994; Parks, 1986, 2000) and future researchers that built on their work (Slee, 2004). Parks (2000) devotes an entire chapter to examining the complex definition of faith and its relationship to meaning, trust and hope (p. 14). She defines faith as “a human universal . . . a dynamic phenomenon that undergoes transformation across the whole life span, with the potential for a particularly powerful transformation in the young adult years” (p. 16). Parks believes faith is a noun, in that it is something we “put our heart upon” and trust as true (p. 24); yet, it is also a verb, as faith is a process of making meaning that is dynamic and often changes over time. She defines “meaning making” as the human desire to understand “the connections among things: A sense of pattern, order, form and significance” (p. 19). She also believes faith affects action and

that those living a life of faith will be motivated to act on what they trust to be true (p. 25).

This recognition of faith as connecting to heart and mind (meaning-making) and motivating toward action provide a complex and compelling construct that is more narrowly defined than what is understood as *spirituality*. Yet it is also not limited to actions connected to specific *religious* or institutionalized observances. Therefore, the term *faith* is the appropriate term for the construct being examined in this dissertation.

In addition, the scope of this dissertation has been strongly influenced by the research and writing of early faith development theorists and is limited to examining how Christian students specifically are making connections or meaning. It has also been my experience that the term *faith* is often the preferred term for Christian students when discussing their personal belief systems and how they make meaning of their Christian religion. As such, the word *faith* is the most appropriate term for use in this inquiry.

Paradigm and Assumptions

This dissertation will be conducted in the constructivist tradition. This paradigm is defined by the belief that there are multiple views of reality and that these realities are socially and historically constructed (Creswell, 2003; Mertens, 2005; Stage & Manning, 2003). In the constructivist tradition, the goal of this inquiry is to understand a phenomenon: how students make connections. To do so, one must get multiple participant perspectives, in depth in a variety of contexts in order to understand the complexity of the phenomena being examined (Creswell, 2003; Stage & Manning, 2003). While there is no objective reality, data can “be tracked to their sources, and the logic

used to assemble interpretations can be made explicit in the narrative” (Mertens, 2005, p. 15).

Another assumption on which this dissertation is based is that the constructivist paradigm is best for examining the influence of race and gender. Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that the cultural lenses that individuals use to respond to situations are often invisible or hidden from the individuals themselves. This makes it difficult for researchers to examine the influence of race and gender directly. As the cultural lenses (specifically the lenses of gender and race) of the students are a particular concern of this dissertation, the constructivist paradigm allows the researcher to examine these lenses in depth from the students’ perspective. This purpose leads to the need for qualitative research methods. These issues will be addressed by conducting qualitative interviews with twenty White women students. This will allow for the emergence of “think rich description” which is one of the strengths of qualitative methods (Patton, 2002). Rubin and Rubin (2005) then suggest that constructivist researchers learn about culture by

asking about ordinary events and deducing the underlying rules or definitions from these descriptions and pay particular attention to unusual usages of words and to the stories that convey cultural assumptions (p. 29).

The diverse interviews of this study will be examined for some of the underlying usages and words that will portray cultural differences found in the interviews.

The constructivist approach also acknowledges that the “inquirer and the inquired-into” (Mertens, 2005, p. 14) are in a process where they mutually affect each other (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Stage & Manning, 2003). This relationship can be seen as a positive characteristic of the constructivist research approach as this connection can allow for more in-depth and high-quality understanding and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba,

1985; Stage & Manning, 2003). But it is also important for the researcher to acknowledge the influence of his or her personal positionality. As a result, I will acknowledge my values and own cultural lenses and their possible influence on the research process (see methodology).

Overview of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study is to understand how undergraduate White Christian women students connect their spirituality to their beliefs and actions on political and social issues. Chapter one will introduce the study by defining the problem, presenting the research questions and needed definitions and examining the research paradigm that will be used.

Chapter two of the dissertation will set the context for the dissertation by reviewing the literature connected to the research questions. It will begin with a brief history of the role of religion in higher education and then will present the conceptual framework and model for the dissertation. The literature review will discuss the moral development literature and its historical connections with spiritual development theory and literature. It will then proceed to examine spiritual development research and models specifically for college students and women. Identity research and its connection to political and religious identity will then be examined. This chapter will conclude with a brief examination of college students and political and social beliefs and actions.

Chapter three will outline the qualitative research methods used to examine the research questions proposed in this dissertation. This will include an explanation of the qualitative study methods including the data collection and analysis process. This chapter will conclude with some ethical considerations and limitations to the research presented.

Chapters four and five will present the results of the research with Chapter four focusing on the women's general faith development as well as how this development is connected to their political and social beliefs and actions. Chapter five will then examine the results relating to the influence of race and gender on how the women made these connections.

Chapter six will discuss the results of the research by connecting back to the conceptual framework and original research questions of the project. Implications for future research and practice will conclude the final chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This dissertation is influenced by a wide variety of literature on the growth and development of women students. This chapter will outline some of the most influential literature in creating the conceptual framework for this project, which grounded the methodology and research design. A brief review of the historical role of religion in higher education in the United States will be presented, followed by the historical findings of moral and spiritual development theory. The spiritual development literature will then be narrowed for the purposes of this study to examine the research on the spiritual development, specifically of college students and women. Literature will then be discussed that examines the beliefs of White Evangelical Christians on social issues and feminist perspectives on Critical Whiteness Theory. Lastly, literature that examines the political beliefs and actions of college students and how these beliefs intersect with social and religious beliefs will be examined. The chapter will conclude with a synthesis of the literature into a conceptual framework that will guide the research process for the dissertation.

Historical Role of Religion in Higher Education

The integration of spirituality into the activities of the university, and concern for educating the whole student (spiritually and academically) was standard practice in the early development of American institutions (Chickering et al, 2006; Hartley, 2004; Loy & Painter, 1997; Marsden 1994; Parks, 2000; Rudolf, 1990; Stamm, 2007; Thelin, 2004). Women were especially affected by the connection between religion and higher

education, as many of the early opportunities for higher education were founded on the premise that this education would promote piety and domesticity, two of the highest virtues for women at the time (Cherry et al, 2001). Known as the “cult of true womanhood”, women were confined to domestic duties as prescribed by religious institutions of the time (Nidiffer, 2000). Eventually, women were allowed to pursue higher education to fulfill the needed occupations of teacher and missionary, which resulted in some of the early higher education institutions for women being converted from women’s theological schools (Rudolph, 1990; Solomon, 1985).

The rising prominence of science on campuses and the corresponding loss of prominence of religion caused higher education institutions to begin to separate issues of religion from issues of the intellect when educating students. This shift resulted from many factors including the Industrial Revolution, a growing appreciation for the research model of the German university, and a growing acceptance and teaching of Darwinism (Hartley, 2004; Marsden, 1994; Solomon, 1985; Thelin, 2004). *The Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin was published in 1859 and was consistently being taught on secular campuses by the 1880s. Greater Biblical criticism was imported from the German universities and allowed scholars to study the Bible just as any other text (McManners, 2001). On secular campuses, chapel services became optional, religion and theology classes became electives, and the individual religious convictions of faculty were less of a concern. Marsden (1994) states,

The division of labor between theological education and university education had been rather completely effected. . . . In most of the major emerging universities . . . by the 1880s, higher critical views, or simple skepticism about traditional views, were generally accepted among the leading professors as a matter of course” (p. 209).

While some historians argue that higher education history actually supports the need to integrate the examination of spirituality back on to secular campuses (Marsden, 1994), most suggest that this separation between the life of the university and the topic of religion has left many higher education institutions unsure of how or if they should help students develop spiritually (Chickering et al, 2006; Nash, 2001). As stated at the beginning of this proposal, recent literature has begun to call for once more making the examination of spirituality a part of the mission of higher education. This dissertation seeks to find constructive ways to help higher education institutions and professionals engage students in this fundamental area of their development.

Kohlberg's moral development theory

To understand the foundational spiritual development models and the critiques that follow, one must understand their connections to the moral development research of Kohlberg (1981, 1984, 1991). While research on moral development began long before Kohlberg in the 1960's (Wendorf, 2001), his model of moral development continues to be most widely accepted and debated (Giesbrecht, 1997). As with most theories of development, Kohlberg begins with the work of Piaget. Kohlberg sought to build on Piaget's work by focusing on the principle of justice, and by including a much larger sample (Rich & Devitis, 1994). Kohlberg's work conceptualized the evolution of moral development as an increasing awareness and integration of a justice perspective in moral decision making. Kohlberg considered his theory to be cross-culturally and gender relevant, and deliberately distanced himself from the role of faith or religion in his work. Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer (1991) state,

Kohlberg's psychology rests on the assumption that moral development occurs independently of religious influences. Therefore he paid only marginal attention

to religious development; or, to be more precise, only after the end of the moral development sequence, at stage 7, does religion begin to play a role again in Kohlberg's scheme (p. 13).

Kohlberg proposed a six-stage model of moral development. Detailed descriptions of each stage are beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is helpful to have the basic idea of the three levels which expand the concept of justice "from an egocentric to a societal perspective. That is, what is considered to be fair or morally right expands from a system that serves oneself (preconventional), to one that serves one's close friends and family (conventional) and finally to one that also serves strangers (postconventional)" (King and Mayhew, 2004, p. 382). The central concern of Kohlberg's model is justice, so it is commonly referred to as the *ethic of justice* model. It is based on the importance of moral reasoning, individual decision, fairness and impartiality.

Of particular interest for this inquiry is the question of what role spirituality played in Kohlberg's theory. Kohlberg was very intentional to separate faith and moral development, as his experiences as a concentration camp survivor caused him to wonder about people, especially those of faith, who did not help fight the injustices of the holocaust (Kohlberg, 1991).

Critique of Kohlberg's moral development theory. Critiques of Kohlberg's theory of moral development question its cross-gender and cross-cultural applicability (Cowden, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Siddle Walker and Snarey, 2004; Simpson, 1974; Snarey, 1985). Kohlberg's primary research was conducted with White, male participants. While subsequent studies included women, as well as people from various racial groups, the original theory was based on the primary research (Jaffe & Hyde, 2000; Swaner, 2004). However, Walker (1984) found no significant gender bias after conducting a

metaanalysis of 108 samples of moral development literature. Gilligan (1982) then proceeded to pursue research that focused more on the relational rather than individual-focused theory of moral development of Kohlberg.

Gilligan: "In a Different Voice". Gilligan's (1982) research on female moral development was foundational for future research on women's development. She begins her work by questioning the prevailing notion that there is a "problem" with women's development because it was defined by early theorists as heavily relational. She states that "development itself comes to be identified with separation, and attachments appear to be developmental impediments, as is repeatedly the case in the assessment of women" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 12-13).

Gilligan (1993) then conducted research of her own developing a model of moral development commonly referred to as an *ethic of care* model. Gilligan presents the results from three studies, all involving personal interviews. One study interviewed twenty-five sophomores taking a course on moral and political choice. The second study was an abortion decision study of twenty-nine women ranging in age from fifteen to thirty-three from diverse class and ethnic backgrounds. The final rights and responsibilities study involved 144 males and females matched on a number of factors across the age span from six to sixty. It is important to note that her interview questions involved asking her subjects to respond to "real life" dilemmas faced by the women (such as making a decision about a possible abortion) as opposed to the hypothetical situations proposed by Kohlberg (Gilligan, 1982, 1988; Rich & DeVitis, 1994; Schrader, 1999).

Gilligan's research culminated in a model stressing the value of relationships and connectedness in moral development, specifically for women. In this model, individuals

developed from a focus on caring for oneself, to caring for others and ending in caring for oneself *and* others (see Table 1). Gilligan explains the difference between her model and Kohlberg ethic of justice model as follows:

A justice perspective draws attention to problems of inequality and oppression and holds up an ideal of reciprocity and equal respect. A care perspective draws attention to problems of detachment or abandonment and holds up an ideal of attention and response to need. Two moral injunctions—not to treat others unfairly and not to turn away from someone in need—capture these different concerns. (Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988, p. 73).

While Kohlberg’s model focuses on moral reasoning, individuation, and what is fair, Gilligan’s focuses on moral decision making that happens in relationships, includes affective dimensions, and is concerned with what is honest and does not hurt others.¹

Table 1

Gilligan’s (1982) Ethic of Care “Sequence”

Perspective	Key issues
Care for self	<p>Focused on survival because of powerlessness in relationships. Morality imposed by society.</p> <p>TRANSITION: Women judge above perspective as selfish.</p>
Care of others	<p>Focused on responsibility of caring for others at the expense of of caring for herself. Self-sacrifice = care=goodness Accepts societal norms as foundation for moral decisions.</p> <p>TRANSITION: Women realize disequilibrium in relationships and a loss of sense of self. Begin to question how to be responsible to others AND to self.</p>
Care of self AND others: Interdependence	<p>Women begin to define moral judgments as those that are honest. Internally examine societal expectations and expectations of others and make decisions. Women can accept responsibility for final choice as they accept responsibility to make choices.</p>

¹ See Brabeck (1983, p. 278) and Siddle-Walker & Snarey (2004, p. 5) for detailed comparisons between Gilligan and Kohlberg’s theories of moral development.

Critique of Gilligan. The main critiques of Gilligan's work center on her research methodology and the overstatement of the gender differences in moral reasoning (Greeno & Maccoby; 1986; Luria, 1986). Gilligan was clear in her original work (1982) and later research (1986, 1987, 1988) that the ethic of care was not used exclusively by women; men also utilized an ethic of care orientation and women utilized an ethic of justice. But care was often the moral orientation women preferred when making moral decisions and men preferred a justice orientation (Gilligan, 1982, 1986; Gilligan & Attanucci, 1986). Later researchers challenged this perspective and found little evidence for gender differences in moral development orientations (Brabeck, 1983). Brabeck argued that both orientations were found in both men and women and so developmental theory should focus on developing theory and research to incorporate both orientations.

Two additional quantitative studies with college student samples also did not find that gender was associated with different types of moral judgments (W. Friedman, Robinson & B. Friedman, 1987; Ford & Lowery, 1986). The Ford and Lowery (1986) study did find that women used an ethic of care more *consistently* and men used an ethic of justice more consistently.

A study conducted by Jaffee and Hyde (2000) supports Brabeck's earlier findings. The authors conducted a meta-analysis of 113 studies to determine if the empirical evidence available today would support Gilligan's claims that there are gender differences in the use of the ethic of care or ethic of justice orientations and if these differences could be moderated by other variables. Their analysis found that there was a small effect size that favored women toward care reasoning and men toward justice reasoning, but that "although distinct moral orientations may exist, moral orientations are

not strongly associated with gender” (p. 45). They suggest that because men and women use a mixture of both care and justice reasoning, the debate should move beyond this dichotomy to examine *how* individuals use both orientations and how and when they decide to use each one (p. 46).

Another main criticism of Gilligan notes that Gilligan, like Kohlberg, conducted most of her research on White, upper-middle class subjects (Luria, 1986). As a result, many felt the ethic of care model operated from a White, upper-class cultural perspective. Thompson (2004) states:

Most of the mainstream literature on caring has assumed that White, middle-class, heterosexual conceptions of caring was (or ought to be) universal. . . Yet not only is the mainstream ideal of caring by no means universal, but its very status *as* an ideal is problematic. Many, if not most, women of color have to cope with “real-lived” conditions that bear little resemblance to the choice-laden circumstances posited for the moral individual (p. 27).

Some women of color did not believe that the model of care outlined by Gilligan applied to the experience of many women of color.

Feminist critique of Gilligan is also concerned that Gilligan’s theory could bring back the days of the cult of “pure womanhood” because of its emphasis on relationships.

Gilligan responds by pointing out the complexity of her theory when she states:

They speak of the nineteenth-century ideal of pure womanhood and the romanticizing of female care: I portray twentieth-century women choosing to have abortions, as well as women college students, lawyers, and physicians reconsidering what is meant by care in light of their recognition that acts inspired by conventions of selfless feminine care have led to hurt, betrayal, and isolation. My critics equate care with feelings, which they oppose to thought, and imagine caring as passive or confined to some separate sphere. I describe care and justice as two moral perspectives that organize both thinking and feelings and empower the self to take different kinds of action in public as well as private life. (1986, p. 326)

This will not be the last time researchers concerned with women's development will be accused of limiting opportunities for women by focusing on relationships and connection rather than independence and separation. This critique will reappear when encountering later research on women's cognitive development.

Noddings: Ethic of Care AND Justice. In addition to Gilligan, another researcher important in developing the conversation about the ethics of care was Noddings (1984 and 1989). Noddings became increasingly focused on finding ways to incorporate care *and* justice in an ideal model of moral development. She believed that justice by itself was inadequate and wanted to develop a new model: an ethic of justice *and* caring instead of justice *versus* caring. Noddings (1999) summarizes her thoughts as follows:

Care Theorists usually seek ends compatible with justice, but we try to achieve them by establishing conditions in which caring itself can flourish. Out of this healthy environment of personal and community caring, solutions may emerge that will satisfy not only the criteria of justice but also the *people* who are targets of our good intentions. What better path to equity? (p. 19).

Schrader (1999) examines this possible tension between the ethic of care and the ethic of justice by conducting interviews with college students to try to find the place where care and justice in moral decisions might intersect. Schrader used elements of both Gilligan's and Kohlberg's theories in her interviews with sixty-five students aged 18-22 that were equally represented by social class and gender. Schrader found that the information gained from these interviews was so complex and varied; it could not be put in an ethic of care or an ethic of justice model exclusively. She proposed researchers and educators should focus more on the *process* individuals use to make moral decisions and less on the *end product* of those decisions. Schrader agreed with Noddings' call for an ethic of care *and* justice and believed focusing on process might provide the best

opportunity to meld the justice and caring ethics without trying to oversimplify the moral development of humans.

Siddle Walker and Snarey: The “Matrix” of Moral Development. While the care and justice model seemed to offer possibilities for being more inclusive of the complexity of women’s moral development, it did not “fit” for some women of color and it continued to ignore the role of religion in moral reasoning. Then a break through book edited by Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) made these connections, at least for African Americans. Siddle Walker and Snarey state that African American’s often must balance dual perspectives when making moral decisions. They propose a new model or *matrix* of intersecting values that produce important virtues. While all levels of the matrix are valuable, for this dissertation I will focus on the intersection of race and gender, the intersection of religion and ethics, and the intersection of the community and the individual in the moral development of African-Americans.

Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) begin the development of the matrix by stating that *race* is not subordinate to *gender*. As discussed earlier in this paper, much of the research and critique of the ethic of justice orientation of moral development had centered on issues of gender. But the common experience of most people of color is that they are primarily categorized by their race before their gender. The authors would like to see an equal balance between these two values which they suggest produces the virtue of *liberation* which frees individuals from the racial and gender stereotypes that often seem to tell African Americans what they can and cannot do.

Another intersection on the matrix states *religion* is not subordinate to *ethics*. While most theories of moral development avoid the role of religion, Siddle Walker and

Snarey believe this is not acceptable in the African American model of moral development as religion is central to African American history. The authors state, “any effort to understand the moral dimension of African American life will be diminished without understanding the historically central role of religion in African American views of care and justice” (p. 9). When these two values are present in balance, *hope* results. “Religion can provide people with a vision of what *ought* to be in the precarious face of what *is*” [*italics original*] (Siddle Walker and Snarey, 2004, p. 135).

A third grid in the matrix proposes that *community* is not subordinate to the *individual*. Of course this set of values coincides well with the ethic of care and justice position, but Siddle Walker and Snarey believe community is even more central to African American life, and probably not enacted in the same ways proposed by Gilligan. Siddle Walker and Snarey suggest that when both the community and the individual are valued, the virtue of *uplift* results. Uplift is defined as “the enhancement of the community and the valuing of the individual’s diverse gifts” (2004, p. 136).

But how do we know when someone is becoming morally mature based on the matrix? Siddle Walker and Snarey suggest that a morally developed person is one who knows which side of the value combination to emphasize and which to underemphasize depending on the situation. As individuals develop the nuances of these values, they become wise and operate with higher order moral thinking.

Critique of Siddle Walker and Snarey. This matrix of moral development has great possibilities to continue the conversation about the intersection of moral development and spiritual development. Yet it still has many limitations. While the model is drawn from multiple disciplines, theories and contexts, it has not been applied

and tested. No instrument has been created or specific interviews conducted to examine if the matrix model is an accurate reflection of the African American culture as a whole and how an individual grows into a moral person. Much more qualitative and quantitative research is required to establish its validity.

These findings in moral development literature hold possible implications for how students make connections between their spirituality and their political and social beliefs. This researcher hypothesizes that students' moral orientations may provide motivation for thinking about and taking action on social and political issues. Some students may be motivated by a need for justice or fairness. The literature suggests this may most likely be a theme expressed by White male students. Others may express relationships or connection as the main motivation for becoming involved, which may be the preference for female students. But most likely the women students will express a combination of caring and justice concerns, but may prefer or favor a caring orientation.

Spiritual Development Theory

It is important to understand the history of moral development theory because it is the foundation, or the beginnings, of spiritual development theory, which is a major construct of this inquiry. Spiritual development theory is important to understand for this dissertation because it offers ways in which students make connections in, and with, their spirituality, and how these processes change over time. While the connections examined below in spiritual development theory are not limited to connections with social and political beliefs and actions, they do provide possible themes and processes that could be applied to this inquiry.

Fowler's model of faith development. When discussing the topic of spiritual development, the name of researcher James Fowler (1976, 1984, 1994, 2001) often dominates, because his research and model are seen as the most comprehensive and well researched (Lee, 2001; Slee, 2004; Streib, 2005). Other researchers have examined spiritual development (Allport, 1950; Helminiak, 1996; Kahoe & Meadow, 1981; Oser, 1980), but most follow-up research is conducted on Fowler's model. Fowler (1981) and his associates developed the five stage model of faith development (preferred term of Fowler) based heavily on the theories of Piaget, Erickson and Kohlberg, and from 359 qualitative interviews with a majority (97.8%) White and Christian (81.5%) sample. The gender breakdown of the interviews was almost equal (49.9% female). Unfortunately, it cannot be determined exactly how many interviews were conducted with traditional college-age students (the focus of this inquiry), but about 40% of the interviews were conducted with 13-30 year olds.

Based on these interviews, Fowler (1981) proposed a six stage model for Faith Development that mirrors these earlier theorists' linear models of development. As this model is foundational to other models, a more thorough discussion of its form is warranted.

Stage one is named intuitive-projective faith, and typically encompasses children from age three to seven. During this time, children express their faith through their imagination, and imitate the faith stories, images, and actions of adults. Once children develop concrete operational thinking, they move to stage two, or mythic-literal faith. Typically, in stage two, school children (although adults were found in this stage) begin to embrace the stories of faith as their own. They begin to create their own narrative of

the faith story to make meaning of their life experiences. This stage also begins to value fairness and justice.

To transition to stage three, Fowler believes that a clash or contradiction of these stories and images will cause individuals to “step outside” themselves and reflect on their faith, which can move them to stage three: synthetic-conventional faith. Typically, this stage begins in puberty and is largely centered on relationships outside the family, such as friends and boyfriends or girlfriends. Individuals begin to develop a sense of self, and of how others view them, and these realizations are applied to a concept of God. God is seen primarily relationally, and is often sought in connection with issues of identity. Values and beliefs are often internalized and not examined.

To move to stage 4, individuative-reflective faith, Fowler believes there needs to be a serious clash in values from a valued source, such as parents or church leaders, that would cause individuals to examine what they believe and why. This clash typically happens in young adulthood, and allows an individual to separate from the expectations and thoughts of others, to examine his or her own faith. As one progresses in this examination, more information may be needed about other faiths and beliefs, or individuals may find their beliefs are “flat”, and therefore become motivated to reflect.

Stage 5 typically happens in midlife and is known as conjunctive faith. This stage is even challenging for Fowler (1981) to describe (p. 184). During this stage, individuals are more open to seeing alternative faith perspectives as related to theirs, even if this realization is threatening. During this phase, individuals struggle with the unconscious levels of beings that affect their faith experience and expand the boundaries of their faith.

Only a few people will actually reach Fowler's final stage, called universalizing faith. These people transcend the boundaries of individual faith traditions to fully embrace the higher values of faith. Fowler states

“Stage 6 becomes a disciplined, activist *incarnation* [italics in original] —a making real and tangible—of the imperatives of absolute love and justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions. The self at Stage 6 engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality” (1981, p. 200).

Critique of Fowler's theory. Critique of Fowler's theory centers around five areas of concern: his definition of faith, the limitations of his stage 6 or mature faith, its cognitive focus, and its lack of applicability to non-Christians, women and non-Western cultures (Kwilecki, 1988; Parks, 1980, 1992; Rich & DeVitis, 1994; Small, 2006; White, 1989). A critical mass of these critiques can be found in three volumes (Dykstra & Parks, 1986; Fowler, Nipkow & Schweitzer, 1991). While an exhaustive examination of these critiques is beyond the limits of this dissertation, I will examine the three critiques of most salience to my research question: the linear nature of the model, the cognitive focus, and the lack of applicability to women.

While the theory is well accepted and researched, some scholars challenge some of the bases of Fowlers theory. As can be seen from the description above, Fowler's model is linear, hierarchical, and implies a steady, irreversible progression toward more developed faith. Some critics believe that this is not an accurate portrait of how faith develops. Heinz Streib (2001) believes the linear nature of the model does not allow for regressions back to earlier stages, which is common in faith development. He also states that focusing on the cognitive dimension of faith development ignores the psychodynamic-interpersonal, relational-interpersonal, interpretative-hermeneutic, and

life-world dimensions of faith development. In his later work, Fowler (2001) responds to Streib's criticism by saying the model Fowler created is only half the story, and that the emotional side of the faith story needed to also be told. (p. 164).

Streib went on to propose a model of faith "styles" which better resembles geological layers, where earlier faith styles do not disappear, but are buried and can reappear throughout ones development. Based on work by phenomenologists Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur, Streib proposes five religious styles which incorporate the cognitive, interpersonal and life-world dimensions. He names these styles subjective, instrumental-reciprocal, mutual, individuative-systemic, and dialogical. While Streib provides an intellectually interesting alternative model, he does not provide research to test his theory, which limits its applicability.

Some researchers believe that Fowler's work focused on cognitive functions and deals little with the affective domain (Ford-Grabowsky, 1987; Jardine & Viljoen, 1992; Rich & DeVitis, 1985; Streib, 2001). Initially, Fowler (Fowler et al., 1991) stated that his theory was not "dealing with a psychological reductionism to intellectual or rational aspects to the exclusion of the emotional or the irrational." However later, Fowler (2001) states that his theory is only half the story, and that the emotional side of the faith story also needed to be told (p. 164).

A third key criticism of Fowler's work states that it does not account for and value women's unique ways of expressing and experiencing faith (Bolen, 1994; Parks, 1986, 1991, 1992; Slee, 2004; Streib, 2005). Slee (2004) states:

The sources drawn upon, the images and metaphors of faith employed, the models of mature faith adumbrated, the theoretical understanding and operationalization of faith, and the account of stage development proposed can all be critiqued for their inbuilt androcentric bias (p. 9).

Fowler himself acknowledges that the women interviewed for his study did not score as high as men in his faith development model, and this issue needed further examination (1981, p. 321). Later, he admits that his researchers may have underscored some women and overscored some men (Fowler, 1992, p. xiii). One research study conducted with undergraduate students found that male students scored higher on Fowler's faith development interview (Walker, 1985), but later Hoffman (1994) found that women scored higher.

While Fowler's work continues to dominate spiritual development literature, it will not be part of the conceptual framework for this inquiry because of its possible lack of applicability to women's unique ways of expressing and experiencing faith. As this dissertation seeks to address specifically the ways in which gender may affect spiritual connections, Fowler's model does not provide the most effective framework.

College Student Spiritual Development: Parks. While other models of faith development have emerged since Fowler (Clare and Fitzgerald, 2002; Streib, 2001), the research and model of Parks (1986, 2000) is particularly interesting for the purposes of this project, because it describes the faith development of young adults specifically. Parks is especially concerned with how young adults develop faith (preferred term of author), and eloquently describes this process below.

To become a young adult in faith is to discover in a critically aware, self-conscious manner the limits of inherited or otherwise socially received assumptions about how life works—what is ultimately true and trustworthy, and what counts—and to recompose meaning and faith on the other side of that discovery. (p. 7-8).

Similar to Fowler, Parks begins her discussion by incorporating the work of cognitive theorists like Kegan, Piaget and Erikson, but she then diverges from Fowler by

incorporating the work of Gilligan by adding relational or community constructs to her model. As a result of thirty years of experience in higher education and interviews with multiple students, Parks proposes a faith development model that weaves three discrete strands of development: cognition, dependence and community (Table 2).

Perhaps the most significant contribution from Parks’ research is her finding that the transition that Fowler described from Stage 3 faith to Stage 4 (the stages and transitions usually experienced by college students) should actually be thought of as a third stage rather than simply a transition between two stages. Parks names this new stage *tested adult*, in which individuals are no longer exploring multiple worldviews and values as in the young adult years, but are actually “testing” or “trying on” various commitments to “see if they fit.”

Table 2

Parks (1986, 2000) model of faith development					
Form of	Adolescent		Young adult	Tested Adult	Mature Adult
Cognition	Authoritative Dualistic	Relativistic	Probing Commitment	Tested Commitment	Convictional Commitment
Dependence	Dependent/Counter- Dependent		Fragile inner- dependent	Confident inner- dependence	Inter- dependence
Community	Conventional	Diffuse	Mentoring Community	Self-selected class/group	Openness to difference

Based heavily on Perry’s (1970) work, *cognition* as described by Parks (1986, 2000) involves how individuals think and who has authority in one’s life when making meaning. Meaning in adolescence is dualistic in nature with issues being either right or wrong with little gray or middle ground between the two. Usually this meaning is decided by some external authority such as parents. Then at some point that external authority fails or is in conflict with other authority which causes individuals to believe

that knowledge is all relative to context and relationships. In the young adult years students are searching or “probing” multiple forms and sources of truth and comparing them to their own life experiences to see if they “fit”. Students often feel divided at this point as they try to decide on the life commitments in which they want to engage but have many options. In the tested adult phase, individuals tentatively cognitively commit to faith as they have formed it, but this commitment is still being tested and revised. Mature adults end with a strong yet thoroughly examined cognitive commitment to faith.

Parks (2000) departs from Fowler’s theory and acknowledges the work of Gilligan by including discussion and a distinct faith development strand addressing emotions or affect. Parks believes that faith must develop in the context of relationships and the construct of *dependence* is one way to examine this affective connection to faith development. Adolescents are dependent on the relationship with whatever source of authority is important in their lives and then they often become counterdependent when they act opposite or against this relationship. Parks then draws a sharp contrast between inner-dependence and independence. She believes that Western culture over-emphasizes the concept of individualism and autonomy, which denies the importance of the relational dimension of life. She chooses the term inner-dependence to represent that point at which individuals can recognize their own inner-voice within the role of an external Authority in the life of faith. As a young adult, this inner-dependence is fragile as they begin to interact in the “adult” world, yet are still gaining confidence in their voice. Individuals in the tested adult stage then evolve to a more confident inner-dependence in which individuals are confident in their own voice but also acknowledge the need for other personal relationships. Parks then concludes with describing an interdependence

phase that happens after midlife, in which individuals still acknowledge their individual sense of self and the importance of relationships, but also understand at a deeper level the interconnectedness of all people.

Lastly, in the form of *community*, Parks proposes that faith development theorists along with psychologists need to move beyond focusing on the individual at the expense of examining the effect of the context in which individuals are living and making their faith commitments. Parks found that individuals develop in faith by moving from being in community with those that are broadly similar to us, to multiple groups representing various perspectives, to mentoring groups of ideologically compatible groupings, and ending in openness to the genuine “other” (Parks, 1986, p. 95). These “concentric circles” (p. 94) are similar to the focus of Kohlberg’s moral development work in suggesting that individuals move from a focus on themselves to engagement with, and connections to, the larger world.

This model begins to address the criticism that Fowler’s model was too individualistic and cognitively focused by including the strands of community and dependence. But some find that her model remains too cognitively focused (Love, 2002). Perhaps Parks’ greatest weakness is that her work lacks detailed information about her methodology. She states (2000) that her research sample resulted from three different studies at a variety of institutions over her thirty years of practice. The only detailed description of her sample and methodology is from one study (Daloz, C. Keen, J. Keen & Parks, 1996), and this particular study looked at individuals that were thirty years old and older, which does not seem to apply directly to the study of young adults.

Parks utilizes student quotes as her main source of data but very little is known about the context in which these quotes were made and the representativeness of the sample interviewed. Of particular concern is the lack of information on the gender, racial and religious background of the majority of the students discussed. This has caused some to question the theory's applicability to the broad diversity of today's college students (Anderson, 1995; Watt, 2002). In her early work (1980), Parks does discuss briefly (p. 356) how of the eight students (of a total sample of 20 divided equally between sexes) who reached stage 4 of her model, only one was male. She hypothesizes many reasons for this but suggests that further research would need to examine this discrepancy. Unfortunately, she does not return to this critique in her later work.

Although the critiques of Parks' theory must be considered, her model of college-age faith development has enhanced the dialogue because of her inclusion of the community and dependency strands of development and because of its focused examination of spiritual development during the young adult years. Her work has been included in the conceptual framework as it offers possibilities for ways in which students might make connections between their spiritual development and the social and political beliefs and actions. Parks suggests that most college students will remain in the *young adult* phase during college but some may progress to *tested adult*. Within either of these phases, students may choose to think about and become involved in social and political issues because they are testing or "trying on" concrete ways in which to enact their faith commitments.

Parks also suggests that students may use mentoring communities of individuals who share the same worldview as the students. She suggests that higher education

institutions can be one such mentoring community for students as they grow spiritually. In one of her later articles (2008) she goes into detail as to how mentoring environment helps move individuals “from a more limited world view and capacity to make a meaningful contribution to a more adequate world view and enhanced capacity to contribute in positive ways to the ongoing evolution of life” (p. 6). Parks goes on to state that mentors recognize individual potential and provide support, challenge, inspiration, and accountability. This researcher hypothesizes that mentors and mentoring communities may also be an important tool for students to make not just spiritual connections, but spiritual connections with political and social issues.

Garber: Connections Between Christian Belief and Behavior

The work of Garber (2007) offers a helpful final connection for the conceptual framework for this dissertation as it examines how students weave together Christian belief and behavior. Garber examines this issue through the perspectives of the history of ideas, the ethic of character and the sociology of knowledge (p. 48). Through these lenses he examines his years of teaching and ministry experience with students and also conducts numerous interviews twenty years after college with individuals who retained a “coherent faith, one that meaningfully connects personal disciplines with public duties” (p. 124). Garber found that these individuals were able to consistently connect their beliefs and actions through three major factors: convictions, character and community.

Garber found that those individuals who had developed a Christian worldview or Christian convictions that could incorporate the complexities of the modern world were best able to sustain the connection between their Christian faith and their lived experience. These individuals also found teachers or mentors that embodied these

commitments and character so that they could see the possibilities of living out this worldview. Garber also found that those who could sustain this commitment were in community with others who were mutually committed to these ideals. Higher education can provide these opportunities for students, and did for many. But those who sustained those commitments twenty years later continued to find and nurture these factors.

Garber acknowledges that his findings are remarkably similar to the conclusions reached by Parks as to the three strands that promote spiritual development: cognition, dependence and community. It is suggested that when interviewed, students may express any of these three factors as vital tools in helping them make connections between their spirituality and their political and social beliefs and actions.

Women's Spiritual Development. While the body of research on spiritual development in general is large, fewer studies have examined the role of gender on this process and those that have been conducted have provided mixed results concerning the influence of gender on the spiritual development process. Some researchers conclude that the faith development of women is more similar than different to that of men (Bolen, 1994; Cureton, 1989). Cureton (1989) undertook one of the few quantitative studies of college-age students. He was attempting to develop a quantitative measure of Fowler's faith development interviews to determine the spiritual developmental level of first-year students at a Christian college, and if that level differed for women. Using analysis of variance and regressions, the author determined that the spiritual development of female students was not significantly different from that of men, yet the reliability of the instrument used was in question by the author.

Other researchers focused on the religious behavior (as opposed to development) of women students. McAllister (1981) found that a majority of women they interviewed experienced a “religious awakening”, but that this was a gradual process for most. Pastorino, Duham, & Kidwell (1997) also found that college-age women have a period in which they reexamine their faith. Buchko (2004) found that women’s faith contained more relational aspects as their daily religious practice reflected a greater desire to connect with God through prayer and they had more frequent feelings of reverence toward God. Women were also more likely to seek out religious advice when having personal problems. Berkel, Armstrong and Cokley (2004) found no statistically significant sex differences on religiosity or spirituality with a sample of African-American students.

Some researchers have found that spiritual development of female undergraduates has unique content and structures. Anderson (1995) examined the religious identity (preferred term of author) of three undergraduate Christian White women. Anderson found that in the process of religious identity development, all three women found their “voice” by embracing gender inclusive language in their spiritual life and by being introduced to theories of feminism. Central themes from their narratives corresponded to Park’s work in that all three discussed the importance of “central figures”, or mentors, and the role of relationships in communities to developing their spiritual identities.

Holmes, Roedder and Flowers (2004) also sought to understand students’ spiritual development through qualitative interviews with four Christian students (race not specified). The authors found that peer and mentoring relationships were central themes expressed by the students. But the men and women experienced their faith in relation to

these themes in very different ways. The women chose peer groups that remained the same throughout their years in college, while the men sought out new relationships throughout. Both men and women also sought out mentors, but the women sought out individuals that validated them as individuals, whereas the men sought out mentors that would stimulate discussion and ask challenging questions. The authors also found that the women expressed times during their college faith development where they were silent about their faith in order to fit in while the men spoke out about their faith regardless of how others perceived them.

Slee: Faithing Processes. While the previous research suggests that spiritual development may differ for women, few researchers have explored this in-depth. Nicola Slee (2004) is one researcher who has the most comprehensive study and model of women’s faith development to date, so her work will strongly influence this dissertation. Through open-ended interviews of thirty women from various Christian religious denominations, Slee discovered six *faithing*² processes, or strategies that women used “in making sense of and patterning their experience and finding ultimate meaning in it” (p. 13) (see Table 3).

Table 3: Processes of Women’s Faithing (Slee, 2004)

Faithing Process	Definition
Conversational	The experience of the open-ended interview was a meaningful way for women to articulate their faith.
Metaphoric	Use of images, similes and analogies
Narrative	Use of story as primary mode of expression
Personalized	Use of human exemplars as reference
Conceptual	Use of theoretical concepts to analyze experience
Apophatic	Indirectly explaining what faith is by implicit or negative terms (what it is NOT).

² Slee (2004) states “I prefer to use the verbal form ‘faithing’, rather than the noun ‘faith’, to highlight the dynamic and active process of meaning-making with which we are concerned in the study of faith development” (p. 61-62).

While the above processes are important, Slee states that the majority of her findings were about the themes she observed in the faith development of women, or the *what* of women's faith development. She identified three major themes of *alienation*, *awakenings*, and *relationality*, which were presented in various forms and to varying degrees by the women interviewed. *Alienation* was defined as "a profound loss of self, or authentic connection with others, and of faith" (p. 81). Some women felt so separate that they could not articulate their current spiritual place, either because they were silenced by patriarchal religious norms, or because they were simply unable to put their experience into linguistic form. The remaining women interviewed used multiple metaphors and images to describe these periods in their lives in which they felt profound separation from others, themselves and, therefore, from their faith. They described their alienation experience as being in a wilderness or desert, as "deadness", "loss of feeling", being "stuck" or paralyzed, being on a quest for the unknown, and giving up the self to a male other, even to the extreme of the use of violent images, such as the rape and attack of self. Slee found that many women had resolved this crisis of self and faith by early adulthood, but a few others remained immobile in this phase into later adult years.

Awakenings, or a "breakthrough to new consciousness and spiritual vitality", (p. 109) is the second theme described by the women. Some described leaving home or other situations such as religious communities or significant relationships that were constraining or alienating. Others described the experiences of travel, coming home, being at rest, motherhood, relating to marginalized or suffering others, discovering one's creative voice or gifts, and experience with illness or death as inspiring spiritual growth or change. Slee found that for some women the process after this awakening to reclaim

or rename their spiritual life from previous constricting spiritual models was so great that they rejected spirituality altogether. Others found ways to claim and rework their previous spiritual lives with their newfound sense of selves.

Slee also found the women in her study described their faith in God as experienced in *relationship*. The women described their faith as being in relationship with God, but also in relationships with other humans. For some of the African American women in her study, this relationship with God was more focused on its “oppositional power” as a source of affirmation and strength to face the racism and oppression present in their daily lives. Lastly, Slee states that a pervasive goal for the women was to integrate the various aspects of their lives and reach holism or balance.

Slee (2004) concludes that Fowler’s model holds some connections to the faith development of women in her interviews. These commonalities were shared in the analysis above. But Slee believes there were four key ways in which her work differed from Fowler’s. The women’s faith development descriptions emphasized concrete, narrative and visual forms of thinking while Fowler’s model emphasized rational or abstract thought. Secondly, Slee’s findings suggest that women see their faith development as fundamentally relational. Fowler’s theory does discuss relationality in the middle stages but it seems to be ignored or lost at the later stages. Lastly, Slee supports Parks’ finding that Fowler’s model does not pay enough attention to the periods of alienation women experienced, and that these should have more emphasis than simply as transition periods to future stages.

While Slee’s work provides exciting possibilities for examining the faith development of college-age women, there are some limitations that must be

acknowledged. Slee's sample lacks many women of color (she never states explicitly the racial breakdown of her sample), perhaps limiting its cross-cultural applicability. The few women of color that Slee did interview expressed connections between their faith and political and social issues and experiences of oppression (p. 77). The sample is also Christian, which makes her model most appropriate to examine Christian spiritual development. The sample of women interviewed ranged from age 30 to 67, which provides obvious limitations as to its applicability to college-age women. This area is of less concern as many of the experiences shared, and on which the themes were drawn, happened during their college years. While it must be acknowledged that looking back on experiences rather than being directly within them could cause them to be viewed differently, often the distance from the experience allows for clarity.

Contributions from women theologians, clergy and religious educators. Women educators and theologians have also written extensively on the spiritual development of women. The work of many of these women has been foundational in the thinking of researchers in the area of women's spiritual development, so some of the major themes from their work will be summarized.

One group of women has built on the theological concept of *relational* faith as another way to examine women's faith development (the term most often used as most write in specific religious traditions) (Cook, 1994; Cooney, 1985; Devor, 1989; Ierardi, 1990³). They believe that focusing on the theological and relational aspects of Christian faith, rather than the psychological theory on which Fowler based his work more accurately represents Christian faith development.

³ Ierardi presents a compelling examination of the evolution of the theology of *relationality* and its connection with women's faith development.

Many writers also emphasize the need to acknowledge the importance of *metaphors* in women's faith development and the need for women to often discard traditional patriarchal metaphors and form new ones to represent their spiritual growth (Christ, 1986; Ierardi, 1990). Ochs (1983) specifically suggests that the metaphors of spiritual stages or journeys do not reflect women's experiences, and stories of mothering and love would better represent women's spiritual experiences.

Like Slee, women theologians have also found that story and "quest" are significant themes in women's spiritual development (Christ, 1986; Cooney, 1989). Some hypothesize that because women's voices are not heard in other societal contexts (including religious organizations), the need for them to tell their stories and integrate faith into the storyline is formational spiritually.

Lastly, many of the feminist theologians speak of elements of their spiritual walk that are represented in the research discussed throughout this literature review. In particular, many of them speak of an "awakening" (Christ, 1986) or "awareness" (Osiek, 1986) that develops when they realize the conflict between their feminist ideals and religious tradition. Conspicuously missing from the spiritual development theories discussed thus far but found in feminist literature on spirituality is a period of anger or disappointment with established religion (Osiek, 1986). It seems that when women and other marginalized groups realize that their spiritual voice has been "silenced", anger or a deep sense of loss can result and should be considered in models (Winter, Lummis & Stokes, 1994). Spiritual feminists are also calling for examining how social constructs like race, class and culture intersect with women's spirituality, which will be reflected in

the upcoming section on identity research (Atkinson, Buchanan, & Miles, 1987; Pogrebin, 1991).

Research Integrating Moral and Spiritual Development of Women

Perhaps one of the most directly applicable studies was conducted by Cowden (1991), who examined the faith development of women by comparing the moral development theories of Gilligan and Kohlberg with Fowler's faith development theory. Cowden's research examines if there was evidence for an ethic of care underlying women's faith development, what impact either the ethic of care or justice has on faith development of women, and how the different elements of the Gilligan and Fowler models affect understandings of women's faith development.

After interviewing ten Baptist female ordained pastors (5 African-American and 5 White) Cowden (1991) found that the women interviewed reflected all three moral development orientations (ethic of justice, ethic of care and ethic of care *and* justice), and that their moral orientation did affect how they expressed their faith. In Cowden's study, women coming from the care orientation described their faith in highly relational terms, while those from the justice perspective used a more "detached voice" (p. 100) and expressed their faith as a process in the context of larger societal issues rather than a personal relationship with God. The one woman who came from the mixed perspective spoke with influences from both perspectives. This finding clearly supports that moral and faith development are correlated, and that there is an ethic of care, but it does not support that this orientation is the preferred mode of moral development for women.

Because Cowden's sample is older (ages 30-45) and all established in the Baptist denomination, it obviously cannot be directly generalized to the spiritual development of

women undergraduates. But this work is important to examine because it incorporated a diverse sample and establishes that moral development affects spiritual development.

Cook, Larson and Boivin (2003) conducted a study with interesting findings when applying Gilligan's research to spiritual development. The authors used Gilligan's paradigm of views of self and a newly created similar paradigm to represent views of God with 44 Christian College first-year and senior students. The student's views of self were coded on the justice or care continuum. The newly created instrument to examine views of God was coded as "indicating an orientation to God as an authoritative or relational figure (or a mixture of both)" (p. 78). The authors found that women in the Christian college were more likely to utilize the ethic of care than men, but they were not more likely to utilize an ethic of care more often than an ethic of justice. So this may support Gilligan's research that women as compared to men prefer an ethic of care, but it does not support that women use an ethic of care more often than an ethic of justice.

It is also interesting to note that a majority (42 of the 44) of the students were more likely to *articulate* God as authoritative and rule-orientated rather than a relational being. But of these 42 students, 25 students also described God in relational terms. The authors then argue that these *transcenders* display the most advanced spiritual development, as they can hold both views of God in tension. This perspective might then favor women as having more advanced possibilities for spiritual development, as they most often held these two views in tension.

Giesbrecht (1997) also examined the connections between moral decision making and spiritual beliefs, but also included psychosocial development in his research model. Giesbrecht conducted a LISREL path-analysis on data from a sample of 274 (49.6%

female) predominantly White, undergraduate students from conservative, Canadian, Protestant evangelical colleges and seminaries. His data supported Gilligan's theory in that while all participants stated similar psychosocial issues, gender affected how these issues were experienced. The author found that intimate relationships were primary in social identity development for women, but perceived personal competence was a prerequisite for men's interpersonal involvement. Empathy also was important to women in their development, while perspective taking was stronger in men.

Giesbrecht's work was applicable to this discussion because it found that students' justifications for moral judgments (as evidenced in the DIT dilemma's) differed greatly between students identified as responding "conservatively" and those responding "liberally" to the moral dilemma questions. This seemed to support that specific religious traditions can affect moral decision making. This finding is important because few researchers examine the nuances of how students of faith may differ *within* their group. Most researchers address religious students in comparison with those that are not religious. Giesbrecht's work encourages us to further examine gender differences in moral and faith development, but also to pay attention to nuances that may not be readily apparent from broad generalizations about religious students and their development.

How Women Develop Cognitively

The literature examining the moral and spiritual development of women provides interesting possibilities as to how women may make connections between their faith and their political and social beliefs and actions. But how women develop cognitively may also influence the process of making connections and should be examined as part of this literature review. The theme of *meaning-making*, or how one *thinks* about his or her

experience is present in various ways in all of the previous examinations of women’s development theories. There are multiple theories and models of cognitive development in college-age students beginning with the work of Perry (1970) and including the Reflective Judgment Model (Kitchner & King, 1994) and the Self-Authorship Model (Kegan, 1994). But this section will be limited to examining the key findings concerning college-age women and their cognitive development, and how these findings might influence a model of college women’s spiritual development.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule: “Women’s Ways of Knowing”. As with other early theorists, Perry based his work on an all White, male, educated sample, which raised questions as to its applicability to women. One group of researchers determined to expand Perry’s work to examine its relationship to women’s development is Belenky, Clinchy Goldberger and Tarule (1997). The authors conducted extensive interviews with 135 women of varying ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds⁴ to examine if Perry’s model of development would apply for women in the same way it applied for men. Their work is particularly helpful because 90 of the 135 women interviewed were college students. Belenky, et al. (1997) found that the women fell into five “ways of knowing” or “different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority” (1997, p. 3). These modes are summarized in Table 4below.

Table 4

Women’s Ways of Knowing: Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule⁵

Silence	Experience authorities as all-powerful resulting in passivity and
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⁴ The exact demographic breakdown of the sample was not indicated by the authors.

⁵ Developed from Belenky et al., 1997; Clinchy, 2000; Goldberger et al., 1996; and Love & Guthrie, 1999.

dependence. Cannot imagine or express a sense of self and experience words as threatening. Often are isolated from others and accept extreme sex-role stereotypes.

TRANSITION: Various experiences such as child birth bring a switch in perspective.

Received Begin to see authorities as source of all true knowledge. Truth is objective. Hear words of others in dualistic (right or wrong) terms. Listening and retaining knowledge from authorities is primary task and women are not confident in expressing own knowledge. Try to live up to expectations of others.

TRANSITION: Often a loss of trust in male authority but also expectations of college academic life push women out of received knowledge position.

Subjective Truth is not found in authorities but in personal experience and intuition. Remains dualistic in viewing right and wrong, but right is now found within individual or is “subjective.” Emphasis on feeling rather than thinking about truth. Often need extreme break with past relationships and contexts to focus on finding inner voice.

TRANSITION: External authorities come in conflict with internally found truth in ways that cannot be avoided. Some experience times when internally defined truth was wrong.

Procedural Truth is found through “reasoned reflection.” Truth is not easily discerned and so must focus on various procedures or “ways of looking” to integrate objective and subjective truths. Knowledge comes from sources external to self.

Separate knowing: Knowledge is sought through impersonal evaluation of objects from a distance and with critical thought. Make moral judgments based on justice orientation. Often are *doubters* and value rational decisions. Learn through critical thought taught by authorities.

Connected knowing: Seek *understanding* by being in relationship with and trying to see issues from other’s perspectives. Knowledge is objective (must see both sides), yet also personal and unstructured. Make moral decisions based on care orientation. Learn through empathy.

TRANSITION: Time of intense personal reflection and analysis. Experiencing the felt need to integrate both modes of procedural knowing described above.

Constructed Weave together both *separate* and *connected* ways of knowing. Incorporate subjective sense of self into decisions balanced with knowledge learned from others. “All knowledge is constructed and the knower is an intimate part of the known” (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 137). Moral decisions include examination of context.

Critique of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule. While this research was ground-breaking in further developing the cognitive development literature, there have been many criticisms by feminists. Goldberger (1996) summarizes the critiques as stating it is essentialist (Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1989; Lewis, 1989), not applicable to women of color and other underrepresented groups (Bing & Reid, 1996; Maher & Tetreault, 1996), and encourages antirationalism (Patai & Koertge, 1994). Goldberger refutes the claim that their work can be read as essentialist and antirationalist, but admits that it is limited in its applicability to a diversity of women's experiences. Similar to Gilligan and Slee, Belenky et al. (1997) were very careful to acknowledge that their model might not be universally applicable, or applicable to women only (p. 15). The authors actually found many similarities between the development of women and that of men as observed in Perry's work (which Love and Guthrie [1999, p. 27] point out may be because both studies were conducted on students in similar elite, higher education contexts).

Baxter Magolda: Epistemological Reflection Model. Baxter Magolda (1992) also produced important work on the gendered patterns of cognitive development. Like Belenky et al., Baxter Magolda began her research because she perceived differences between what she observed in women's cognitive functioning and what was explained by Perry's model. The author conducted longitudinal interviews and surveys with 70 students⁶, one each year for five years. Baxter Magolda admits that all of the students interviewed were from an academically select university, middle class, and predominantly White (97% of original sample of 101), but she is one of the few researchers to study both men and women. The author's quantitative findings supported

⁶ Baxter Magolda began with 101 students and finished with 70 after four years.

some statistically significant gender differences, but they were small and were not “meaningful” (1992, p. 10).

While her quantitative findings were limited, Baxter Magolda (1992) did find meaningful differences in the qualitative data. While she found that men and women were more alike than different, she observed four *modes of knowing* with gendered patterns within each category. These patterns were “related to, but not dictated by gender” (p. 22) and should be viewed as a continuum rather than mutually exclusive (p. 37). Table 5 presents Baxter Magolda’s findings and also compares her findings to that of Belenky et al. (1997). Because of the limits of space, I will not elaborate on these connections in detail. The table is not meant to suggest that the patterns of the two models are the same, but to suggest that there are some striking similarities between some levels.

Table 5
Epistemological Reflection Model compared to Women’s Ways of Knowing model⁷

Baxter Magolda	Description	Belenky et al.
Absolute Knowing	Authority all knowing. Knowledge Received ⁸	
Receiving (female)	Simply <i>learn</i> material. Personal. Interpretation of knowledge done privately. Listening is primary role. Passive learning.	
Mastery (male)	Public. Engage with professor and peers to master material. Verbal, interactive learning.	
Transitional	Some knowledge uncertain and seek understanding.	
Interpersonal (female)	Seek peer and instructor’s ideas through interaction to make judgments. Resolve uncertainty with personal judgment.	Subjective
Impersonal (male)	Debate views with peers and instructor.	

⁷ Developed from Baxter Magolda, 1992 and Love and Guthrie, 1999.

⁸ The *silenced* pattern found in Belenky et al.’s work was not identified in Baxter Magolda’s model. Most likely this is because those women who fell in the silence category were not found in higher education contexts which is where Baxter Magolda’s interviews took place.

Independent	Resolve uncertainty with logic and research. Most knowledge uncertain.	Procedural
Interindividual (female)	Student input equal to authority's. Value original thought.	Connected Knowing
Individual (male)	Focus on thinking of self AND views of others.	Separate Knowing
Contextual	Focus on thinking of self primarily. Knowledge depends on context.	
Present in only 12% of interviews so can't evaluate for gender	Integrate and apply knowledge. All perspectives not equal.	

Critique of Baxter-Magolda. Magolda's model is unique in that it highlights the role of peers, instructors and evaluation in the development of cognition in students (p. 30). This connects well with the spiritual development theory of Parks and other researchers who found the role of peers and mentors to be important in students' spiritual development. Yet Baxter Magolda's model does not adequately account for ways in which peer and instructor experiences may be different, even negative, for underrepresented groups of students. McEwen (1994) points out that she doesn't even break down her final recommendations by gender. One additional critique suggests that both the work of Baxter Magolda and Belenky et al. are actually describing different styles, and not actually different structures of cognitive development for men and women (Rodgers, 1990).

An in-depth, stage-by-stage comparison of all the models discussed thus far is not possible in the space available.⁹ However, obvious broad connections can be made between the cognitive findings of Belenky et al. (1997) and the moral and spiritual development models already discussed.

⁹ See Love (2002) and Cartwright (2001) for thorough comparisons of spiritual and cognitive development theories.

As Belenky et al. (1997) note, the patterns they observed between the women who were *connected* knowers and *separate* knowers were very similar in orientation to the ethic of *care* and ethic of *justice* moral reasoning orientations (1997, p. 102). But the women who fall into the *constructed* cognitive development mode operated from an ethic of *care AND justice*, supporting the finding of Noddings and Siddle Walker and Snarey. Like Gilligan, they also found that women tended to favor connected knowing over separate knowing (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 124).

All of these theories are lacking in their applicability and “voice” for women who may not be White, middle class, educated or heterosexual. The statements by two feminist when discussing *Women’s Ways of Knowing* could also apply to the work of Gilligan, Parks, and Slee. Maher and Tetreault (1996) state:

Just as WWK [Women’s Ways of Knowing] had revealed the false universalism of traditionalist male theory, so, now, theories of different “identities” had begun to reveal the limitations of WWK and other work in its field in speaking for all women, without sufficient attention to variations among them (p. 155).

While these theories provide needed examination of possible differences *between* men and women, new research and models must examine the differences *within* women. Gender identity theory and its evolution to multiple identity theories offer important findings in examining the experiences of the diversity of women.

Jones and McEwen: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity

The research that has examined spirituality as it relates to culture or gender has examined these constructs individually with little research examining the complex intersection of multiple identity constructs within individuals (Buchko, 2004; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Tisdell, 2003). This dissertation is concerned with the intersection of multiple identities including faith, gender, race and political identities, so a much more

robust model is needed than those that have been offered by previous researchers. The work of Jones and McEwen (2000) provides a helpful model for bringing the many aspects of student's identity development together.

Jones (1997) sought to build on Josselson's interviews, and the work of Reynolds and Pope (1991) that examined individuals' multiple identities as multiple oppressions. Unlike Josselson, Jones examined a diverse sample of women and incorporated the role of religion into her model. She hoped to explore the ways that multiple dimensions of identity worked within women, but also to "determine how the experience of difference shaped and intensified the identity development process of participants" (p. 377). Through a grounded theory approach, Jones conducted four in-depth, open-ended interviews with a sample of ten women of varied culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other physical and social variables (p. 377).

In this study, the women of color point to how race and ethnicity were an important part of their identity, although the salience of this identity construct varied greatly depending on the woman being interviewed. Jones found that all participants could relate to the gender identity dimension which is important for this dissertation. However, what being female meant again varied across individuals and for some was quickly connected to other aspects of their identity such as religion, sexual orientation and culture.

Like Gilligan and Josselson, the importance of relational connections was also a theme found in Jones' work. Yet the emphasis was a bit different as Jones found women wanting to connect with people that were different from themselves. The relationships discussed and described by Gilligan and Josselson were often those of close family

members and partners, or those that could be seen as similar. The desire to connect with those different, or outside of their circles, did not seem to emerge as a theme in the work of the other theorist, except Parks.

Overall, the findings of Jones are important because they emphasize that gender should not be highlighted as one single and primary aspect of identity to study, and that earlier research is certainly limited by its homogeneous samples. Jones' central finding states:

“. . . multiple dimensions of identity could not be understood without examining the intersections of these dimensions and the contexts in which they are experienced. Similarly, the experience of difference associated with the construction of identity could not be fully understood without questioning the role of power and privilege. Both difference and privilege mediated the connection with and the relative salience of various dimensions to the participants” (p. 383).

Her resulting theory is that women do have a core identity that reflects their personal attributes and characteristics. But this inner identity is surrounded by the various contextual influences described above that are understood and constructed in different ways based on the role of difference and privilege in individual woman's life.

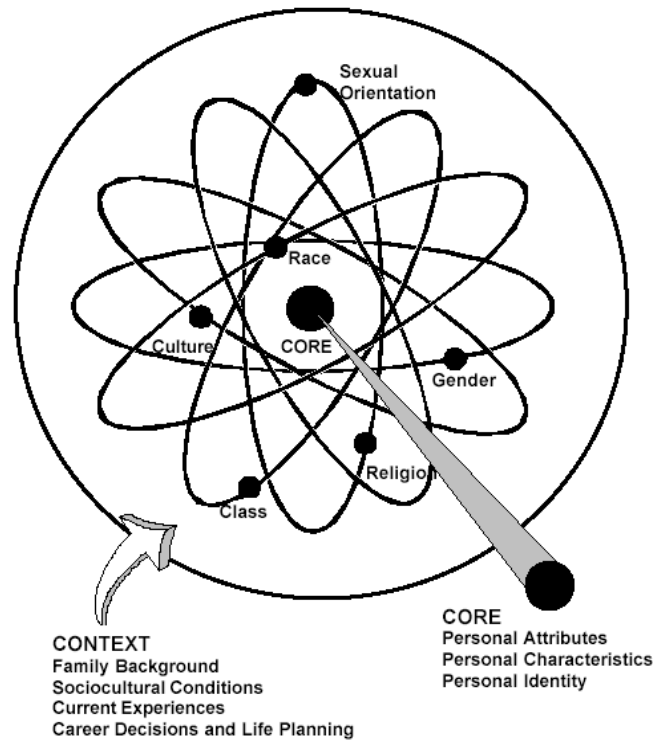
Jones (Jones & McEwen, 2000) later proposed a model of identity that incorporates the multiple identities discussed, and holds promise for ways in which earlier research on identity might be expanded to include the experience of diverse women. The figure of an atom (Figure 2) represents her model of multiple dimensions of identity. Significant identity dimensions of women (such as race, culture, gender and religion) orbit around the core, moving closer and further away depending on the salience of that role at any given time. These orbits also often intersect to show that these identities often overlap. The whole atom is surrounded by a circle which represents the

contextual influences of family background, sociocultural condition, current experiences and career decisions and life planning.

The Jones and McEwen model is instrumental in examining the intersections of the identities of concern for this dissertation: race, gender, and spirituality. When looking at the figure below, it would be the points of intersection of the various orbits that would be of interest. The findings of Jones and McEwen suggest that differing identities may have greater salience to an individual, especially women, depending on the context. When examining their connections between their spiritual identities and social and political issues, certain identities may come to the forefront based on the issue. For example, women's gender rather than their racial identity may be expressed most specifically if they are discussing the connection between their spirituality and their involvement on abortion issues. Which identity they most identify with may even suggest which issues they engage, and if they connect those issues to their faith commitments.

While it is not known exactly how this model will operationalize itself in the findings of this dissertation, it suggests that the salience of an individual's identities may be very influential in how they make connections between their spirituality and their political and social commitments. It also suggests that while gender and race have been identified for examination for this dissertation, multiple other identity lenses may also be expressed by students as being influential in how women make connections.

*Figure 1: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity
Jones & McEwen (2000)*



Feminist Perspectives on Critical Whiteness Theory

This dissertation is interested in how White Christian women make connections between their religious beliefs and their political and social beliefs and actions. The research questions for this inquiry deliberately address Whiteness as central to the research questions, because it is believed that women’s White identity will inform how they make connections. It is no longer acceptable to allow Whiteness to go unexamined as a central influence or to be thought of as a default identity. Its influence must be examined and “denaturalized” (Hurtado & Stewart, 2004). But how one studies Whiteness as a theoretical construct differs significantly from how one studies other socially constructed racial categories. Researchers cannot have the same theoretical and methodological strategies when examining the influence of those from the dominant

cultural paradigm as they have used when studying those from the dominated cultural paradigm. As Hurtado and Stewart (2004) state, “Some of our most cherished ‘feminist research methods,’ and the implied or explicit standpoint epistemology associated with them, must be rethought as we approach the study of a culturally valued characteristic” (p. 316). This section will briefly review literature defining Whiteness, discuss major contributions by feminist theorists of Whiteness, and conclude with methodological suggestions for feminist examinations of Whiteness and how some of these will be utilized in this dissertation.

One of the central questions or issues being addressed by Critical Whiteness Theory (CWT) is how to define Whiteness. Current researchers are challenging the early perspective in the field of a single White identity (Gunew, 2007; Ringrose, 2007). Just as researchers of color state that there can be no one definition of African American or Asian American, theorists of Whiteness are discussing the need to complicate the static, homogeneous view of Whiteness. Winant (2004) states, “it is no longer possible to assume a ‘normalized’ whiteness, whose invisibility and relatively monolithic character signify immunity from political or cultural challenge” (p. 3). Winant goes on to explore what he believes to be a *white racial dualism* that has developed as many Whites struggle with the historical legacy of white supremacy but also struggle with the moral and political successes of the Black civil rights movement. McCarthy (2003) suggests that Whiteness cannot be studied outside the contextual influences of class, gender and sexuality and that to do so allows Whiteness to remain “under theorized.” This dissertation will contribute to further theorizing about Whiteness by observing how

Whiteness may affect how women students make connections between their religious and political identities.

Feminist researchers have been at the forefront of examining the complex nature of Whiteness as it intersects with other social identities, particularly that of gender.

Frankenberg's work in the early 1990's is seen by many as central to beginning this conversation and more thorough analysis. In *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness* (1993), Frankenberg defines Whiteness as three pronged:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint," a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at our society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (p. 1).

This dissertation will be primarily concerned with the "standpoint" that Whiteness may present for how the women interviewed may look at themselves, others and society. Later researchers use the term "orientations" or starting points to refer to this perspective (Ahmed, 2007; Hunter & Nettles, 1999). While examining the first perspective of White privilege is important, as will be discussed below, this area has been the primary focus of feminist Whiteness research, and more needs to be done to address how Whiteness functions as a standpoint or orientation through which White women look at themselves and others.

Frankenberg's work is also important as her findings suggest possible themes and ways of processing that might be presented by the White women studied for this dissertation. Frankenberg (1993) found three "discursive repertoires" in how White women "think through race." The *essentialist racism* discourse believed that "race makes a difference at the level of biology and being" (p. 189) and was found predominantly in pre-1960's mindsets. This dominant discourse (at the time of Frankenberg's research)

was demonstrated in the polite language of “color-blindness” or *color-evasion*. This discourse was observed through the complex language and euphemisms White women used to describe people of color without acknowledging difference or power. Later researchers also support the dominance of the ideology of colorblindness and further locate it as a worldview of White college students specifically (Hunter & Nettles, 1999).

A third group of women were *race cognizant* and emphasized that race made a difference in peoples’ lives, and that race is a significant factor in shaping current U.S. society (p. 157). This group of women was found to be politically marginalized among White Americans, and in public discourse. Of particular interest for this dissertation is the finding that race-cognizant women found different ways in which to act on their beliefs: some of them chose to focus on the ways that racism impacted them personally and their responsibility for racism, while others chose to focus on the feminist commitment that “the personal is political” and be involved in more structural or institutional commitments. Many of the personally focused women were younger and were in the midst of discovering their Whiteness. The latter group of women was more likely to have longer established commitments to antiracism, and was more interested in political activism to create structural change. It is quite possible that the race-cognizant women interviewed for this dissertation will more likely fall into the former category and be focused on their personal White identity and their responsibility to act against racism. This has obvious implications for how the young White women interviewed might make connections between their religious and political beliefs, and in which political and social beliefs they will be involved.

McIntosh (2002) wrote another influential piece addressing Whiteness that has informed later feminist analysis. First written in 1992, McIntosh's original essay was one of the first attempts to make White privilege visible by creating a list of ways being White influenced her daily life. McIntosh defines White privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" (p. 97). Her work remains influential but later researchers have critiqued her approach.

Hurtado and Stewart (2004) critique McIntosh's work for focusing on *comparisons* to people of color rather than in reflecting on herself and her group (p. 323). While they validate McIntosh for her honest analysis, they suggest that by comparing, it is assumed that the White advantages discussed are what everyone would want or would aspire to attain. There is no indication that there could be a different "list" of what might constitute a good life or good person beyond that found in the White culture. The authors suggest that this centering of White culture in opposition to "the other" has reinforced a sense of superiority of White culture. This dissertation attempts to address this critique by analyzing the effects of Whiteness among White students only, rather than comparing White students to students of color.

Hurtado and Stewart's (2004) work is also helpful to begin the consideration of the methodological issues and tools to use when studying Whiteness. Their work is part of an updated version of an influential edited volume titled *Off White: Readings on Power, Privilege, and Resistance* (Fine, Weis, Powell & Wong, 1997). Hurtado and Stewart suggest that methods to analyze Whiteness must differ from those used to study non-dominant perspectives. They state, "methods that serve constructive aims when used

with subordinates may have very different implications when used with dominants” (p. 327). Specific methods they suggest are including people of color throughout the research process, as they are the experts about Whiteness. In the ideal world, the authors suggest that individuals of color would conduct the interviews (or co-conduct) and be involved in the analysis process. They state it is also important to have these multiple perspectives reflected in the final written report. While this dissertation will have interviews conducted by only a White researcher, faculty of color will review the analysis and reporting process.

Frankenberg (1993) suggests that offering more information about herself and her experiences with personal and systemic racism helped the White women she interviewed “break the silence” (p. 35) and reflect on race. She did this through exchanging personal stories, explaining her analysis in more detail with them, and sharing about her internalized racism. Because the research questions for this dissertation do not focus exclusively on the analysis of Whiteness, this method may not be as effective. But if the researcher finds that the White women she interviews during the pilot study are hesitant to reflect on their White racial identity, more self-disclosure on the part of the interviewer may be utilized for the full study.

Stoddart (2002) suggests further methodological tools, beginning with the importance of the researcher knowing herself by examining her connections to the dominant culture, and the possible influences that could result on the research process. Stoddart suggest two strategies to “combat my own inherited worldview” (p. 1255). First, she was intentional to include scholars of color on her dissertation committee and in her larger work. Secondly, she remained involved with various students and staff of

color through her work as a literacy teacher. These two tools helped remind her of how she was attached to the dominant worldview. The author also found that having her interviewers respond in narrative form was helpful in eliciting descriptions about racial identities. Lastly, she suggests checking the concepts created from the data with the respondents to uncover any researcher bias.

Many of Stoddart's suggestions will be utilized in the design of this dissertation. The researcher included the perspectives of scholars of color in her literature review and on her dissertation committee to challenge ways in which her White racial and cultural identity might influence or limit her perspectives of the data. The researcher will remain involved with students from diverse racial, class, ethnic and attractional orientations. As stated by Stoddart, it is believed that remaining immersed in varied perspectives, the researcher will remain sensitized to her role in the dominant, White, hegemonic American discourse.

Political Engagement of Students

This dissertation will be asking students to discuss connections they make between their spirituality and their political and social beliefs and actions. It would therefore be helpful to have some understanding as to students' current political and social beliefs and engagement, in particular, how these might differ for Christian students. I will begin by examining some of the recent literature on college student political engagement, which will be followed by results that focus on women and Christian student political engagement.

The political engagement research on current college students provides mixed results as to if, and how, students are politically engaged. The results of a recent

literature review (Longo & Meyer, 2006) of college students and politics suggest that while today's college students are cynical about politics and apathetic about becoming involved, there have been recent increases in some forms of political participation (voting, trust in government, and political awareness and participation). The authors also suggest that this increase in political engagement has coincided with an increase in volunteering and community involvement which may be viewed by today's college students as an alternative to politics. The authors describe this as the "scissor effect" which they define as "years of decline in political participation have coincided with a surge in volunteering and involvement in the community" (Longo & Mayer, 2006, p. 2). Unfortunately, these authors did not break out their findings by race or gender.

Hollander and Longo (2008) further discuss this trend discussed by students, not as an alternative to politics, but as "alternative politics." A diverse group of students interviewed for the "Raise Your Voice" project were asked to tell "stories of service" and "stories of politics." The authors found that students elaborated on their community service projects, but the room would often go silent when they were asked to tell their stories regarding politics. They stated that they did not have time or interest in politics, and often had a negative connotation of the word "political." The authors conclude by suggesting some ways in which colleges and universities can encourage students to connect their service and political engagement. These suggestions include finding out what issues students care about and then having civil conversations about these issues, including deliberation or reflection of community service, and developing students to lead campus (p. 6).

These findings as to the importance of community service in the lives of current college students are supported by other authors, such as Howe and Strauss (2000), who suggest that the new generation of students, coined the *Millennials* (those born after 1982), are defined by a new service ethic that may be their preferred way to express their political participation. The authors state, “A new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notions of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds” (p. 216). The authors suggest that this focus on community service is in stark contrast to the values of the previous generation, which was often cynical toward political and civic engagement.

Braskamp’s (2007) research also revealed that service learning used as part of the curriculum was influential in student’s spiritual or religious development. The use of reflection in these courses, even if they were not religious, allowed the students to integrate their spiritual or religious worldviews into their learning. Braskamp and his colleagues also found that student’s spiritual development was influence by the culture of the institutions, co-curricular opportunities and the sense of community on campus. In particular, they point to the strong relationships that some faith-based institutions develop with students as formational in helping integrate their faith with their daily lives. The results of this research might suggest that community and service learning opportunities might be possible avenues for students to connect their faith and their political or social beliefs.

Additional studies of college students’ political participation provide helpful information on predictors and influences of political participation for college students. Jarvis, Montoya & Mulvoy (2005) found that the two psychological predispositions of

political socialization and interest were influential in motivating students toward political participation. They also found that social connectedness expressed through group memberships and close personal relationships were a strong predictor of political participation. Political opportunity or personal invitations to participate in politics were also highly predictive. These factors are helpful to consider for this study because they provide suggestions of where to search for a student sample that may be more politically engaged and thoughtful on issues, and also suggest ways in which students might engage politically.

Dey (1996) further examined the influence of social influences as well as those of faculty and peer interactions. The author performed multiple regressions on data from the 1985 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) study of incoming students, as well as the follow-up survey in 1989 and the 1989 Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) faculty survey. The results found that peer and faculty “normative contexts” were strong influences on the development of student political orientations. Students who were surrounded by conservative, and those surrounded by liberal peers and faculty became more liberal. Dey’s analysis showed that it was not the interpersonal interaction between students and faculty and peers that was influential, so he suggested that the influence on students existed through “mechanisms such as general social trends, messages sent through lectures in classroom settings or an institution’s “hidden curriculum,” and the campus media, which do not fundamentally rely on informal interpersonal interaction” (p. 549-550). These findings are important for this dissertation as they suggest that the institutional context and political orientations of the majority of

peers and faculty at the institution of those interviewed may be influential on the student political attitudes.

Dalton and Crosby (2008) examined student voting and participation in the political process by talking with a focus group of six college students at a Midwestern university that were involved in campus service and political actions. These students suggested that they and their peers were not involved in politics for a number of reasons, including the perception that politicians are not trustworthy, students wanted to be involved in activities that would “solve real problems”, and that conversations regarding politics brought controversy and disagreement that the students would prefer to avoid. Students also stated that they would be more involved in politics if encouraged and inspired more actively by professors, student life staff and others. All of the students discussed the importance of community service in “exposing them to serious problems of people around them and making it much more likely that they would become active in the political process in the future” (p. 3). These findings further support the previous research suggesting that while students may be cynical about being involved politically, they may be active if encouraged by mentors and peers, although this activity may be through community service as opposed to traditional political activities.

A large 2008 poll conducted by CBS News/UWIRE/*Chronicle of Higher Education* (Ashburn, 2008) provides additional information regarding students’ political views and involvements. A web questionnaire was completed by 24,848 students in Colorado, North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania as they were considered battleground states. The top issues that students stated would influence their vote were the economy with 76% of the students stating this was extremely important to their vote. Education

was the second issue that the students valued, with 85% of the students stating that education was very important to their vote. Only 17% of the students thought racism was a very serious problem, and only 16% thought sexism was an issue. But these numbers are a bit misleading, as 83% of the sample was White. Over half of the 9% of Black students in the sample thought racism was a serious problem, as well as about 25% of the Hispanic (4% of sample) and Asian (3% of sample) students (p. A25). Women students were more likely to state that sexism was a problem, but less than 25% of the women believed it was a major problem.

Of interest for this dissertation was how or if students were involved politically. While only a minority of the students were “involved”, they were involved in the political campaigns in a variety of ways. About 25% of the students had been at an event with one of the presidential candidates, 11% had donated to a campaign and 13% had helped with voter registration. But the students had also been involved in new forms of activism, with 25% of the students having become a “fan” of the candidate on a social networking site.

Unfortunately, this newfound encouragement about the political engagement of college students is not quite so hopeful for college women specifically. While the gender gap in voter turnout has turned in favor of more women voting (Center for American Women and Politics, 2007; Lopez, Kirby & Sagoff, 2005), women college students continue to be less interested in politics generally, discussed politics less than men, followed political campaigns less than men and had less overall political engagement than men (Bernstein, 2005; Verba, Burns & Schlozman, 1997). Bernstein also found that women with higher awareness of gender inequalities were more politically active than

their peers. These findings support the suggestion that *how* students express their political beliefs needs to be examined from the perspective of gender. These studies are also limited, as they do not delve deeper into why the women were less involved or connected to politics. The qualitative interviews from this dissertation could provide interesting answers to this question.

Another study is particularly helpful in understanding what connections or relationships there might be between students' spirituality and their political orientation. The HERI National study on the spiritual life of students (2004) examined these connections in detail and found that politically conservative students (those that checked either conservative or far right) were found to be more "religiously engaged" (3 to 1) and "spiritual" (39% vs. 24%) than politically liberal students (those that checked liberal or far left). Religious engagement was defined as attending religious services, praying and reading sacred texts. Spirituality was defined as a belief in the sacredness of life, and seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually. Politically liberal students scored much higher than politically conservative students on "religious skepticism" (45% vs. 14%), which included beliefs like "the universe arose by chance", and disbelief in life after death. Liberals also scored higher on "ecumenical worldview" (48% vs. 15%), which reflected an interest in different religious traditions and trying to understand other cultures and countries.

Lastly, liberals scored higher on an "ethic of caring" (43% vs. 22%), which measured the degree of "helping others in difficulty, reducing pain and suffering in the world, and making the world a better place" (p. 8). Politically liberal students also scored slightly higher on "spiritual quest", which involved interest in, and seeking a meaningful

philosophy of, and purpose of life. Both groups of students scored similarly on “charitable involvement” and “compassionate self-concept.” These findings show some interesting patterns possibly connecting students’ spiritual values with their political values. It will be interesting to examine if these value preferences will be found when students discuss situations in which they connect their Christian faith specifically with their political beliefs. These findings suggest that students may bring up very different experiences and issues when discussing how and when they connect their spirituality to their political beliefs and actions.

This same study also found interesting differences in how students of high and low “levels of spirituality” felt about social issues. Some of these were addressed in the introduction, but additional issues are of note. The largest differences in agreement on issues related to this dissertation involved the responses to “Abortion should be legal”, with 33% of high scorers on level of spirituality agreeing, and 72% of low scorers on levels of spirituality agreeing. There was also a 32% difference in responses to “same-sex couples should have the right to legal marital status” (39% high, 71% low). One additional response is particularly applicable to this study. Only 18% of students with high levels of spirituality agreed that “realistically, an individual can do little to bring about change in society”, while 34% of those who scored low agreed. This supports the idea that hopefully the students I will be interviewing will be more likely to be interested and active in trying to achieve societal change.

Another study conducted by the Pew Forum (2007) examined specifically how White evangelical students were involved politically. The authors found that White evangelicals between the ages of 18 and 29 have become increasingly dissatisfied with

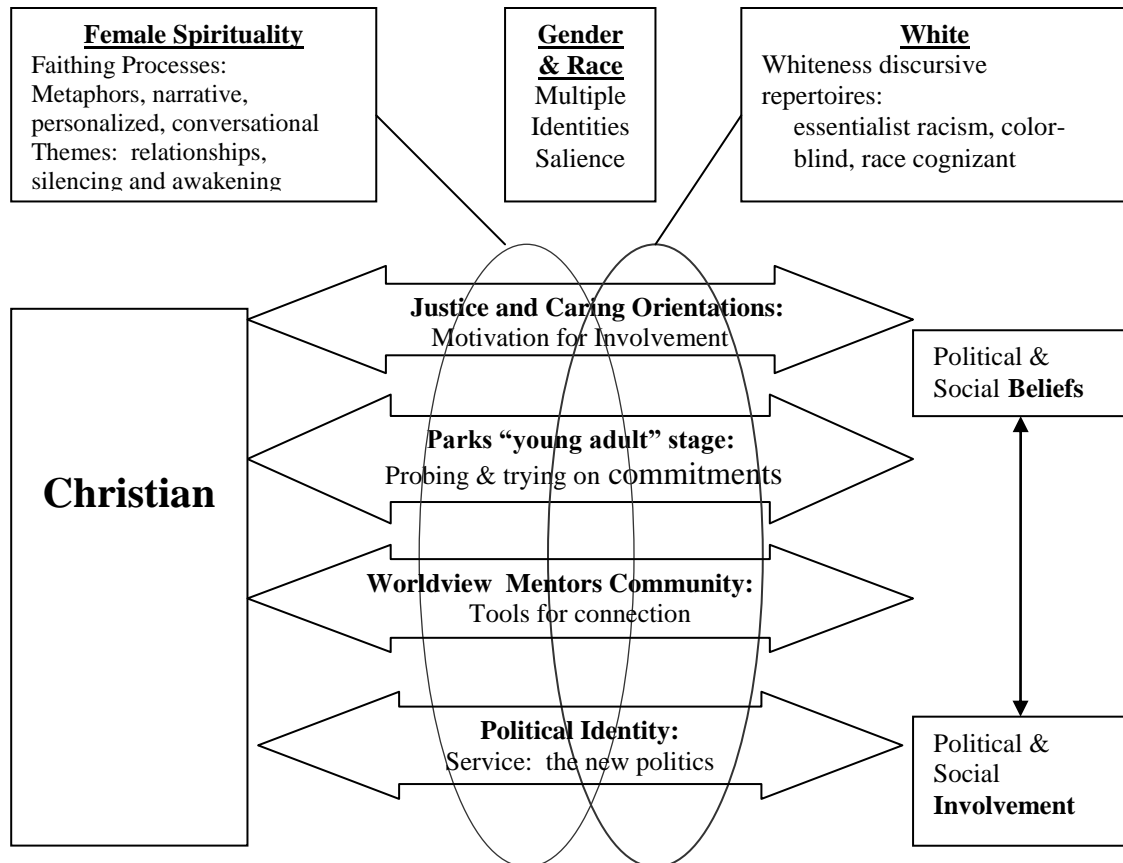
the current administration and may be leaving the Republican Party. The report found that young White Evangelicals now have only a two-to-one advantage over Democrats, which is considerably less than their four-to-one advantage held in 2005. The report also supported the studies discussed previously in that it found that these young White Evangelicals retained a much more conservative position on a variety of social issues compared to their peers in the same age group.

While the literature has examined the intersection of college student's religious and political attitudes, and the intersection of their political and service engagements, few have examined the intersection of all three: religious attitudes, service and political actions. One article did so, and found that students who valued and wanted opportunities to explore their spirituality were more involved in service and general civic engagement activities (Andolina, Meents-DeCaigny & Nass, 2006). Of particular interest for this examination is that this civic engagement was primarily limited to community service activities and not political activities (p. 4). The authors also found that students who valued religion personally were less likely to have participated in a protest, boycotted or buycotted (bought only products which they wanted to support). The authors suggest that this divide between students' service and political engagement could have been affected by a couple of factors. They believe schools and universities have highly encouraged, and often required, service opportunities, but they have not done so with overt political involvement. The role of the religious institutions is also discussed, stating that they encourage service but may be less comfortable encouraging politically active lives.

Conceptual Framework for Dissertation

A great deal of literature has been reviewed concerning White college women’s development but how do they all contribute or provide the foundation for this dissertation? This dissertation has been designed to examine a specific question: how do White female students make connections between their Christian spirituality and their actions and beliefs on social and political issues? In an effort to create the most effective research design, a conceptual framework was formed from the existing literature to guide the initial inquiry. Because little has been written thus far on how these connections are made, this model combines elements of women’s moral, faith, cognitive and race identity development literature to suggest ways in which students might make these connections. Figure 1 is a model of the conceptual framework developed from the literature reviewed.

Figure 2: How Students Make Connections Between Spirituality and Political and Social Beliefs and Actions.



This model is designed to reflect the examination of a process of how students make connections rather than simply content. This process is represented by the arrows connecting the boxes that represent Christianity on the left side of the model and political and social beliefs and political and social actions and involvement found on the right side of the model. The middle area of the model is the primary concern of this dissertation. There are multiple arrows going back and forth because there are multiple possibilities as to what and how students might make connections. It is possible that students might make a connection between their spirituality and their beliefs, but not between their spirituality and their actions. This would be represented by the top arrow. Or the students could connect their spirituality with both their actions and beliefs, which would be represented by the middle arrows. Or students might just connect their spirituality with their actions only, which would be represented by the bottom arrow.

It is also possible that students will not make any connections at all between their spirituality and their political and social beliefs and actions. Perhaps students do not perceive Christianity to be relevant or connected to their political and social commitments. This is a definite possibility, especially for women, as suggested in the political engagement literature. But knowing that these connections are lacking for some students would also be of interest and force professionals to ask why. Any combination of these findings would have ramifications for future research and practice.

Within the arrows are some of the possible orientations, relationships and processes that might be reflected in the interviews based on the literature review. The top arrow reflects the findings of the moral development literature, which suggest that students might make connections from a concern for justice, a concern for caring for the

other or a combination of both caring and justice orientations. As this inquiry is interviewing women, it is hypothesized that the students will discuss both caring and justice orientation, but may prefer a caring orientation. It is further hypothesized that perhaps these moral orientations may provide a motivation or incentive for students to connect their spirituality with their political and social beliefs and actions.

The second arrow refers to the specific theory of spiritual development of Parks. Parks (2000) expands on previous spiritual development theory to describe a stage of “young adult” where students probe and examine multiple commitments and then “try them on.” This stage involves a cognitive, interpersonal and community commitment that are all being acted upon by students. Being involved in a social or political group or cause could be seen by students as a way to enact these initial spiritual commitments.

The third arrow reflects the findings of research that suggests students make connections between beliefs and behaviors by developing a specific worldview, finding relationships with mentors and peers that support this worldview and then living out this world view in community with like others (Garber, 2007; Parks, 2000). From this literature it can be suggested that peers and mentors that are politically or socially involved may be influential in helping women make connections.

The final arrow reflects the literature on college student political engagement that women’s political identity may center on community service. Service may be the “new politics” for this generation of students and serve as a tool for students to make the connection between their spirituality and their political involvements (Andolina et al, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2000). This may be particularly true for women, as the literature suggests they feel marginalized politically (Bernstein, 2005; Verba, Burns & Schlozman,

1997) and may instead choose to focus on community involvement. Those that were involved politically often became involved through personal invitations, and being involved in groups of like interest through their peers (Jarvis, Montoya & Mulvoy, 2005), which is also suggested in the arrow above.

The two ovals found in the middle of the model represent how the lenses of gender and race may affect this process. The ovals are created to appear transparent to represent visually that these identities may not be influential for all women and often their influence remains unexamined. The literature does suggest that the process being examined for this dissertation might differ for men and women and for White students. To reflect this, suggestions as to how gender or race may affect the themes and processes that students utilize to make connections are found in the boxes in the upper left and right corners of the framework.

The contributions of researchers and theologians examining the spiritual development of women will inform the work of this dissertation and are reflected in the gender box of the conceptual framework in the left corner. Women's faith developmental literature suggests they make connections much more through relationships and may utilize a process similar to Slee's (2004) "faithing" processes, which include the use of narrative and metaphors when describing one's faith. It is also possible that when speaking of their spiritual identity development, the women interviewed may reflect the themes of silencing, awakening and relationships that were also found in Slee's work.

Frankenberg's (1993) work on White identity development informs this dissertation and is found in the box on the right. Frankenberg's research suggests that women who are *race cognizant* may find their race salient to how they make connections

with their faith, while those that fall within the *color-evasion* spectrum of development may not be able to articulate or be aware of the influence of their Whiteness on how they make connections. As discussed earlier, women that fall within the *race cognizant* group often felt marginalized within the White culture and often responded either by getting involved at a personal level or by becoming involved at the larger, societal or institutional level. Because it is of interest in this dissertation to examine how Whiteness might influence the women's *standpoint* on how they view or make connections, it has been included in the conceptual framework above.

The multiple identity development model proposed by Jones and McEwen (2000) is also influential to the conceptual framework and resulting figure for this dissertation. Visually it is presented in the framework diagram as the area that intersects between the two ovals representing gender and race. While their model examines many identities, this dissertation is interested primarily in how women's religious, political, racial and gender identities might intersect. Like Jones and McEwen, I propose that these identities will have greater and lesser salience depending on the individual women interviewed, so while they are placed evenly around the outside of the figure, in reality some may be more closely connected to how women make connections between their faith and political and social beliefs and actions than others. It is also possible that the women may not see the influence at all of particular identities. As suggested in Jones and McEwen's work, most likely the context the women are in will influence how salient some of the identities may be. To allow for examination of all possibilities, the four identities have all been included in the figure.

This conceptual model is not meant to serve as an ending point, but as a beginning or reference point for this research project. It is assumed that it will change and grow as the data from this inquiry is examined. But it does outline some possible ways in which the phenomenon being examined might be viewed. While many possibilities were suggested as to how students may make connections between their spirituality and their political and social beliefs and actions, I will remain open to new possibilities that arise from the data.

Conclusion

The women's moral, faith, cognitive, racial and political identity development literature is rich with possibilities as to how college-age White women might make connections between their faith and political and social involvements and beliefs. But the possible intersections of these models and the multiple identities that may be simultaneously influential in how women make connections have not been examined in depth. The conceptual framework presented provides a starting point for examination and grounding for this dissertation. The following section will build on this framework and outline how data will be collected and analyzed to most effectively address the research questions of this dissertation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The literature examined in chapter two has grounded this inquiry and shaped the conceptual framework to examine the questions of this dissertation. With this conceptual framework and the research questions established, decisions were made as to the most appropriate research tools and framework. This chapter will present these choices by reviewing the purpose of the dissertation, examining the positionality of the researcher, outlining the qualitative research tools employed, and presenting detailed participant descriptions. It will conclude with a discussion of the analysis process and the limitations that the various methodological choices bring to the research.

General Qualitative Study

Merriam (1998) describes one of the key philosophical assumptions of qualitative research as the researcher's interest in "understanding the meaning people have constructed" (p. 6), the goal being to gain meaning from the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's (*emic* rather than *etic*). Understanding how women are making their own meaning of their faith, politics and social service beliefs and action is the primary focus of this dissertation. As such, qualitative research methods are best utilized to gain rich description and give opportunities for students to give voice to their subjective lived experiences. By listening intently to their stories through interviews, I hoped to find the true essence of how students were making connections. Therefore, the most appropriate research strategy for this study was qualitative.

There are many different types or approaches of qualitative research, so determining the best qualitative research form for this dissertation was also a process. After considering, and even beginning, a phenomenological study, I determined that the number of women interviewed and the multiple constructs being examined would be best served by a more general qualitative study. Merriam (1998) describes this approach as a “basic or generic qualitative study”, and characterizes it as a study whose purpose is “simply to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (p. 11). It is not the intent of this dissertation to build specific theory or to describe how a very specific group of people might make connections. Rather, it describes how a number of women might make connections and how they would describe this in their own words. As such, the general qualitative research design is the most appropriate for this study.

Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this study is to understand how White Christian women college students connect their spirituality to their beliefs and actions regarding political and social issues. Before understanding how students are making connections, it was discerned where they are making connections. Questions were asked to ascertain the specific experiences, individuals or contexts that helped students to make connections. Or, are there specific issues like gay marriage or the war in Iraq that bring together spiritual and political beliefs in a very tangible way, and force students to make connections? This study addressed where students were making these connections by interviewing students, and asking them what political and social issues they value, what issues they are involved with, and the reasons for their involvement.

After hearing from the students about what they were involved in, questions were asked to examine the process by which they did or did not connect these beliefs and involvements to their spiritual life, or connection with God. This was difficult to examine directly, as asking such a question specifically would most likely elicit confusion, or be too leading of a question. Therefore, how they made connections was examined through probing questions to gain detailed descriptions of students' spiritual and political lives, and the issues and experiences they believed were influential. These descriptions were then examined in detail to reveal themes and tools used for making connections.

This dissertation also asks the question: Do individual students make such connections differently? As discussed in the literature review, some suggest that women make connections in their spiritual lives through relationships, metaphors, narrative and personalizing their spirituality (Cook, 1994; Cooney, 1985; Devor, 1989; Ierardi, 1990; Slee, 2004). Would these "faithing" strategies appear when female students describe their spirituality in connection with their social and political involvement? How would the lenses of multiple identities work together or affect how the women made connections? All of these influences and ones that may not have been discussed in previous literature were examined from the detailed descriptions given by students of their lived experiences.

This study delved into these complexities by interviewing twenty-four White Christian women students in their junior or senior year of college about their political and social beliefs and actions, and how (or if) these commitments connect with their Christian

faith. The remainder of this chapter will outline the philosophical and methodological details of how the study addressed the proposed research questions.

Positioning Myself in the Research

Like other qualitative methods, the situated role of the researcher is a major issue for the trustworthiness of this dissertation. Objectivity of the researcher in positivist research paradigms is redefined in constructivist research as the awareness of the researcher's preconceptions of a phenomenon (Becker, 1992). These preconceptions are then set aside, or "bracketed", to allow new meanings to be observed (Becker, 1992; Creswell, 2003; Giorgi, 2006; Merriam; 1998). Because this dissertation involves the influence of gender, race, religion and politics as central research questions, it is imperative to examine how my own identities or *sensitizing concepts* might affect the research process (Charmaz, 2002; Dunbar, Rodriquez & Parker, 2002).

In an effort to be transparent as to the possible influences of my experience and identities on the research, I will outline the ways in which I sought to be aware of my preconceptions and biases throughout the research process. I will also present some of my thoughts on my previous life experience that influenced the research questions in an attempt to thoroughly examine ways in which my perspective might influence my analysis and conclusions.

This process, known as *reflexivity*, has been a topic of great interest to social science researchers. Becker (1992) suggests that one process that can be utilized to increase awareness of our sensitizing concepts is the use of a research journal in which to record any ideas, experiences and feelings the researcher has had with the phenomenon. Findlay & Gough (2003) provide practical suggestions as to how to operationalize the

concept of *reflexivity* in research. They suggest including the following in a research journal:

Notes concerning why certain choices and decisions were made, about changing directions, personal reactions etc. can be used to inform a 'reflexive account' which in turn will inform the research report. Again, asking oneself difficult questions can facilitate enhanced reflexivity and, ultimately, greater understanding of the phenomenon (pg. 25).

I used my research journal and the suggestions above to critically examine decisions made in my research process through the lenses of gender, race and religious background. In particular, I often examined my reactions and responses in interviews to see if I reacted to those I interviewed whose identities differed significantly from mine. I also often recorded my feelings and observations at the end of interviews to debrief later.

My research interests reflected in this dissertation have developed from over fifteen years of professional experience as a student affairs administrator, and faculty member within higher education. During this time, I have fulfilled multiple roles working with students, including that of resident director, faculty member, counselor, academic advisor, and dean and director of orientation, disability services and leadership development. In all of these roles I have witnessed the complexity of students' lives, and watched them make sense of their worlds through multiple lenses of identity. Through my interactions, I have come to realize the influence and complexities of my own multiple identities, especially the intersections of my majority (or agent) White Christian identity, and my minority (or target) identity as a woman.

My undergraduate, as well as a majority of my professional experience before the last few years, has been in Christian liberal arts institutions. These experiences have been formational in developing my Christian worldview and how my Christian faith is woven

into my daily beliefs and actions. I came to college with a vision for putting my Christian beliefs into action to try to bring about justice in our world, but my education at Calvin College provided the mentors and knowledge to nurture these commitments and make them lifelong. Through my classes and my experiences in residence life, a world was opened to me as to how to love and serve others in my community and, in a limited way, the larger world.

It is also probable that my religious identity influenced my research process. I believe my identity as a Christian was positive in for these interviews because I was seen as an *insider*, as I share the Christian faith of the students I was researching. This insider status was beneficial in that it allowed access to students through existing networks, allowed me to observe patterns in student responses that non-Christians may not have observed, and allowed students to be at ease when discussing their Christian faith.

Part of the process that began in college was to examine the ways in which my gender and race mattered. My parents were intentional in raising me to see individual differences, to acknowledge them as good, and to struggle with the notion that while all were created equal, all do not live equally in our world. By living in diverse neighborhoods, traveling while doing service, having a mother who defied the expectations of the preacher's wife by becoming a minister herself, and developing friendships from many backgrounds, my parents helped me begin my critical consciousness around race and gender. But it was not until college that I began to examine what it meant to be White, a woman, a Christian, able bodied and middle class in very specific ways. This examination continues as I learn daily about the ways in which these multiple identities privilege and oppress me.

This knowledge about my personal racial and gender identities opened a new world to me that I have worked throughout my professional and personal life to help open for other students. As a practitioner and instructor I have observed the power of mentors, curriculum, service learning, multicultural programs and residence life (to name a few) in student's lives. It seems this role is especially valuable for helping students develop commitments and knowledge of their calling and place in life. But the ways in which these commitments are made and kept also differ for diverse students. To better understand our students and their needs, it is important to give voice to the diverse ways in which they make meaning during college.

One thing that has struck me in recent years is that I was never encouraged or challenged during my college years to have a voice in political life, or to connect political issues to my Christian faith. Or perhaps I was invited to make these connections but chose not to because I was intimidated, or didn't feel they connected to my life. As a professional, I continue to see this disparity as student political groups and debates are often dominated by men, especially on Christian campuses. Seeking to understand why I and other women may not have developed a political voice in college directly informed the research questions of this dissertation.

For a variety of reasons, I have come to believe that to institute lasting societal change, one must acknowledge and seek to change societal structures. Put another way, my education and mentors helped me realize that Christians are called to address institutional sexism and racism in addition to individual sexism and racism. Some of this is done through politics. To fulfill a Christian calling in our world, I believe Christians need to be aware of how political structures affect the daily lives of others - some for

better and some for worse. These realizations in my life have given me a passion to examine how and if we can encourage women (and all) students to become aware of political issues, and the ways in which they connect to their faith. Or perhaps we need to find ways to encourage those of us working in student affairs to reinvasion the ways in which we encourage political and social involvements to include ways that are more inclusive of divergent voices. This dissertation is a reflection of this passion.

Data Collection

Participant selection and recruitment. Previous research on women's spiritual development suggests that there are differing patterns for the spiritual development of women as opposed to men (Anderson, 1995; Buchko, 2004; Holmes, Roedder & Flowers, 2004; Slee, 2004). Yet, little qualitative research has examined this development, especially as it is formed during the college years. From the feminist perspective, it is important for researchers to begin examining women without always having men as the referent group to gain deeper and more nuanced descriptions of women's experience. Therefore, this dissertation interviewed women only.

The spiritual development literature has also focused primarily on White Christians, and has not examined the possible influence of race on an individual's spiritual development. Most of the research that includes race as a construct has examined the spiritual development of people of color, and has left the possible impact of being White on one's spiritual development unexamined. In order to truly understand the possible influence or connection of White identity to spiritual development, the sample of this study was limited to White students only. This also was done to minimize the

limitations of the White researcher, such as the possibility that students of color might not have shared as openly about their racial identity with a majority researcher.

This research also supports that faith development may differ for various religions (Bryant, 2006; Mayhew, 2004; Peek 2005; Small, 2006). Therefore, the student sample for this study was limited to one religious tradition-- that of Christian women. The sample was further limited to Christian students from the Protestant and Evangelical religious traditions to limit the possible influence of religious tradition within Christianity on how students make connections. For the purposes of this study, Evangelical is defined similar to Emerson and Smith's (2000) definition. They define Evangelicals as individuals who believe the Bible to be the ultimate authority, as opposed to other traditions that might also value tradition, human reason, and individual experience as valid sources of authority. Evangelicals also believe Jesus Christ as the one way to eternal life, and often describe this experience as being "born again." Evangelizing or sharing of one's faith is also important.

It was also important to think about the appropriate age group to target for the study. Junior and senior students were interviewed, as they had more exposure, experience and time to think about their faith in relation to political and societal issues while in college. There is also the possibility that these students were involved in the 2004 presidential election cycle, in addition to the 2008 election cycle, which offers the students a greater diversity of political experiences to discuss during the interviews. It was also important to the research to gain perspectives from a broad range of students along the political spectrum, as it is possible that their political ideology could change how they made connections. While it may have been easier to find respondents for the

study at a Christian college campus, it may have been more difficult to gain as broad of a political perspective as could be found on a secular campus. To this end, interviews were conducted at a large, public, research university in the Midwest that is considered politically and socially liberal.

Because the research questions for this study were interested in how women made connections to their political and social actions, it was important that the women who were interviewed be involved in some form of social or political group or involvement. The type of group or definition of an action was broad to allow for the greatest range of participation from students, and these definitions were supported with examples in the invitation to participate and the demographic questionnaire (see Appendices A and C). The nature of the involvements of the women interviewed will be presented in the description of the sample provided later in this chapter.

After obtaining approval from the institutional review board, various campus contacts were forwarded an email explaining the dissertation and asking them to forward an invitation to interested students (see Appendix A). Contact was initiated with diverse political, service learning, religious and multicultural groups along the conservative to liberal political continuum to gain the broadest possible representation in the sample (see Appendix B for a list of groups sent the invitation email). Students were compensated \$25 for participating, as this has been effective in recruiting college students (Szelenyi, Bryant, & Lindholm, 2005). Compensation was provided from grant funds.

Questionnaire. Student demographic information was obtained by distributing a short questionnaire which also served as their application to participate in the study (see Appendix C). The questionnaire asked for information such as age, year in school,

major, gender, religious background and political affiliation. This questionnaire was used to provide basic information about students before they were interviewed to assure that they fit the demographic limits of the study, and for identification of identity groups for analysis.

Interviews. Consistent with qualitative research methods, semi-structured interviews were the primary data source (Becker, 1992; Giorgi, 2006). Semi-structured interviews allowed for exploration of the connections that students expressed in greater depth and in their own words, without imposing many preconceived formulas about how the students would make connections. The interviews consisted of a general question about a student's experience, followed by probing questions to encourage students toward more specificity. These follow-up questions included encouraging the use of examples and encouragement to "elaborate on the events, feelings, memories, meanings, and thoughts" of the experience (Becker, 1992, p. 40). This method of interviewing allowed examination of the phenomena from the personalized perspectives, or multiple constructed realities, of the students, which is the goal of constructivist and qualitative research.

Interview structure. A beginning interview protocol was created based on the review of spiritual and political development literature and the conceptual framework for this dissertation (see Appendix D). Past interview protocols used by the researcher to examine faith development in Christian students were also utilized to suggest ways in which to best approach students about their spiritual development generally (DeGraw, 2005, 2006).

The interview began by reviewing the purpose of the study with the students and discussing the informed consent form (see Appendix F). Because the information discussed in the interview could be very sensitive, I verbally reviewed the confidentiality statement and permission to be recorded as found on the informed consent statement. Students were then asked if they had questions before beginning with the official interview questions.

Consistent with the constructivist paradigm, there were only a few proposed open-ended questions on the interview protocol with questions that were broad enough for students to make their own meaning (Creswell, 2003). There were only a few such questions as it is assumed by the qualitative researcher that those being interviewed, when asked to describe an event, will “spontaneously contextualize the event and give the most relevant and important aspects of the experience” (Giorgi, 2006, p. 81). This allows the researcher to avoid making decisions about what specific questions to ask that may or may not be important to the individual being interviewed. The questions proposed for this dissertation asked the students to reflect on their experiences in three general areas: general questions about spirituality, general questions about their political and societal commitments, and general questions about their political and societal beliefs.

As can be observed on the attached interview protocols (Appendices D and E), pilot interviews were conducted with one interview protocol. And then the feedback provided from those two women was used to improve the protocol for the final interviews. In both protocols, the interviews began with two broad questions regarding students’ spiritual lives. These questions about their faith were intentionally asked first for two reasons. The students’ Christian faith may be the easiest and least sensitive area

for them to talk about, so it is a good place to begin to set the context that the interview is about them speaking, and the researcher listening. This also helped the student develop trust and ease with the interviewer in the interview setting.

The questions addressing spirituality were also important as they investigated one of the major constructs of the conceptual framework. I needed to examine how students describe the sphere of their Christian faith, past and present, to begin to understand how it might connect to their political and societal beliefs and actions, as well as their gender and race. The interview questions of Slee (2004) in particular were utilized when creating these questions. Possible follow-up questions to the broader questions were used to probe for deeper meaning and description. These were suggestions only, and were not strictly followed. The main goal was to spur the students to answer the questions as deeply and descriptively as possible.

The next group of questions on the protocol asked students about their political and social involvements. These questions were addressed next, as they ask students about their actions, which may be easier or more comfortable for them to discuss and express than their specific political and social beliefs. These questions were meant to direct the students to the contexts in which I was more specifically interested in examining the influence of their faith. The findings for this dissertation will be elicited from the nuances of the students' general descriptions, the specific words they use and the examples they provide (Becker, 1992; Suddaby, 2006). But the probes were used as follow-up areas of inquiry because they are key concerns of this dissertation.

The final section of the interview consisted of questions to address students' political and social beliefs in relation to their faith. These questions were designed to

examine the overlapping identity constructs of the conceptual framework. The questions and probes asked about specific experiences where the students might have felt conflict, or the influence of multiple identities or values operating simultaneously. These questions were influenced specifically by the work of some of the key theorists who have examined the intersections and conflicts of multiple identities (Emerson and Smith, 2000; Jones, 1997; Jones and McEwen, 2000; Siddle Walker & Snarey, 2004).

The interview concluded with one final open ended question for the student to be sure they had shared all the information they felt was relevant to the research topic. They were also encouraged to follow-up by email after the interview if they had things they would like to add. Only one student sent additional information in email form after the interview, and this was added to her transcript for further analysis.

Pilot study of the interview protocol. To ensure the effectiveness of the interview protocol and the demographic questionnaire, pilot interviews were conducted. This determined which questions were unclear or provided useless data (Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2005). Two pilot interviews were conducted with White women graduate students from the School of Education who were close in age to recent college graduates. They were recruited using an invitation email with wording similar to that of the invitation email provided to the sample population for this study. They were given the demographic questionnaire to complete, with extra space between the questions to make comments or suggestions as to its effectiveness or needed changes. They were then interviewed utilizing the interview protocol suggested in the original dissertation proposal (see Appendix D).

After completing the interviews, a copy of the interview protocol was provided to each of the interviewees with space in between questions for them to write comments as to the order, effectiveness and clarity of the questions. An additional questionnaire was given to them to complete, asking the following questions:

1. Was the questionnaire clear? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
2. Were there any questions in the interview that were unclear or not helpful? (you can consult the attached protocol and make comments directly on it if you prefer).
3. Do you have any suggestions for improving the interview?

The feedback was reviewed and utilized to make changes to the interview protocol and demographic questionnaire before interviewing the primary sample for the study. Detailed notes were also kept after completing the two pilot interviews on ways to improve the flow and content of the interviews. As a result of the pilot interviews, small adjustments were made to the questionnaire, and larger adjustments were made to the interview protocol.

The changes to the pilot interview protocol (Appendix D) addressed the following issues. The opening question regarding the student's spiritual life was too broad, and the women interviewed for the pilot study suggested starting with the second question. Question number three regarding spiritual challenges was deleted because the interviewees were incorporating this into question number two, and because too much time was being spent in the interview on questions regarding spirituality. As a result, there was not enough time left to address connections, which was the heart of the research study. Questions 7 and 9-11 were eliminated because they were confusing to the pilot interviewees, and there was not enough time during the interview. Appendix E is a

copy of the revised final interview protocol that was used for the interviews for this dissertation.

Interview quality. As the interviews are the primary data source in qualitative research, their quality is of utmost concern. Quality interviews were assured through the previous experience and training I have received conducting qualitative interviews. In addition, I engaged in a continual reflective process during and after the interviews, which allowed me to examine ways in which I may have negatively influenced the interview process. I had previous training and experience conducting qualitative interviews through three years working on the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts, a national, longitudinal mixed methods study. I also conducted eight student interviews examining the spiritual development of students as part of past personal research projects (DeGraw, 2005, 2006). This knowledge and experience in combination with the knowledge from two graduate qualitative research classes and years of meeting individually with students allowed me to conduct quality interviews.

Becker (1992) also addresses quality issues by suggesting helpful questions for the interviewer to silently ask herself during the interview:

Do I feel that I can summarize the essential aspects of this phenomenon for this person? Have I gotten enough examples and details? Can the person say anything else about this aspect of the phenomenon? Do experiences of the phenomenon exist that she or he has not mentioned yet? (p. 41).

These questions were used as part of the interviewers debriefing process after interviews to help determine if enough information had been gained. These questions helped refine which probing questions were the most helpful in producing the detailed description of the phenomenon being studied.

As part of the research process, initial thoughts immediately after individual interviews were digitally recorded or written. This allowed thoughts about the interview to be recorded immediately, such as key themes, non-verbal cues that would be helpful to note for context, and any issues on which I needed to follow up.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by an outside transcription company.

Procedures for addressing trustworthiness and credibility. All qualitative researchers search for methods to ensure the trustworthiness of their data (Creswell, 2003; Stage & Manning, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Mertens, 2005). Some of the issues affecting the reliability of the research have been addressed above through the use of the research journal and debrief notes after interviews, to be aware of possible bias or sensitivities of the researcher. In addition, where possible, the transcripts of the interviews were emailed to the participants, with the option for them to add or clarify any of their comments. There was no additional data that arose from the participants after the interviews.

Analysis

Interviews were examined through the coding processes consistent with general qualitative research practice. (Becker, 1992; Creswell, 2003; Giorgi, 2006; Merriam, 1998). The analysis of interviews began by reading through all the transcripts to gain a “general sense” of the information and the overall meaning, and to “get into the story” shared by the student (Creswell, 2003; Giorgi, 2006). I then went back through each interview line by line and coded the transcripts into meaning units that could be broken down into sections that are not so short that the meaning is fragmented, but not too long

so that important meanings were missed (Giorgi, 2006). These meaning units were highlighted and identified with a comment in the Microsoft word document stating the overall theme of the unit within the transcribed documents.

Step three involved collecting these meaning units that were similar into one place. I went back through each of the transcripts and copied and pasted the meaning units or codes that were similar together in one document under larger topical or meaning making units. This process resulted in thirty-one major categories, which were further examined in step four.

Step four of synthesizing the data and describing the structure of the phenomenon is perhaps the most difficult to operationalize. How does one move from the categories or meaning units for individuals, and find overall connections and structures among participants? Up until this point, my preconceptions about the phenomenon were set aside to allow for the meaning to emerge from the subjective experience of the students. At this point, the possible structure and themes suggested from the literature review were brought back in as part of the analysis process. The larger categories were examined for any patterns and themes that arose from the data, but I was also alert for themes that had been suggested from the research forming the conceptual framework. I then combined the language of the women being interviewed with the language of the discipline of study and a higher education audience (Becker, 1992; Giorgi, 2006) to describe the general structure of how women made connections.

Participant Descriptions

Twenty-four White, Christian women were interviewed for the study. Each of the women had college credits to be considered, was either a junior or senior in college, and

self-identified across the political spectrum with varying degrees of political and social involvement. The women interviewed are of course central to the success of this study. As such, it is important for the reader to get a very brief introduction to each of them. In addition to a basic introduction, information regarding the political, religious and social involvements of the women interviewed will be presented at the end of this chapter. These participant descriptions are then summarized in Appendix G (pages 181-183) to be used for reference when reading the results chapter.

Marina is twenty-two years old and is majoring in Biology and Nursing, and has a passion for women's healthcare. She identifies as Lutheran and liberal politically. She became very involved in a campaign to get people to vote no on Proposal 2, which was a state initiative that would have banned affirmative action. She also took part in an extern program in a hospital that was influential on her decision to go into nursing.

Josefina is twenty-three years old and is majoring in Youth Empowerment Studies and minoring in Spanish. She identifies as United Methodist and liberal politically. She is involved in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship as a small group leader, and is on the advisory board for the service learning center on campus. She is also highly involved with a creative arts projects with local prisons.

Layla is twenty years old and a Sociology and Political Science major. She identifies as Baptist and liberal politically. She is actively involved in College Democrats, and lobbying to reverse the ban on affirmative action. She was also involved in a political internship in Washington D.C., and is trying to create a non-partisan coalition of campus organizations interested in civil rights and social justice.

Courtney is twenty-one years old and a Social Science and Pre-Nursing major. She identifies as being raised Methodist, but states she is really non-denominational, and is politically middle-of-the-road. She is involved in Campus Crusade for Christ and a Christian Multicultural Sorority. She is especially interested in community organizing and is involved in a local homeless shelter.

Jenny is twenty years old and an Anthropology and Spanish major. She identifies as Lutheran and liberal politically. She volunteers in a literacy program for elementary students and at Ten Thousand Villages, a store that sells fair trade products. She also lives in and is a leader in her Co-op.

Thea is twenty years old and a Business major and German minor. She identifies as non-denominational, but currently attends a Baptist church. Politically, she identifies as middle-of-the-road. She is involved in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship as a small group leader, and was involved in College Republicans her freshman year of college. She also volunteered for Peacemakers International, which has a variety of ministries in the large city close to campus.

Megan is twenty-one years old and an Oboe Performance major and Women's Studies (health and gender) minor. She identifies as Lutheran and far left politically. She is involved with RESULTS, a national lobbying organization trying to illuminate hunger and poverty and chaired the World AIDS week activities on campus. She also volunteers at a center on campus that supports low income and teen moms before, during and after child birth.

Laurel is twenty-two years old and an English Literature and Sociology major with a Philosophy minor. She identifies as Lutheran and far left politically. She

volunteers for a literacy program for elementary students, and is in a leadership position in the service learning center on campus. She also went on a walking pilgrimage along the ancient *Camino De Santiago* route.

Paige is twenty years old and undecided on her major, but wants to be in social work. She identifies as being raised Lutheran, but is attending a non-denominational church currently. She is middle-of-the-road politically. She is involved in small groups at her church and lives in a campus living-learning community that is community service based. She is in a leadership position in an organization called GROUP which organizes mission trips for youth and adult groups. She also works for the Prisoner Reentry Initiative.

Coley is twenty years old and a Sociology and Global Health major with a sub-concentration in health and aging. She identifies as non-denominational and liberal politically. She is heavily involved in Campus Crusade for Christ, including a Bible study, international student outreach, and a 10 week summer mission project. She volunteers at a local homeless shelter and a local hospital and nursing home.

Ashley is nineteen years old and a Kinesiology and Pre-Physical Therapy major. She identifies as non-denominational and middle-of-the-road politically. She volunteers for a literacy program for elementary students, and is involved in a small group at her church. She will be attending an alternative spring break where she will do community service. She also volunteered in a hospital doing hearing screenings for newborns, and was in a living learning community for those interested in health-related fields.

Becca is twenty-one years old and a History major. She identifies as non-denominational and middle-of-the-road politically. She is a leader in Greek Intersity

Christian Fellowship and leads a weekly Bible study in her sorority. She also volunteers for Young Life in the summers.

Virginia is twenty-one years old and is a General Studies and Pre-Health major. She identifies as United Methodist, and stated the following about her political affiliation: “I like to call myself independent, but I suppose that I am liberal with a couple/few issues on which I am actually conservative.” She is involved in Campus Crusade for Christ, volunteers at a medical clinic for the underserved, and was in College Democrats and a human rights group. She also attended a march in Washington against the Iraq war and works for Habitat for Humanity.

Agnes is twenty years old and an Organizational Studies major. She identifies as Lutheran and middle-of-the-road politically. She is involved in Food Gatherers, which collects large corporate food donations and then distributes them to those in need. She also is actively involved in an Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice, Big Brothers/Sisters, and Moveon.org.

Tristan is twenty-one years old and a Biology and Pre-Med major. She identifies as Methodist and conservative politically. She volunteers with local physicians and Relay for Life. She also volunteered through her involvement in College Republicans.

Leah is twenty-one years old and a Psychology major. She identifies as Lutheran and middle-of-the-road politically. She has been a peer mentor for an incoming freshman, volunteered at a local Children’s hospital, and is actively involved in a local church.

Abby is twenty-one years old and a Movement Science major. She identifies as Catholic/non-denominational and is middle-of-the-road politically. She is involved in

Campus Crusade for Christ and a pen pal program that has college students exchange letters with local elementary schools. She also lived in a living-learning community for those interested in health fields, and took part in International Service-Learning global medical training.

Mary is twenty-one years old and a Nursing major. She identifies as Protestant and far right politically. She is actively involved in the College Republicans and volunteers many hours at a local retirement center.

Megan M is twenty-one years old and a Psychology and French major. She identifies as North American Baptist and middle-of-the-road politically. She is a leader and Bible study leader in Campus Crusade for Christ, and is involved in service projects sponsored by that organization. She also tutors kids in the neighboring large city, and is involved in a pen pal program that has college students exchange letters with local elementary schools.

Allison is twenty years old and an Atmospheric Science major and Mathematics minor. She identifies as Protestant and having grown up Wesleyan, but is attending a Baptist church currently. She is involved in Campus Crusade for Christ as a Bible study leader. She is also a site leader for an alternative spring break program where college students do volunteering during their spring break.

Sara is twenty-one years old and a Nursing major. She has no denominational affiliation and identifies as middle-of-the-road politically. She is involved with Campus Crusade for Christ, Peacemakers International, and a center for low-income people to get psychiatric medical attention.

Emily is nineteen years old and an Economics and French major with a minor in History of Art. She identifies as non-denominational and liberal politically. She is a Bible study leader in Campus Crusade for Christ and very active in a local church. She also volunteers at local retirement homes.

Claire is twenty-one years old and a Material Science and Engineering major with a minor in History of Art. She identifies as Lutheran and liberal politically. She is a member of the College Democrats and has attended rallies for women in politics. She also is an officer in the Society for Women Engineers.

Olivia is twenty-one years old and a History major. She identifies as Baptist and liberal politically. She is a Bible study and team coordinator in Campus Crusade for Christ and is involved in student government on the LGBT commission. She is actively involved in the Stonewall Democrats, an organization working for gay rights, and is a youth group leader at her local church.

Religious Affiliations and Involvements. While this study was limited to those that identified as Protestant and/or non-denominational in an effort to limit the scope, many would argue that there is great religious diversity even within these two religious designations. Those within these religious designations may be especially interested in the denominational affiliations of the women interviewed, as these traditions can affect individual beliefs. Therefore, the denominational affiliations self-identified by the women are presented in Table 1 below. The survey given to the women before their interview left the question regarding religious identification deliberately broad so that the women could self-identify with whatever traditions they felt best described their religious involvements. Specifically, the questionnaire asked “Do you consider yourself Christian?”

If yes, with what denomination (if any) or religious community do you consider yourself most affiliated?" (see Appendix C for complete participant questionnaire).

Table 6 shows that the women interviewed self-identified from many different denominations. Some of the women also did not want to identify themselves within a single religious tradition, so they listed two. This table also demonstrates that the sample is religiously diverse within the general label of *Protestant* and/or *Evangelical*, although there were more Lutheran students than other denominations. Most likely this resulted because the leader of the Lutheran Campus Ministry was one of the individuals that forwarded the email invitation to students, and this particular organization is denominationally affiliated. Most other organizations that sent the email to students were not denominationally specific.

Table 6
Denominational Affiliation of Women Interviewed

Denomination	Number of Women	Names
Lutheran	8	Marina, Jenny, Megan, Laurel, Paige, Agnes Leah, Claire
Baptist	3	Layla, Megan M, Olivia
Nondenominational	4	Coley, Ashley, Becca, Emily
Methodist	3	Josefina, Virginia, Tristan
Methodist/Nondenominational	1	Courtney
Catholic/Nondenominational	1	Abby
Nondenominational/Baptist	1	Thea
None	1	Sara
Protestant	1	Mary
Wesleyan/Baptist	1	Allison

The women were also involved in various other religious groups or organizations. Fifteen of the women interviewed described themselves as involved or active in a church some time during their college years. Many of the women were also involved in campus Christian organizations, including three women in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

This mission of InterVarsity is “to establish and advance at colleges and universities witnessing communities of students and faculty who follow Jesus as Savior and Lord: growing in love for God, God's Word, God's people of every ethnicity and culture and God's purposes in the world” (<http://www.intervarsity.org/about/>). Nine of the women were also involved in an organization called Campus Crusade for Christ International, which has the stated mission “helping to fulfill the Great Commission in the power of the Holy Spirit by winning people to faith in Jesus Christ, building them in their faith and sending them to win and build others; and helping the Body of Christ do evangelism and discipleship” (<http://www.ccci.org/about-us/index.htm>).

Political Beliefs and Involvements. Before discussing how the women connected their political views to their faith, it is important to understand how they identified themselves politically, and their general views on politics and politicians. The sample of twenty-four women interviewed self-identified across the political spectrum, but a majority indicated that they were “middle-of-the-road.” Of the twenty-four women interviewed, two identified as “far left” politically, nine as “liberal”, ten as “middle-of-the-road”, two as “conservative” and one as “far right.” This distribution shows that we had representation from across the political spectrum. But one characteristic of the sample for this study is that it is skewed to the liberal side of the political spectrum, but still focused primarily on “middle-of-the-road”. Having more women who identify as liberal is consistent with the college the women attended, but the skew of the sample’s political beliefs is a limitation of this study.

The women who identified as middle-of-the-road are of particular interest because they represent the majority of the sample, but also because why women identify as

middle-of-the-road has not been examined qualitatively in any of the studies reviewed. This finding is also interesting because the women interviewed for this study presented such varied reasons for their chosen designation.

Three of the women said they indicated they were middle-of-the-road because they identified as liberal on most social issues, but considered themselves fiscally conservative. Other women did not want to identify specifically with one political party, as they felt that each party dealt well with different issues that were important to them, or were not happy with either party. Megan M. discussed her hesitancy to commit to one political party.

Megan M: Because I think that everyone's opinions differ, and everyone has different abilities to bring to the table. And no matter what you label your political affiliation, it won't be an exact match of everyone else within the same party. So you really just have to know stances on each, individual issue, and that's probably why my parents follow everyone rather than simply going in and say, "Oh, here's a democrat. Oh, here's a republican." Because that's not a full explanation of what that person represents, so to be aware of that. And like I said too, being a Christian, I do feel a certain way on issues like abortion or whatever, but definitely not as conservative on other issues. So it is more of a middle-of-the-road type.

Megan indicates that she is middle-of-the-road politically because she wants to focus on the individual and their stances when thinking about politics, and also that her Christian beliefs affect her ability to commit to one party. Her belief is that she does not want to be labeled in one party, as her views are diverse depending on the issue.

Thea also presented an interesting reason for being middle-of-the-road politically. She said she would never say that she is Republican because there are a lot of stereotypes of Republicans. When asked what those stereotypes were, she said Republicans are seen as "heartless and greedy and overly wealthy and White evangelical Protestants." She

preferred to remain “politically ambiguous.” This response could also be reflective of the large secular environment in which Thea attends college.

Politically involved women. The women discussed various political involvements on the questionnaire collected before the interviews and during the interviews. Six of the women brought up that they voted, many of whom were the very women who stated they were not involved politically. Listed in the table below are the specific political organizations that the women interviewed said they had been involved in or indicated they were involved in on the study application. This list is by no means exhaustive. For example, it is possible that more than six of the women voted, but many of them may not have considered this act as being “politically active.” The question regarding political involvement on the questionnaire was deliberately broad so the women could self-identify what they believed to be politically active. The question read:

Please list any ways you have been involved during college in on and off campus political, religious, community service and race/ethnicity groups or organizations. This involvement could be defined in a variety of ways. It could mean being involved in political groups like the Democratic or Republican party or groups involved in addressing social issues like abortion, the environment, racial justice etc. Or, this involvement could mean performing community service like volunteering at a school or homeless shelter. Political actions could also mean being involved in a political or social issue related website on-line, voting, being in a protest or reading about political issues.

As you will see from the table below, the women gave fewer examples of being politically involved than they did of being religiously or socially involved. In retrospect, it may have been helpful to separate out this question into three separate questions, asking about their social, religious and political involvement. This may have solicited more detailed information regarding their political involvements. But it may also be the

case that the women simply were involved more in social and/or religious commitments. The findings from the interviews would support this hypothesis.

Table 7

Political Involvement of Women as Reported on Questionnaire

Political Involvement	Number of Women
Vote	6
College Republicans	3
College Democrats	3
No on Proposition 2 (to ban affirmative action) campaign	2
Stonewall Democrats	1
March against the War	1
Tried to create non-partisan coalition of campus orgs interested in civil rights and social justice	1
Moveon.org	1
Rallies for women in politics	1
RESULTS (a lobbying organization)	1
University Student Assembly	1

Women not involved in politics. There were several themes present when the women discussed their beliefs and involvements in politics in general, separate from specific issues. To begin, six of the twenty-four women interviewed stated that they were not interested in politics or did not think of themselves as political. While this is not surprising based on previous literature which stated that women were less politically engaged (Bernstein, 2005; Verba, Burns & Schlozman, 1997), it is interesting that there was great variety as to their reasons why they were not involved or interested in politics.

Some of the women stated they were not involved because they did not trust politicians. Ashley exemplified this perspective when she stated the following about politicians.

Ashley: I don't really like politics 'cause I think a lot of them lie. And so I don't trust any of them really. . . Like I mean, when they stand there and say stuff like 90% of the time, I just think oh, you'll turn around and say something different the next campus you go to or whatever. So, I don't really trust them.

Josefina's distrust was related more specifically to how politicians handled Hurricane Katrina.

Josefina: I don't even want to be a part of any of that ever. You know, and so it's really hard to, like, fight for things that are important in the face of that because you never really know what's going to be said. You never really know what's going to be communicated. You never really know what's going to change.

Both women felt that their inability to trust politicians negatively affected their desire to be involved in politics. These findings support the work of Longo and Meyer (2006) that found today's college students to be cynical about politics and apathetic about becoming involved.

Others were not involved in politics because they thought political views were a personal matter. Marina did not think of herself as political because she believed that politics were personal and you didn't talk about your political beliefs. She learned this belief early from her family.

Marina: We don't talk about it. We never talked about politics. We never talked about who people voted for, so for me, like, it's a little bit more of a personal issue. I don't think I'll ever put like one of those flags in my yard. I just, it's just not, I'm just not like an openly super political person. Just like I'll know who I vote for, and maybe I'll tell you, but I'm not gonna – I don't know. I'm just not a flashy political person yet.

Not only did Marina believe that political beliefs were personal, she believed that talking about politics would make you a “flashy” or “super” political person.

For Sara, “politics are not really part of my world” because most political parties are the same. She believed that “no one's gonna impose a dictatorship or any – maybe this law will be passed and this law won't, or whatever, but I'm just not that concerned

with it. I don't know why. I'm just not." Sara went on to express that she was not concerned about politics because Jesus is really in charge rather than politicians.

Sara: I mean I'm just not really concerned about who's president of what or who's in charge of what because I mean Jesus is in charge of the world. So I'm just like what difference does it really make who is in charge of the country? I mean, I don't know. I don't really care.

This is a clear example of how Sara's religious beliefs affect how she views politics. If Jesus is in charge, her involvement would really not make any difference in the outcome so why bother being involved?

Another perspective shared by four of the women regarding their involvement in politics is that they were engaged or involved in politics at the local level, but were not interested or connected to politics at a national level. Most of them stated this was because they felt they could have a greater impact on making change at the local level.

Sara summarized the thoughts of these women.

Sara: I guess this is really weird 'cause I feel like the government can be a huge part of social injustice that still exists. I just don't really see them as a factor in alleviating those, which is kind of ridiculous. I'm sure it's faster to just go to the problem and fix it than to involve all that. I mean it's probably better to actually change it, but for my purposes and for my life and what I want to do, I think it's faster for me to just go somewhere and fix the immediate – like I said, clean water, and food, or medical things. Go there and provide that. So obviously there's still a greater problem but that greater problem is way out of my hands.

These findings support the findings from the literature review regarding college students choosing to do community service as a form of, or instead of, political involvement (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Longo & Meyer, 2006). The four women in this dissertation did not feel empowered or motivated to make change within political structures, but preferred to meet the immediate needs of those around them through service.

Social Beliefs and Involvements. While only some of the women were politically involved, most of the women were involved in service in their community. Table 8 lists the various social service opportunities in which the women were involved. These results are presented to support that the women who were interviewed were involved in a broad variety of service organizations, which provides some diversity of experience within the sample. Interestingly, only two of the organizations or involvements below are Christian. The homeless ministry and the “outreach in the inner city neighborhood” (name left off to protect anonymity of institution) are the only involvements listed below that are Christian. The remaining ones listed are secular. These results also indicate that the women interviewed were much more likely to be involved in some type of service opportunity than in political action groups (compare to Table 7 above), which again supports the findings of previous literature on the political involvement of current college students (Andolina et. al, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Longo & Meyer, 2006).

Table 8

Social Service Involvement of Women

Name	Organization/s
Josefina	Math for Social Change/Young Peoples Project, Prison Creative Arts Project Poetry Workshop, Art of prisoners Planning Committee
Courtney	Local Homeless Shelter
Jenny	America Reads, 10 thousand villages, Co-op leadership
Thea	Community Outreach in inner city neighborhood
Megan	Co-chair World AIDS week, Center for the Childbearing Year, Dula
Laurel	Campus Service Learning Center, Alternative Spring Break Lead Team, America Reads
Paige	Prisoner Reentry Initiative
Coley	Bridges International, homeless outreach, visiting nursing home, volunteer at local Hospital
Ashley	America Reads, Alternative Spring break
Virginia	Local medical clinic, human rights group, Habitat for humanity
Agnes	Food Gatherers, Big Sister;

Tristan	Volunteer with local physicians, Pre-med club, Relay for Life
Leah	Volunteer at Mott Children’s Hospital, Peer Mentor
Abby	Kgrams, Health Sciences Scholars Living and Learning Community
Mary	Volunteer at various nursing homes
Megan M	Campus Service Learning Center, Kgrams, Service Projects through Campus Crusade for Christ and local church.
Alison	Alternative spring break, Community Outreach in inner city neighborhood
Sara	Volunteer at organization for low income individuals for psychiatric and/or medical attention), Community Outreach in inner city neighborhood
Emily	Volunteer in two nursing homes
Claire	Officer, society of women engineers
Olivia	LGBT Commission (student government), Youth group leader

The tables above are meant to break down the women’s involvements into smaller pieces to help illustrate that the sample is involved in a diversity of political, religious and social service groups and involvements. But it is also helpful to have a quick guide to be able to see the various involvements of each of the individual women interviewed. Table 4 presents this data and can be used as a resource when reading the results of the dissertation.

Social beliefs connected with Christian faith

During the interview the women were asked to share their beliefs and thoughts on one social issue that they thought connected with their Christian faith. One interesting finding from this study was the consistency with which the women brought up the same topics even though they held diverse political perspectives. While they could have picked any political or social issue, a majority of women spoke about two issues: homosexuality and abortion. There were twelve total topics that the women discussed (most women spoke about more than one topic), but clearly these were the two contemporary issues that most of the women noted as connecting their social and faith beliefs. These two issues will be discussed in detail in the results chapters, but it also is

important for future discussion to examine all of the topics discussed. Table 4 outlines all of the topics brought up by the women and the number of women that discussed them.

Table 9
Social Issues Raised Which Women Stated Connected With Christian Faith

Issue	Total number who discussed (24 total interviewed)
Homosexuality/Gay Marriage	15
Abortion	14
Health Care	5
Education	4
Stem Cell Research	4
War	4
Environment	3
Death Penalty	3
AIDS in Africa	1

Limitations

Limitations of this study result from choices that have been made in selecting the sample. This study is designed to examine the spiritual development of Christian students. There is a clear need for continuing research on diverse religious perspectives, but there is also a clear need for a more in-depth and thorough examination of the dominant religious paradigm in America and its influence on political and societal issues. The Christian worldview is clearly the dominant religious worldview in American culture (Blumenfield, 2006; Clark, Primhall, Vagas, Schlosser & Alimo, 2002; Prothero, 2007; Schlosser, 2003). Yet, Christianity's role in American politics (and others arenas) often goes unexamined, which can result in minority religious perspectives becoming disenfranchised. This dissertation will illuminate how Christian students' faith development may intersect with their political and social views in ways that have been previously unexamined.

There is also a clear need to examine Christian spiritual development beyond that of White students. Yet here again, the faith and spiritual development literature until this point has not examined the influence of White racial identity on the spiritual development process. Without this examination, the dominant narrative will be allowed to continue without challenge. The need to limit the scope of this dissertation, and the limits of the researchers own social identities also influenced the choice of White students interview sample, which of course limits its applicability for students of color and male students.

While qualitative research offers exciting methods to delve into the lived experience of students, it also limits the result of the inquiry. This dissertation provides detailed, rich descriptions from students describing a process that is often unexamined. The resulting findings are of value because they are taken from women students' own words, arose directly from their experiences, and are useful in helping other students, researchers and practitioners examine similar processes. But this research method also poses limitations, as can be stated about many qualitative methodologies.

While this dissertation will provide needed depth to the inquiry of student spiritual development, it is limited in its breadth. The twenty-four women interviewed provided a wealth of information and offered broad ways in they made connections that are helpful for future study. But in an effort to narrow the questions, certain sample demographics were chosen. As a result, the findings of this study can on only be discussed in relation to White, Christian, women college students and should not be used to compare to other racial, gender or religious groups.

Another limitation is that all of the interviews were conducted at a single, large, secular research university. As such, the sample was skewed toward middle-of-the-road

to liberal politically. The findings might vary if interviews had been conducted at small, Christian, private or liberal arts colleges. While limiting the interviews to a single campus allowed for one less variable, it also limits the implication for the findings.

In hindsight, class could have been included as an identity as women brought this up often during the interviews related to religious identity and why they were involved in service. It would have been interesting to at least ask some basic questions regarding the socioeconomic status of the women interviewed because it may have impacted their views and involvements. Some connected class identity with race but many did not so it may be worthy of future study.

Lastly, I believe the scope of this study is a limitation, as there were many lenses through which I was trying to examine how women make connections. This meant I was trying to examine students political, social and faith beliefs and actions, which at times seemed overwhelming. I do believe the breadth of this study offers a contribution to the field, but it was at the expense of being able to look at one area in greater depth.

There are certainly limitations to this inquiry, but there is also a clear need to examine the questions proposed by this study. By acknowledging the limitations here, it is hoped that the purpose and intent of this study are further clarified and narrowed to make them realistic and effective to contributing to the research needs in the higher education field.

Chapter 4: Faith Development and Connections with Service and Politics

This dissertation examines the question of how undergraduate Christian women students connect their spirituality to political and social issues, in both their beliefs and their actions. This question was framed to examine the process of how students made connections rather than simply the content of what they believe about political and social issues. Yet before being able to examine connections, it is best to understand where the women believed they were in their current faith development and what had helped them grow spiritually during college. The salience of their faith identity and their understanding of how their faith develops has obvious impact on their ability to make connections to other identities and beliefs. Therefore, it will be examined in some detail before examining how the women connected it to other identities, actions, and beliefs.

This chapter will begin by presenting the results concerning what the women believed helped them grow spiritually while in college. Many of the women began by discussing how the context of the large secular university at times limited their expression of their faith because they felt discriminated against as a minority. They then discussed how both church and campus organizations were influential in their faith development by connecting them into a *community* of other Christians through small groups and other fellowship opportunities. In addition, having Christian friends to hold them *accountable* to their Christian values also came through as influential for the women's spiritual development. Lastly, the women discussed how reflection and prayer were important in keeping them connected and growing in their faith.

After discussing the findings related to women's faith development in college, this chapter will examine how the women made connections between their faith and their political and social beliefs and actions. A few general themes arose from the interviews as to how White Christian women make these connections: through *relationships, the topic of same-sex attraction, classes, questioning and prioritizing their Christian beliefs* and taking part in *service opportunities*. The women presented that relationships with people, specifically their relationships with parents and peers, were influential in helping them make connections. In addition, the topic of homoattractiveness was brought up consistently as providing the context for connecting their faith beliefs with their social beliefs. Some of the women also discussed the influence of mission and study abroad trips and courses on making connections as well as the processes of questioning biblical translation and historical context, prioritizing Christian beliefs, and connecting to a core Christian value. Lastly, being involved in service opportunities helped them make connections but was also seen by some as actual political action. Each of these themes will be presented as they emerged from the interviews with the women and will be examined as to how connections were made.

Faith Development: Perceptions of the influence of a large, public university

One of the surprising findings of this study is how often the women interviewed brought up the influence of the large, secular university they attended on their development or their openness about their Christian faith. While this was not a question presented in the interview, seventeen of the twenty-four women interviewed brought up during their interviews that the University was influential. The environment of the large campus was seen as a positive influence on their development by some and as a

limitation by others. Most of the women who viewed it as a positive influence discussed the positive effect of the racial, ethnic, and religious diversity on the University campus. These results will be discussed in chapter five, when the effects of race and diversity on how the women made connections will be examined.

Some of the other women felt that the environment of the University was not a comfortable place for them to express their faith, which, therefore, limited their opportunities to make connections between their faith and other parts of their lives. The words most often used to describe the University and the surrounding area were *liberal*, *intellectual*, *diverse*, and *antireligious*. While some used these terms simply as descriptors, others felt the University environment limited their spiritual opportunities.

Megan M. discussed the culture at the University as intellectual, with many of the students leaning toward atheism. She felt this limited her options for Christian groups to be involved in on campus.

Megan M: Yeah, and I'd say that the University is interesting too for me in the sense that I feel like it's not—the University just has its own mentality, and I think that with the people that are so intelligent here, they form their own arguments. And I think that a lot of the consensus with students is very much leaning towards the atheistic end. So that was—so that's—it's just hard to find different involvements, and it was InterVarsity or Cru.

Megan's perception was that the intellectual nature of the University causes student to lean away from faith and more toward atheism. Megan also felt that this limited her possibilities for religious organizations in which to become involved.

Megan M went on to describe the intellectual atmosphere and how this caused some to question their Christian beliefs. Earlier in the interview, Megan had stated that she believed the University had its own culture, so I asked her if she meant this in relation to people or faith or just in general. She responded:

Oh, just in general. I think that definitely like a hippie type, more earthy feel, and I think the people really like to identify themselves as intellectuals. All the people in the coffee shops—like I definitely enjoy it too, but I do think that with that intelligentsia and all that does come kind of—I think that to—in terms of like if you were trying to outreach mission, this is definitely a very different environment in that everyone here is very educated, and they form their arguments. And they want to argue with you about why something like faith, which is not so tangible, is not plausible because people have all these concrete things that they know, see, and do, and faith is something that you can't see, that you live out. And that you feel, and that you know is true.

Megan M. perceived that the intellectual culture of the University emphasized creating arguments on tangible, concrete things and felt that this was often brought into conflict with issues of faith, which were less tangible and so perhaps not valued by others.

Because of the intellectual environment, faith can be seen as irrational, and Megan may have felt that this impression would then be passed on to her as being irrational. Also, in the university setting, Megan may have felt that argumentation was the primary tool used in discussing beliefs, which may not be her preferred method of discussing her faith. The results from the cognitive development studies of Belenky et al. (1997) and Baxter Magolda (1992) indicate that some women prefer interpersonal or connected ways of knowing that seek *understanding* by being in relationship with and trying to see issues from other's perspectives. Megan went on to discuss how she did not find this connected way of knowing in the University environment, especially in her leadership position on campus.

Megan M. also felt she was in the minority as a Christian in many contexts at the University and experienced intolerance because of her Christian beliefs. She struggled in particular in a leadership position she held on campus for which she took part in a training class. She was the only Christian in the class and felt that other students were intolerant toward her Christian faith and views on certain issues:

I was like the only Christian in the training class. And I feel like I'm a pretty tolerant person and definitely open to everyone else's opinions. But I feel like there's a reverse effect at the University; whereas because Christians are maybe the dominant group outside of the University it's like they aren't here though that, that carries over here, and people really enjoy the fact that they are one of the more minority groups, but they can stress that they are a dominant group and kind of take free range of that. So I feel like while I'm inclined to be very tolerant and appreciative of other people's backgrounds, the same courtesy isn't extended to Christian groups.

Megan M. discussed the paradox of how the University stressed openness and diversity, but felt this value was not extended to those from the Christian faith perspective. The effect this had on Megan is that she would not openly discuss her faith in this context, even though many of the issues that were raised in class connected directly with her faith beliefs. She was often silent and was even approached after class by the faculty member, who encouraged her to discuss her beliefs more openly with the class. Megan M. did state that she thought the students in the leadership class may have been "different" from other students on campus, as she believed they were probably more passionate and, therefore, more vocal toward issues of diversity and social justice.

In addition to Megan M., five of the women shared that they often did not even share their beliefs outside of the Christian organizations they were involved in because of what they felt was the antireligious sentiments at the University. Similar to the students interviewed by Moran (2007), the women were often negotiating how much they wanted to share of their Christian faith based on who they were around. This could clearly affect their ability to make connections between their faith and social and political beliefs and actions if they did not feel comfortable even discussing their faith with others in the university context.

Abby thought it was difficult to bring up her faith because she didn't want to "push anyone's buttons" or "have people think that you're judging them." In response to a question regarding whether she experienced people at the University as open to talking about or hearing about faith, Thea shared in detail that she often did not talk about her Christian involvements with others she did not know who were not Christians because it made people uncomfortable.

Thea: Yeah. Well, I mean, people are generally nice about—I don't feel comfortable often to everyone just being like "Oh. I was at. . ."—I'm involved in InterVarsity Christian fellowship," but if they ask, I'll tell them. But mostly I'll just say things at small group because I think that it makes people uncomfortable, and I don't need for people to feel uncomfortable around me.

I: What makes them uncomfortable?

Thea: People have these preconceived notions of Christians as like crazy lunatics who—I don't know, condemn everyone around them. And I don't need to be that person in anyone's eyes because I try very hard not to condemn people around me because we're all condemnable, so who am I to judge? . . . so if I get a little bit more involved in like a group, and we become kind of friends, I'll just say, "Oh, I just came from church." And they always kind of go like "Oh, you still do that?" "Oh, yeah, mm-hmm. I'm still involved in church. I love my church. You should come sometime. They give us free food." And they're kind of like "Oh, sure. No." People—I mean, people are very tolerant, but it's one of those funny things where people being open-minded goes as far as until I tell them that I don't think that everyone's going to heaven, and then all of the sudden they're not open-minded about that. They're very close-minded about that because they think that I'm being close-minded, and that's frustrating. So people will have conversations to a certain extent, but I think it's personally I just get uncomfortable because I don't know how far they want to go in talking, and I'm happy to talk about anything. But I don't feel like you should have conversations with everyone about everything. There are some things that you need to be a little bit closer to talk about.

Thea believed that there were certain places and people where she would talk about her Christian faith at the University, but this usually meant that she needed to be friends or know them. She had to consistently monitor or negotiate her faith or religious identity and beliefs based on who she was around because she did not want to be seen as

intolerant or closeminded. Like Megan M., Thea also believed she was fighting against stereotypes of Christians as intolerant. The result was that she was hesitant to discuss her faith in detail outside of her small group at InterVarsity. The environment of the University seems that it may also limit the contexts or opportunities for Thea to make connections outside of her specifically Christian groups.

Emily also felt like she experienced being “an anomaly” because of her faith beliefs, but she expressed that this actually had a positive effect on her faith development. She lived in one of the residential colleges where she also attended class with many of the people with whom she lived. In this context, she felt she was watched more closely.

Emily: It just puts me in this like unique position being in this group of people, and like being a Christian is like an anomaly. . . So like living that out too has been a challenge, and I do feel like a lot of the times I'm being—I don't know. If my friends know that I'm a Christian and I go to church and do all that stuff. . . The ones that do know that I feel like I'm a little bit more scrutinized than like by my other friends, but I feel like that's an important part of being a Christian is like putting myself out there and like allowing people to look at my life and see that I'm involved in all this stuff and this is how I live my life, but I'm not perfect either. So—

I: So, scrutinized, tell me more about what you mean by that.

Emily: I don't know. Just like being in like the RC classes, a lot of questions are raised . . . I'm taking one class that's like kind of religiously geared, and a lot of things that come up are like very much anti-Christianity I guess you could say. I guess I feel like some of my friends will glance my direction to see what my reaction towards things. But yeah. I don't know. I feel like it's a stereotypical answer, but if it's made me stronger in my faith because I have to like find new reasons for why I believe things. I can't just say, "Oh, I believe this because it's a convenient way to go."

Emily believes that being in the minority and modeling or having others watch how she lived her life was an important part of being a Christian. She also believed that having to explain why and finding “new reasons” for why she believed things caused her to grow

stronger in her faith. For Emily, being in the minority caused growth and did not limit her as the women above had shared.

The consistency with which the context of the University was brought up unsolicited by the women interviewed made the influence of this specific context stand out as important in their spiritual development. Based on some of the previous research on Evangelical students on secular campuses, it is not surprising that some women would state that the context of the large secular university made it challenging for them to express their Christian beliefs openly. One study found evangelical Christian students experienced intolerance in the classroom, felt they were in the religious minority on campus, and were often negatively stereotyped, resulting in them feeling “out-voiced” and “misunderstood” (Moran, Lang & Oliver, 2007). These feelings were certainly reflected by some of the women in this study as well.

The concept of *identity revelation*, as discussed in another article by Moran (2007), found that Evangelical students on secular campuses were often negotiating when and where to let others know about their faith commitments and beliefs because of perceived bias and stereotypes. This finding was supported in the comments of the women above as they were often deciding when and to whom to disclose their faith or religious identity. At first, one might wonder if the fact that the women felt they could not openly discuss their faith with others would limit their opportunities for making connections. But on further review, the women discussed above did make connections between their faith and political and social involvements even though they were selective in sharing their faith with peers.

Faith Commitments: A search for community

In addition to the context of the University, the women interviewed discussed other influences that were important to their faith development. As the purpose of this research is examining how women connect their Christian faith to other areas of their lives, it is important to begin by examining the women's faith identity and what they felt was influential on this identity development during college. This can begin to be addressed through examining how the women responded to the interview question "Can you tell me where you are at in your spiritual life right now?"

The common theme as to why the women began attending church or campus Christian organizations once they arrived at college was the desire for *community* and *fellowship* with other Christians. This desire to be connected to other Christians and the influence of community on their development was a common theme for many of those interviewed.

Emily stated she began attending her college church to "meet quality people" and "find some honest people to be friends with." Paige spoke specifically about the Christian community she found at the church she attended and how this challenged her faith.

And the church is very much about like you living in like a Christian community. And not like you don't reach out to people but like that you have a base—like a strong base of Christian friends that you can go to or you can like live life with. And then you also can all like go and like help share the Gospel with everybody. Then you have people to go do it with and all these things, which I love, but I never had before. And so that was—that was—between this retreat and like the people that were in my life through the church like my faith just kind of like took off freshman year, which was good because then it was challenging, and they, like pushed me in different ways.

Paige spoke about how the Christian community was important to her because she was supported by being around other Christian friends who formed her support or base to “live life with.” Paige was also very active in the larger University community through a living and learning community where she has many non-Christian friends. But she found the support of the Christian community at her church vital for her continued faith commitment and being able to have someone to go with to “share the Gospel.” She also found the community there a place that “pushed” her in different ways. It is also interesting that Emily stated that this was the first time she had felt community in this way. While she was involved in a church before coming to college, it seems that there was something unique about her involvement in this church during her college years that challenged her in different ways.

Virginia also shared that her involvement in Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU) was initially a way to meet other Christians and be in community. Similar to the women discussed earlier, she felt her faith put her in the minority in the dorm. But she also valued developing friendships outside of that Christian group.

I think I saw CRU freshman year as more of just a way to meet Christians, which was good because I felt pretty lonely in the dorm—felt like I was the only Christian there. And I was kind of known as “the Christian” in the dorm. But it was still a really good experience just to like still have—and I think throughout college I’ve kind of learned or am still trying to learn to have the Christian friends that you can get support from and share in that—just a bond that you don’t have with other people, but still have friends outside of Christian bubble that you can be around and still love and share a life with. So I feel like CRU has helped me with that.

Virginia began her involvement initially to meet other Christians and to have the support of others who shared her same values. She also valued her friendships outside of her Christian community, also known as the “Christian bubble.” Like Paige, Virginia drew a distinct difference between her Christian friends and her friends outside the Christian

organizations in which she was involved. Virginia stated she sought non-Christian friends out intentionally, which would support Parks' *tested adult* stage in which individuals seek out multiple perspectives. While she valued her non-Christian friends, her connection to a Christian community was becoming more important to her.

Megan M. provided even more detail about why this fellowship was influential in her faith development. When asked how Campus Crusade for Christ had affected her faith or had been influential in her faith development, she responded that it "kept me in the faith" and that Christians are "called to fellowship with one another. That brings us closer to God as well as with others to encourage us and pray for us." Megan M. believed that by having others to pray for and with helped her to grow closer to God and to remain connected to her faith during her time in college.

Jenny provided additional insight into the role of community in faith development in that she had not been involved in a specific Christian community but had been very involved in other forms of community, such as volunteering at Ten Thousand Villages (a fair trade store) and being involved in a literacy program. When asked if these experiences connected with her faith, she stated, "I mean, I think that relates to faith in a big way doing that. There should be equality for everyone. I think that's a Christian ideal definitely."

I asked if there were other Christian ideals or values she found particularly important and tried to enact in her life when she went on to discuss the concept of community.

Jenny: The one that I haven't really considered, although now I'm really changing my mind about it, is community, and how important community is. 'Cause I got so introspective and like kind of thinking about how I'm defined by the religion. I haven't really participated in community recently, but I'm really

reconsidering it because community is—it's really important to get involved and have your bases, your, like, foundation.

I: Um hum, so when you say community, are you meaning particularly a faith community of some sort?

Jenny: Yeah, yeah, in either thinking about it now like got to when I was in junior high and high school, and had that little faith community of my friends, and how helpful, and how supportive that was. I mean—

I: Yeah, do you have Christian friends on campus that you consider peers or that you interact with?

Jenny: I do. Yeah, I do, but it's not in a big way, you know what I mean.

I: Okay, it's not like super influential for you at this point?

Jenny: They're more my friends rather than my Christian friends.

I: I see. Yeah, and out of curiosity, did you try any of the kind of Christian organizations when you came to campus at all?

Jenny: I didn't. I kind of came to campus thinking that I was gonna take it more on a personal level, and then, doing that after a few years, I'm ready to look and see what else is available.

I: Yeah, and is there anything in particular that you can point to as far as why this reconsideration of communities kind of came about, or is it just a—

Jenny: I think it's being more involved on campus in general. So it makes me want to be involved in a spiritual way 'cause if I—I mean, this year I've really started to be involved in other areas. That's when I started working at Ten Thousand Villages, and the campus paper. So I think that I should—I mean, if I am involved in all those areas, I should get involved in the religious area too because I've seen like the benefits of being involved in those areas because, I mean, talking about how I wanted a diversity of perspectives, you know. I think the religious community would provide that too.

Unlike the previous women discussed, Jenny came into college thinking she would approach her faith on her own and did not initially look for Christian community. But her story is interesting because her involvement in other communities on campus has caused her to reconsider the role of Christian community and the benefit of gaining a

diversity of perspectives on an issue. She also shared the belief of the earlier women interviewed that being in a faith community could be helpful and offer support.

Some of the women had their primary spiritual involvement through these organizations and focused on being with those of similar values, which would suggest they were in the *young adult* stage of Parks' model in which they sought out mentoring groups similar in beliefs. These findings also support the work of Slee and other female educators and theologians discussed previously, as the women interviewed focused on how their faith grew through relationships within these groups. The women did not discuss their spiritual growth as related to a sermon, something they read, or a debate they attended. They grew as a result of the relationships they developed with others. But Jenny provides an interesting suggestion that some women may see being involved in a religious community as being part of the *tested adult* phase of gathering diverse perspectives on a topic.

Garber (2007) also found that the role of living in community with those of like values and commitments was instrumental in individuals remaining committed to their Christian faith over time. Garber states:

Community then becomes the laboratory in which our hopes and dreams become real; we do not keep on keeping on without people of kindred heart and mind pledging their own lives toward the same end, holding us up when the world, the flesh and the devil call into question our core commitments and cares. (p. 21).

Garber's sense of community as the place where faith gets put into action with others to support us when our faith is challenged is shared with the women interviewed, as will be illustrated below. Regardless of why they thought the community would or did help them grow spiritually, it is a major theme that they believed that being in community was one way in which this growth could happen. This quote from Garber's work also

supports one of the reasons why the women sought out community: to help them stay committed and resist the challenges to their faith.

Accountability: In addition to community, many of the women sought out Christian community on campus because they wanted someone to hold them *accountable* to what they thought was a Christian life on a secular campus. This theme was not strongly emphasized in the previous spiritual development literature, so it is of particular interest. Parks addressed this briefly in her model, stating that women are looking for challenge and support within mentoring communities, but this did not arise as a primary value in Parks's work. The concept of accountability also did not appear as a major theme in the faithing processes as described by Slee. But having Christian relationships to help hold you accountable for your faith and life decisions was a common theme expressed by some of the women interviewed for this study.

Courtney described the role of accountability in a Campus Crusade small group she was involved in and later led that took place in her residence hall. She responded to a question about how her involvement in Campus Crusade had affected her spiritually:

I've met some of my best friends that way too like since I've come to school. Um, but it's really challenged me to really see, um, I guess why I'm choosing to do things. Because a lot of times I think, I mean, a lot of my good friends here who aren't Christians, they basically get through the week to live to be drunk for the next three days on the weekends, and that's just like something I've not really ever been interested in. That's not like what I like to do.

Courtney echoed the previous women in that she made friends within the group. But in addition to community, Courtney believed the small group experience supported her in her faith by challenged her to examine her life choices and ultimately to remain true to her values, which were not shared by some of her non-Christian friends.

Olivia also described how the accountability of her Christian friends through various Campus Crusade activities affected her life and how this was different from the accountability she had in high school:

I think in college, as opposed to high school, I have a lot more accountability. Like before it was like I can't do this because my pastor might find out, and that'd be bad. But I didn't really have anyone sitting there telling me, "I care for you, and if you do that it's not going to make me happy and I'm going to talk to you about it." That scares me. So, sitting down, having that conversation, "Yes, I made out with that guy, and I know I shouldn't have." Having that sort of conversation freaks me out. So, I try to make sure I lived with Christians and tried to hang out with Christians a lot and if I was just going to study see if someone wanted to come with me and keep me accountable to all those things.

Olivia also discussed how she had been "going out a lot" and having one drink. When she would return, one of her Christian friends would ask her if she had been drinking.

Olivia felt this "kind of accountability has been really good." In college, Olivia found a new level of accountability to uphold the values of her Christian faith. She believed she was more likely to get questioned by her peers, who would have more access to see her living her daily life, and this helped her remain committed to her Christian values.

Abby and Tristan also discussed how they liked to be with Christian friends because they didn't have to worry about partying or drinking. Tristan went to a party on her first day on campus and then left because it "reeked" and was "gross." Outside, she met four or five other women who also disclosed that they didn't drink, so they all went out for pizza instead. Tristan remained close to the women and found out they were Christian. She felt their relationship has been influential on her faith because "they kind of went through the same thing, just like me. We don't drink, we just don't do this. We don't understand any of this. And it was just really nice because it made me feel comfortable and I could still be social."

Earlier in her interview, Abby had discussed how the culture at the University was difficult as a Christian. As a follow-up, I asked if she felt the culture had affected her since she had come to campus.

I think that—yeah, I think there are definitely like certain circumstances that you can get yourself in that – or you can maybe talk yourself out of something that you know isn't right, you know, based on your faith. But—because everyone else is doing it. Or it's what everyone else believes that—like if you surround yourself, too, I think, with those people, which is why, I think, it's good that I got involved with at least more of a smaller church, where I could be friends with the people that I went to the church with. So that you hang out with those people. And you don't have to worry about like partying or drinking or being—hanging out with a lot of—like I still do hang out with my non-Christian friends . . . But just to go back and have that basis, you know, to be able to know that like you're not alone, and that like—you know that like college is only four years.

Abby intentionally sought became involved in a smaller church so that she could develop relationships to hold her accountable and to help her feel supported and “not alone.” Like Courtney, Abby discussed the atmosphere of drinking found at the University as a particular challenge to how she thought she should be living as a Christian. This focus on accountability in these students may be because of the unique context of the environment of the large, secular university the women attended. The women often had many non-Christian friends and certainly had exposure to lifestyle choices that conflicted with their views of the Christian life. While this would also be true at Christian college campuses, the pressure may not be as great to have drinking be a significant part of the college experience.

The general findings of the women interviewed regarding faith development during college support that their faith grew through meeting with small groups of Christians, particularly peers, in which they could find support, accountability, and safety to discuss their Christian faith. These themes will be echoed in the sections below when

they discuss the importance of relationships with peers and parents in connecting their faith with their political beliefs and actions.

The women interviewed were asked: Are there some important experiences or influences in your Christian faith background that are important in bringing you to where you are in your Christian faith today and where are you at in your faith today. These questions were deliberately broad so the women could provide the important themes from their faith development. These broad questions also provided data related to their spiritual development that does not tie explicitly to the research questions of this dissertation or were experiences that happened in high school rather than in college. As such, this data was not included in the results discussed above.

Helping Make Connections: People

In addition to what helped the women grow spiritually, this dissertation is primarily focused on how the women made connections. When discussing how or if they connected their faith with their political and social beliefs and actions, the women interviewed brought up many different people who were instrumental in their development. These people included pastors, small group leaders, mission trip leaders, grandparents, family friends, and college roommates. But the two groups of people that the women discussed most often were *parents* and *peers*. Parents were seen as influential on the development of the women's spiritual and political beliefs before they came to college, and peers were important after the women came to college.

Parents. Twenty-one of the women brought up their parents when discussing who had been influential in developing their social, political, and faith beliefs. In particular, eleven of the women spoke about how their parents were influential on their

religious or faith beliefs, ten spoke about the influence of parents on political beliefs, and five on social beliefs or actions. Many of the women shared examples of how their parents were influential in more than one of these areas. This section will discuss examples of the influence of parents on each of these areas, but because how the women made connections between these areas is of particular interest for this project, examples were chosen of ways in which parents may have laid the foundation for later connections the women made between their faith and their political or social involvements in college.

Eleven of the women discussed the influence of their parents on their faith development, most of which happened before coming to college. The examples shared by the women as to how parents influenced their faith include the fact that parents modeled their faith by taking them to church, by being involved in the actual worship service, and by modeling how to care for others. Two students also discussed how watching their parents question their faith or allowing them to question their faith was influential. Ashley stated that her mother “struggled with her faith along the way.” She believed that this influenced her in that she “kind of saw that it’s okay to, you know, ask questions and be unsure of things.” Jenny also said she went through a period of questioning in high school after she switched from a private high school to a public high school. She stated that the conversations she had with her parents about “what does this mean, and being a Christian had “a lot to do with how I shaped my beliefs.”

While there were examples presented by the women as the influence of parents in their spiritual development before college, most of the examples shared focused on how they influenced their political and social beliefs and actions. Ten of the women spoke

specifically about how their parents influenced their early and sometimes current political beliefs and involvements.

Layla was one of the women interviewed who was very involved politically in college. Specifically, she was involved with the College Democrats in actions trying to roll back the ban on affirmative action and was also in the process of trying to create a nonpartisan coalition of campus organizations interested in civil rights and social justice.

Layla discussed the influence her family had early in her life on forming her strong commitment to political action, which laid the foundation for her later political involvements in college. Layla's family lived near Washington, D.C., and modeled political involvement, including bringing her to hearings on Capitol Hill and taking her to register to vote on her eighteenth birthday. Layla believed this created her values, which she later connected with her faith:

I guess just growing up, the things that they taught me were just, you know, treat everyone, I mean just sort of the basic stupid things like treat everyone the way you want to, you'd like to be treated and just the way I would see them. They're very politically active and so I'd watch them watch the news and react to things. It wasn't like they ever sat me down and had a talk with me, "This is the way things should be." But I guess I just took after them and they taught me values and that sort of automatically translated into political beliefs.

As Layla expressed in this passage, modeling was one of the key ways she learned political behavior. While she did not recall a specific conversation regarding political involvement, her parents' actions taught her that this was important. Layla learned to be politically active from watching her parents and that politics were related to how you treat others, which was one of her core Christian values. By taking Layla to observe hearings and to register to vote, her parents instilled a justice orientation that Layla

connected to the value of treating others like you would like to be treated and motivated her to remain involved politically.

Becca was one of the few women interviewed who discussed the role of her parents in her political development even after she came to college. In particular, she engaged her father as she tried to make sense of the contrast between what she learned growing up from her “very, very conservative” (as she described them) parents and what she was being taught in her college courses:

And so all through high school and all that, they watched FOX News every night, like every night they're watching it. So then, once I got to college and started taking these classes I like “Oh wow.” Like “This is really interesting to contrast what I'm learning in my classes with what I've been taught all growing up.” And so, you know, I would learn something and I'd call my dad and be like “Well, Dad like what's your—are you against,” this and that and da, da, da. And he would be sending me articles. And so it was like I really started to get, you know, engaged with my classes and with my dad in this kind of battle between the liberal institution and the conservative parent.

Becca found the interaction with her father regarding his beliefs and opinions helped her engage more deeply in her classes and also with her father. They did this through conversations and sharing of articles: later in the interview, she even discussed how she bought him a copy of the book *If Democrats Had Any Brains They Would be Republicans* by Ann Coulter for his birthday. She also bought herself a copy and they were planning to read and discuss it together. Becca was hoping this would give her father the opportunity to “teach me more about the conservative side” and “gave her a nice topic to talk about with her dad.” Becca stated that it was getting “kind of sensitive” with her father now but she still liked it because it gave them something to talk about. Becca's continued interaction with her father around political issues remained influential

in her political development as she was integrating new and different perspectives while at college.

In addition to shaping the women's political beliefs and interactions, the women believed their parents influenced the development of their service and social beliefs. Coley believed her father, an attorney, helped develop her social justice perspective. She believed her dad influenced her by ingraining in her "this compassion for other people and this desire for justice." She found this especially interesting because she described him as "the closed-off emotional person that I don't have a great relationship with." He was an attorney and worked with a diverse group of people. Coley brought up one experience in particular that she remembered because it made a lasting impression:

So he taught us about the Native Americans and he brought us to some, like lecture thing that was, or maybe it was some hearings for the Native American tribes for getting their rights and their equal treatment. I just remember going to that when I was little and kind of learned, okay, so here's, it was like a formal setting, here's professional people working for the rights of people who've been oppressed.

This experience with her dad showed Coley how to take action and to work toward helping others gain equal rights. This experience was especially important in that it showed her that people do address these issues as a profession. Coley went on in her interview to discuss how one of her main Christian values is that of social justice and working for the rights of others. Coley then became very involved in college in social justice causes, such as working at a homeless shelter and doing homeless outreach.

Agnes stated early in her interview that her parents were influential but did not discuss specifically how. Later in the interview, when asked how her parents were influential, she discussed how her parents modeled behavior that she later emulated:

They made it [faith] real to me, I think. Like, we could learn like you could learn about the hungry, you know, like feeding the hungry and being, you know, giving of yourself at church on Sunday morning but you didn't necessarily practice that during the week unless you were forced to, especially with a kid. You don't need to, you know, you're not asked to do things like that all the time and I remember my parents taking me to the homeless shelter to serve food the very first time and I was like "What? Where am I? Like what's going on?" . . . So I think that was kind of a big deal for me because it made it I'm like, "Yes, there are hungry people in this world." This didn't all just happen way back in the day because they didn't live in a place where people like panhandled on the streets or anything like that. So I think that socially and just family things like taking it home, like making it real throughout the week.

By bringing Agnes to the homeless shelter, her parents modeled how to connect what she was learning about her faith on Sunday morning in her church with social issues of the current time. They also modeled how to put their beliefs into action by literally feeding the hungry. Agnes felt this was imperative in helping her to make her faith "real" and to put her faith into action.

Agnes continued on later in her interview, to state that she believed that the issue of hunger was "one of like **the** biggest Christian values." When asked why she believed this, she again connected her beliefs back to what she learned at church and from her parents:

Why it's important. It just made it seem always like it was one of the most basic needs and like all of, you know, the whole, all of creation is a gift and you should share it and I think my parents tried when I was younger, mostly because they were a lot poorer back then [she laughs] to teach us what enough was and what enough was to us and what enough was to someone in Africa and all sorts of, and how when you have extra you should share. And so I, and I think that, I mean, that came directly, to them, I'm sure it came directly, well, from them and from church and like, the Bible, sort of.

The concept of "what is enough" is then woven throughout her interview to explain why she is involved in a number of hunger-related issues, including walking to raise money to combat hunger (CROP walk), working with the Lutheran World Relief, and collecting

food for food drives. Once she made this connection between her faith and her understanding of “what is enough,” she was moved to action in a number of ways.

The examples above provide evidence of the role that parents provide in modeling how to connect Christian faith beliefs with political and social action. This role of parents is supported in the spiritual development theories of Parks and early developmental theorists, whose models point to how women start with parents as the early “authorities” as to their faith development. These early influences create a foundation on which the women could later build in college. Parks later discusses how college students went on to “test” other authorities to make meaning, one group of which was their peers. The findings of this dissertation support this theory in that while parents were influential before college, the women then went on to discuss how their relationships with peers became influential in how they made connections once they came to college.

Peers. Eighteen of the women interviewed shared examples of how peers had been influential in their development in some way. As was supported in the cognitive and spiritual development literature, being in relationship with someone who shares the same values can stimulate growth and connections. Yet the findings of this dissertation highlight that few of the women could find peers who made connections between all three identities: political, faith, and social service. Many of the peers the women shared about were influential in either their spiritual development or in their political or social ideals. Very few were influential in both areas. For most of the women, peers in their religious “worlds” remained very separate from the peers they shared with in their

political worlds. This seemed to be especially true because of the liberal, antireligious sentiments that some felt they had in their current university setting.

Layla spoke specifically of this division between her religious friends and those she believed valued education and learning:

The people who I am friends with are people who are liberal and who are really interested in learning and education and value that and value their intelligence and so that usually, people like that generally stray away from religion and so that's a huge tension for me with all my friends.

And I get some points where, you know, I'll be in tears because they'll think that they can talk about it as an intellectual issue, but it's not, you know, they can't disprove my religion through science because that's not why I believe in it and so I'm like, you know, it's hard for me to explain faith to them. And they sort of think it's okay to treat it as a fairy tale or silly or stupid.

I mean, usually a lot of the friends I've met here have been shocked when I tell them that I'm religious. And they're sort of like, you know, it turns them off a little bit it seems and it's, that's really hard because it's not something that I can share with any of my friends.

But I don't, the people who I've found involved in religious organizations probably aren't, I've found aren't as interested in what I'm interested in socially, I guess, and so that's a problem. It's hard to reconcile that. And I find very few people with my interests who are also religious.

While Layla valued her peers, she had not found friends at the University who connected or brought their religious and social perspectives together. Most of her nonreligious friends did not have an understanding or appreciation of her faith commitment beyond an intellectual issue. It seems that they may have seen religion as anti-intellectual. Layla certainly felt the tension between her faith and intellectual beliefs. This brought conflict for her and made it even more difficult for her to bring these two values together for herself. She even predicted this conflict would continue in the future as she worried about raising her kid as Christians because of the "people who have the values that I want

to spend my life with aren't necessarily gonna be Christian and that's scary to me like really scary."

While Layla did not find these peers at the University, she did state she had a friend from home who held her social and religious views and struggled to make sense of these in the context of his family from the south (this was also an issue for Layla). She found this relationship "really helpful" because

He sort of has the same experience where his family is religious and he's developed his social values from where he's from and has been able to reconcile them and had problems with it as well. So that helps a lot just 'cause it makes me feel like I'm not crazy, that, you know, these things can go together.

Allison struggled more with the connection between her Christian friends and her service-oriented friends. Initially, she discussed how she had her friends whom she did service projects with and but they were very separate from her Campus Crusade friends:

But I think sometimes I feel like, yeah, like the service and my faith are like very separate. Sometimes it's hard to like bring it together. So like because a lot of times I'm like well I have my CRU friends and then I have like my other friends, and so it's definitely hard to sometimes bring it together.

Both Allison and Layla struggled with this separation between their various groups of friends and identities, which kept them from talking about their religious beliefs with their secular friends and also kept their religious friends from understanding their social and service beliefs. While this separation of their peers did not keep them from making connections, the two of them did share that the struggle to connect these worlds was hard to reconcile.

While Allison, Layla, and some of the other women shared the perspective that they did not find peers who had connected their religious and social/political views, many of them pointed to peers being influential in that process. While Allison stated that her

groups of friends were often separate, she did discuss how a Bible study leader from her freshman year helped her bring those worlds together:

My Bible study leader my freshman year was really, um, really had a heart for like, service and doing stuff. That was the girl who actually started Mission Serve about going to Detroit and stuff. And she said, I think it was like justice without justification is like not–like bringing justice to people without, just like bringing justice to people without, just bringing comfort to them for this life isn't, I mean that'll bring them comfort for a short amount of time, but if you don't give them Christ that's not going to, you know, it's not going to like help eternally or anything. So you can bring them justice, but if you have no justification for why you're doing that or what is the really heart behind that.

Allison's Bible study leader brought together faith and service through the concept of "justification" or sharing Christ as the reason you serve others. "Justice with justification" allowed Allison to believe she was bringing comfort for this life and also help for life after death or eternal life. This concept of helping people with both their spiritual and physical needs is a core Christian concept that other women used to make the connection between their faith and their service. This passage and concept also is an example of the combination of a justice and caring orientation. Allison believes you are called to bring comfort for this life, but you also must seek "justice" to try to bring equity to those in need. This form of evangelism was a theme expressed by some of the other women and will be discussed in more detail in the *processes* section.

Virginia also found peers influential in helping her connect her Christian faith with her social beliefs. Virginia was actively involved in Campus Crusade and discussed how one particular event brought her together with peers who shared her same faith and her social values:

I did the–what was it–Displace Me in Chicago with Darfur awareness. And you go there and sleep in Chicago for – I think it was just one night or two nights, and we just camped out there at the parking lot and there were a few thousand people. And there was a huge group from the university that came–I think 50-60 students

– and then you write to politicians and you write to the President of Uganda. And we just took time to pray when we were there—to pray for the situation going on in Darfur. And just to like stand up and try to raise awareness about it. And when I was there, I met a Christian, and she was just a friend of mine through Campus Crusade who went to Virginia Beach a few years earlier. And she is not in Chicago and had graduated and everything. But she’s really involved with Sojourners, and very into social justice. And another one of my friends who graduated from here and was involved with CRU, he’s doing Teach for America and is very passionate about Christian social justice. And I feel like that weekend we just talked about all these different issues and how faith is involved in just talking with the two of them and realizing the importance. So like I can look back to that weekend and just be like, “Wow! I just learned so much,” and was very inspired and empowered by them to kind of try to bring in more social justice on campus.

The friend Virginia met was very instrumental in motivating her to work for more social justice causes on campus through her Christian commitments. The event and also the conversation with her peers about how to integrate social justice and faith helped Virginia connect her social and faith beliefs. She also connected both of these social and religious beliefs to political action by writing politicians and the President of Uganda about the situation in Darfur. Virginia was one of the few women who expressed a situation or peer that connected all three of these identities: political, faith, and social service.

Like Virginia, Josefina also discussed four friends who she believed were important because they were politically and socially involved and also were Christians. Josefina shared that her family growing up was religious and politically conservative. She found herself not having those same political views, so she struggled with how her political views connected to her faith. During the interview, Josefina shared about a number of key ways she was involved, so I asked if she felt there were things that had been influential in why she had chosen to be involved. She went on to discuss how having people who shared her same religious and political values were rare and important in her development:

I mean, I think something else is—when I first started getting involved in InterVarsity, there were two other girls. One is my friend I mentioned before who's in New York, and one is a friend who's AmeriCorps VISTA right now in Austin, Texas, who are both White women, who are very politically and socially involved, and who are Christians. And I think like having the two of them and a few other friends who—like one of my really, really close friends, who's a woman of color. But she's a Christian as well, and she's really involved in—was really involved on campus. Now she's a community organizer. And having then, another friend of mine who's an engineering student here, but also, at the same time, very involved in things.

And having those four Christians like be able to have this communication, where we don't have to justify it to each other about what you're doing and why. It's, like there and it almost fills a need. And so I think that's why I had a really hard time communicating with some people growing up. And like even all my extended family like adults extended family, especially on my mom's side, they were pretty politically conservative. I don't have to justify it to those people, and so having even just a couple of people who get it, who you talk to on a regular basis, who are supportive and encouraging, I think is really essential. And I think that's definitely one thing that's kept me going, and like something that I'm aware of, that I have to continue to seek those kind of alliances with people who are on that page.

Talking to these friends allowed Josefina a safe place to talk about her faith and social beliefs without having to justify her positions. She found this supportive and encouraging and believed she would need to continue to seek out these relationships if she wanted to remain committed to both her faith and her social beliefs.

Olivia also shared about a friend who was instrumental in helping her connect her religious beliefs with her social beliefs. Olivia had become very involved in the Stonewall Democrats, a subgroup of the Democratic Party that seeks equal rights for the LGBT community, which raised serious questions for her about what Christians believed about homosexuality and how they treated people in the gay community. Her conversation with a friend helped her think through some of her big questions.

Olivia: I have a good friend of mine who graduated with a degree in sociology and a minor in inter-group relations. So, he's just like social justice all the way. He's a really strong Christian. It just made me think I should talk to him. So, I

gave him a call, and I was like "What do you think about this and this and this?" I probably ran him ragged for a couple hours on the phone . . .

I: Go back to your friend that you called. So, what do you feel like you got out of that conversation? Why did you call him? What was—it sounds like he had interests kind of that you knew about.

Olivia: Right. I knew he was in social justice and he wrote his thesis on churches—or about how churches do and don't allow women pastors and gay pastors. So, he interviewed a couple different churches. So, I knew he was—he knew about Christianity, first off. He was one of the leaders in the Bible studies and debates when I was there. And he knew about social justice issues, and he knew how to tie them to church. So, I was like, "As a Christian can I really say this? What does the Bible say about this?" I think we—I was honestly online and had my Bible sprawled out somewhere.

It was important to Olivia that she could discuss these issues with someone who was both a Christian and also knowledgeable about social justice issues. This relationship allowed her to ask many questions she did not feel comfortable asking in other situations and to really question if she could be involved in pursuing justice for the GLBT community and also hold her Christian beliefs. It seems that having a peer that shared some of these worldviews allowed for a safe space for questioning and honest dialogue.

The findings above support and expand on the findings or previous literature that state women and college students in general often learn and are influenced by peers and mentors. Cognitive development literature supports that women value both learning styles but often are *connected* (Belenky et al., 1992) and *interpersonal* (Baxter Magolda, 1992) learners who learn through relationships with others as opposed to debating a topic. These findings also support the Caring and Caring and Justice models of moral development and the spiritual development models of Slee (2004) and Parks (2002), which incorporate the key elements of relationships with mentors and community. Slee, in particular, found that her faith development model was primarily relational and that the

women grew in their faith as they talked with others. This research supports these models and shows that women value and seek the advice from others when trying to make moral and spiritual connections.

These findings also highlight one of the gaps in the literature and in women's experience, which is that it is difficult to find role models and mentors who make connections between their faith and both political and social beliefs and actions. The few women who seemed to make connections between these three belief structures had key people whom they had observed and could engage with as to how they made these connections. But most women found their spiritual beliefs and political and social service lives very separate. These findings would support the call by Jones to incorporate multiple models to better understand the connections between women's various identities.

Social Issues

While people were important, the women also discussed significant social issues that helped them make their connections between faith and social and political beliefs and actions. This question asked of the women was deliberately open-ended so as to elicit which topics the women really felt connected to their faith. As stated earlier, women consistently brought up two topics as connecting their social beliefs and faith beliefs: abortion and homoattractiveness¹⁰, specifically gay marriage. Abortion was a topic that the women stated also connected specifically with their gender so it will be discussed in the next chapter. The topic of homoattractiveness was brought up by fifteen of the women as connecting to their faith in various ways.

¹⁰I will use the term "homoattractiveness" which was coined by Dr. Amorie Robinson (2007) because I agree with her assessment that the term "homosexual" is "antiquated and pathologizing, therefore disempowering those who are given these labels. They reduce people to strictly sexual beings" (p. 7).

While many of the women raised the topic, the women interviewed had varied beliefs and ways in which they connected their faith to their beliefs about attractional orientation and gay marriage. Some of the women were primarily concerned with people thinking of them as intolerant because of their Christian beliefs and wanted to separate the individual from their beliefs on the larger issue of gay marriage. Other women had specific beliefs regarding attractional orientation as informed by their faith but prioritized this topic as lower than other issues about which Christians should be concerned.

Four of the five women who believed that gay marriage and “the gay lifestyle” were wrong according to Christian teachings were very concerned that others did not see them as judgmental or against gay people. It was also important to them that people understand that they supported gay individuals but they did not support gay marriage or “the choices” gays and lesbians were making. They wanted to separate the issue from the individual, or depersonalize their beliefs. This feeling seemed to be especially prevalent because of their context at a large, public university that had a strong gay community and was focused heavily on diversity.

Allison believed that the University’s emphasis on diversity brought conflict into her conversations with others when discussing her beliefs about attractional orientation because others could not depersonalize the issue as she did:

I still like would consider myself more conservative, just because, especially looking at people here. Like I mean I’m, I’d say because I’m against abortion and I, you know, I think I’m most, I’d probably be against stem cell research if I really thought about it. And just a lot of the things, against gay marriage and stuff like that, a lot of things that people in (location of university) are really for I kind of see myself as being a little more against. I don’t like come out and really say it. Because if I would say like oh yeah, I’m against gay marriage, there would be people like on me like crazy.

I: Really? Here at the University?

Allison: Oh yeah, because there's such a, I don't know, it's a very touchy issue. I don't like to touch it that much, but, because it's hard because people are like, well, you can be born gay, and like all this and that. And it's a hard issue to think about, but there's definitely people at the University who you can't say anything, like don't say that you're against that because, I don't know. It's a very, we try to be accepting of other people and like very diverse.

I: This is the University? That kind of the perspective?

Allison: Yeah, this is the University. So, like, if I say I'm against that, then like basically they think I'm not accepting of other people.

I: So yeah, do these conversations come up. . . you said you try to avoid them.

Allison: Yeah, I just, I mean like I try like I know there's a girl in my, last year's ASB trip and I found out she was lesbian, but it was just kind of like it was a little bit of oh, I didn't realize that, but it didn't change how I saw her as a person. You know like that wasn't, so it's not like I'm, you know like I'm against that, but I'm not against the person. You know like I'll hang out with people who I know who may be gay or lesbian but like so it's not like I stay away from those people. I'm very accepting of them, so that's what, but some people probably don't understand that if I would say I'm against gay marriage, then they would think that I'm against all gay people or something. . .

I: Well, specifically on those issues do you feel like faith informs kind of what you believe on those issues? So if you talk about gay marriage and abortion—

S: I think so. Yeah, yeah definitely. Um, because I mean that's, it's just something that like you know in the Bible it says like you know like homosexuality is a sin and you know, that's just—so I think that definitely, when I look at that I'm like yeah, that's a sin, so that's something that I would be against.

Allison made a distinction between how she felt about gay marriage and how she felt about gay people and the way that she viewed them. She believed she could be accepting of individuals and also believe that homosexuality is a sin and be against gay marriage. By depersonalizing or disconnecting the belief from its effect on individuals, she believed that her religious beliefs did not affect how she treated individuals or who she spent time with. It was very important to her that others saw her as accepting and non-judgmental of

others, which came into conflict when others heard her views on gay marriage and homoattractiveness and found them intolerant.

Megan M. also believed that homoattractiveness was a sin but did not want to be associated with Christians who expressed this belief in judgmental ways. She discussed “the campus preacher,” who was a man who stood outside at the center of the campus to challenge students passing by about the sin of homosexuality:

Like, I don't know if you've heard of the campus preacher. That's not what we are, and he's out there propagating that he is. Other groups like that that come in—here's the group that comes in every year with the signs about homosexuality to be condescending and just really reproach them and their choices. But yet, God loves those people. We love those people. We don't like the choices they're making, but at the same time, to do that is not at all the Christians response. That's exactly what Christ does not want. So I think that's part of what's complicated the situation in the University and the University mentality.

Megan M. would like to distance herself from the type of Christian who is “condescending” and “reproaches” others in public. Like Allison, she would like to focus on loving the individual even if she does not agree with how they are living their lives.

In addition to the group of women who thought gay marriage and the “gay lifestyle” were against Christian teachings, there was a group of four women who were clearly conflicted as to their stance. Three of the four women shared the experience of having a friend or family member who was gay, which caused them to see gay people differently or to struggle with the implications of their Christian faith's teachings about gays and lesbians. It seems that having someone that they knew personally changed or at least complicated their beliefs on the issues.

Emily discussed this perspective and how having gay friends has complicated her original Christian beliefs. After discussing her beliefs that church and state should be completely separate, she shared her conflicted beliefs about gay marriage.

Emily: And I don't necessarily know if I'm completely backed up on that, but in terms of like gay marriage, should it be legal, I don't know. I just like see my friends who are gay, and the idea of denying them the privilege of being—of having a marriage, getting married. If someone told me I couldn't get married that would absolutely break my heart. Not saying that's what you should live for, obviously. It's not. But to say you legally cannot get married, and that's not—because you're biologically different or that kind of thing. Or, I guess, I don't know if it's biologically. That's up for debate too, but I guess I think part of it is a chemical thing in the brain. But, yeah. I just feel like that's not our place to say.

And I feel like by imposing those rules on the entire nation, you're imposing your religion on the entire nation, and whereas like your beliefs should be something that's very personal and something that you've come to on your own. And yeah, I don't know. I just feel like that wouldn't be the president's place to make that kind of decision.

I: And I guess maybe—I can make assumptions about this, but tell me how your faith kind of plays into that decision or that issue for you.

Emily: Well, I'm kind of coming up to a mind block here. I don't know why. Yeah. I don't know.

I: I guess when I'm thinking that issue I'm thinking more about homosexuality, not necessarily maybe the church and state issue. It sounds like that's kind of the specifics of how it works.

Emily: Well, I mean, the Bible explicitly says that homosexuality is wrong, giving into those desires is wrong. But I think as Christians that's something that we're told not to focus on. In Matthew Jesus says like, "You fools, why are you asking questions about this? You should be focusing on this" and redirects them multiple times. I just feel like that's not our decision. I don't know. It's not our right to make those decisions for other people. It has to be a change in their hearts. The moment we make that decision for them, we've crossed a big line, I feel.

I: And was this an issue that you thought much about before coming to the University like when you were in high school and stuff?

Emily: Not really, no. Not really.

I: Okay. So, what do you think is different about here that kind of brought that more to the forefront for you?

Emily: Well, I have like probably over like ten, fifteen good friends who are gay. So, it makes it so much more pertinent.

Coming to college and perhaps coming to specifically a large, diverse, public institution with a thriving gay student population has affected Emily's views. The issue of gay marriage and what Christianity teaches about attractional orientation is more pertinent to her as her beliefs are now personal because they affect her immediate friends. She also expresses another way that she connects her faith to her beliefs in that she prioritizes which issues she thinks are important in relation to her faith. She believes that while there may be a conflict between Christian teachings and her beliefs on gay marriage, she states that this decision should not have priority for Christians and that there are other, more important issues on which to focus.

Layla also utilized the process of *prioritizing* the important issues within her faith when connecting her Christian beliefs and her social beliefs about attractional orientation.

Layla: Yeah, it's tough because, I really don't think that, I really, really don't believe that God is up there, like picking out gay people and being like sinner, sinner, sinner. I think that God's judgment depends on, you know, what you do with your life, who you love, that kinda thing.

But at the same time, the Bible does say it's a sin and so it's hard for me, and I started just talking about this with my friend who is really involved in gay activism and I was sort of like, "Well, you know, it's a sin but it's not that big of a deal." And she was like, "Well, but you're still telling people their life's a sin," and that's true.

So I haven't been able to reconcile that but I do really think that there are ways, like that that's too, that's more divisive than it needs to be, that there's no reason to form political beliefs over that one issue when we have, you know, millions of people in this country suffering because of other, you know, issues and I, you know, God mentions poverty more than he mentions homosexuality.

And I really, you know, I don't think anybody can claim to know what the priorities of that are, but I can guess [she laughs] and I guess that that's not high on the list. So, yeah, that's really the only way I've been able to reconcile it and sometimes I feel like I'm cheating and just helping myself out and making excuses but I don't know. I guess that's all you can do [she laughs].

I: Or just not be reconciled about it, like you said.

Layla: Right, and I don't, I think that, you know, Christian activists who are like, "God hates gay people," like, that's insane and, you know, because I'm think, you know, God doesn't hate anyone, so I real, that I believe 100 percent is God doesn't hate anyone. And so, yeah, that's, it's sort of half reconciled but not totally [she laughs]. I haven't totally come to terms with that, I guess.

Layla clearly was conflicted between her belief that she can say it is a sin but "not that big of a deal," yet this is still stating what in an individual's life is a sin. She was in process as to how to connect her Christian beliefs to her beliefs about attractional orientation. She began by saying that even if it were a sin, it should not be a focus for Christians as there are other more important issues such as poverty. But when challenged by a friend (which ties into earlier discussions about the role of peers) she had difficulty reconciling her beliefs.

While their beliefs about the topic of homoattractiveness varied, the women above all brought the topic forth as one that connected with their faith beliefs. How and why they made this connection also varied, but the fact that the topic itself arose so clearly from the women meant that its salience was tangible and was a strong connector between their faith beliefs and social beliefs.

Courses

Much of what the women discussed as being influential regarding their beliefs about homoattractiveness happened outside of the classroom. But ten of the women interviewed also discussed how a course they had taken in college influenced their

political, social, or faith beliefs or actions. In general, the women interviewed discussed how the courses informed them and helped them become aware of issues and topics that were new to them. For example, Agnes took an environmental class her sophomore year and believed that it helped her “realize that I have a huge impact even though it feels small in relation to the overall impact, but still, I guess I just need to think about it, think more consciously about every action.”

Others took courses that helped them connect their political or social beliefs with action through required service or certain assignments for the course. Josefina was involved in a class in her residential college that involved local advocates working with homeless children which then lead to her later taking a community organizing class. She believed this class helped bring her academic learning and social actions together.

Josefina: It’s in a lot of ways affirming the notions I’ve had about how to relate to people, and that I think at least academically started when I took the social change class and started talking about libratory education, and dialogue, and like practice, and interacting with people in your environment, and empowering. Like having people feel like the power to do things themselves, and overcome oppression, but not—you know in identifying your— like all of these things, and all of these words seem really big and promulgated. But I think like the organizing method of knowing people, and knowing their issues, and being there to support, but to not even facilitate what happens really, but to take the back seat to that, kind of is definitely where those things line up—

Josefina believed that having the class that involved doing some community organizing helped “line up” what she was learning academically about libratory education and how to empower people to overcome oppression in their communities. The class helped her connect her ideas as to how to relate to people in an academic context and to learn tools to help support the process. This class was so powerful in her learning and commitments that she planned to remain connected to the community after the class was over.

Layla tied into earlier findings in this study as she discussed how one of her sociology courses and, specifically, one of her faculty members influenced her.

Layla: But politically I guess just a lot of professors have influenced, not necessarily my politics but the way I see solutions, especially in the African-American Studies Department and the Sociology Department more than anything. But, yeah, not religious at all.

I: Okay, yeah. Well, can you tell me, so how has that affected the solutions that you see?

Layla: I guess understanding the problems about people who have done work actually, you know, in inner city schools and actually know what's going on and have real experiences to relay. I'm trying, I guess [my professor] in the Sociology Department has been my, he's been my biggest influence just because I feel like he, I don't know, I feel like he knows what he's talking, you know, he knows what he's talking about.

And so he lets you kinda figure out the solutions for yourself but he gives you clues along the way. . . I felt like that really helped me understand obstacles to a solution, I guess. I know it's really vague. But, yeah, I just think the more I learn about the problems, the more I sort of start to see ways for the solutions. I, that's, sociology, the reason I am soc in poli-sci is I see sociology as learning about the problems that exist and dissecting those problems and political science is the action component. So, you know, poli-sci is the tool for sociology, I guess.

Layla's statement supports earlier findings regarding the role of mentors when she states that her faculty member had a big influence on her understanding of the possible solutions to social issues. She found his perspective especially helpful because he had direct experience with the issues they were discussing in addition to teaching the class. His role was important as he not only gave her information but helped her understand how to examine and determine solutions for herself.

Processes

In addition to courses they took, the women interviewed used specific processes to help them connect their faith beliefs to their beliefs regarding attractional orientation.

The women made connections through *questioning Biblical translation and historical context and connecting beliefs to a core Christian value*. Each of these processes was utilized for different reasons but all served to help the women make a connection between their Christian faith and their political and social beliefs and involvements.

Questioning Biblical translation and historical context. The last group of women who discussed attractional orientation found ways to connect their Christian faith and support gay marriage and gay rights. Most of them shared two major topics on which they questioned Christian teaching about attractional orientation: translation of the Bible and the historical context of what is written in the Bible about attractional orientation. Some of these topics were shared with the women who were conflicted about their views as they also utilized questioning as a process.

Jenny spoke in detail about her value of the process of questioning and about the translation and historical context of the Bible as it pertained to attractional orientation.

Jenny: I've always thought that spirituality is strengthened by constant questioning, so I'm always questioning different things, and how I believe it. And I don't like to kind of take like beliefs, Christian belief at face value, but I like to question things a lot. So yeah, that's kind of the process of it for me.

I: Are there any examples, recently, or things that you've been kind of questioning or thinking through from that perspective?

Jenny: Well, I mean, the issue of homosexuality has always been a question in my mind because, especially now, after taking classes in the—it's not the religion department. I can't think of the department's name, but I've taken the comparative religion course. It gives some historical context and . . . So like trying to get a historical context of—really important for me to think about what these people who are writing the spiritual texts, what kind of life they were living. Yeah, that kind of thing.

I: Okay, okay. Yeah, I guess, tell me a little bit more about like let's take the issue of homosexuality, since that's the one you brought up. When you're questioning it, are you kind of thinking through this issue? What kind of—what is the process for you? I mean, do you read? Do you talk to people? How do you

make sense about— not being [able] necessarily [to] come to some great conclusion? Maybe you have.

Jenny: I really haven't. But yeah, it's a lot of talking to people, and reading in terms of—I have a friend who knows Hebrew. And so we like we have a lot of conversations about the original text of the Bible, and like it should be translated, and how like the new translations are sort of deviations from the original. And that helps answer some questions. Because while the church offers a perspective, I like to have that in mind like the original translation because that's what they said. So and with the issue of homosexuality, that's—I mean there are a million questions. I could never offer an answer for that.

I: Yeah, can you give me a sense? . . . Have you come to any conclusions as far as what you believe on that issue 'cause that does kind of help?

Jenny: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, like talking to my friend about the original translation, he, basically, says that—and this is coming from an anthropology background as well. Like, how ideas have shaped over time, and you know, the idea of homosexuality didn't exist in the year zero, whatever, or in the years BC. So with that in mind, I think that homosexuality is a social construction. I think that we put a lot of emphasis on sexualized enemies, maybe more so than we should. I mean considering that they didn't have that idea way back when, how can you say that it's wrong, really. I can't say that it's wrong. I don't think it is.

Jenny valued questioning in general for her spiritual growth but through her experience in a comparative religion class, has come to question the historical context of her Christian beliefs. As discussed previously, she also utilized a peer to help her answer her questions specifically about the translation of the original Bible and what this might mean. Her major in anthropology also has informed her perspective on the historical context by stating that homosexuality was really a social construction, as the idea of homosexuality as we know it today did not exist in the times of the Bible.

Agnes also questioned biblical translation and was especially concerned about how this would affect the rights of gay and lesbians. She stated, “I don't see how you can translate that how many, so many years later and just saying that this person is entirely wrong and we will not give them legal benefits.” Marina also stated that she thought how

some people interpret the Bible literally was “a little outdated” and how one translates the Bible in the modern world was central:

Marina: I guess I interpret like the message, the message of the Bible as true, the big picture, like grace and faith and heaven and love and all of those things and how you get to heaven and that he died and blah, blah, blah, but I don't think that necessarily because they thought that being gay in, you know, 2000 b.c. was a bad thing that right now it's a bad thing, that it's—like all those things don't necessarily translate to today, whereas some people feel as though all of these things that are in the Bible that were true then are true now, and those beliefs should stand. I don't necessarily feel that way, and I feel like other people feel that same way as me, that things change. Things progress, and though the message of the Bible and like the big picture has not changed. The Trinity hasn't changed. All of those things haven't changed. The little things in the Bible have changed, and that's okay, so I think that like the interpretation of the issues in the Bible is what makes people different.

Marina believed that those who take the Bible literally do not believe in the historical context of the Bible and translate the written words literally into the modern context. She believed that what the Bible says about attractional orientation does not apply literally to the modern context. She also, like the women discussed previously, prioritized the issues raised in the Bible and believed attractional orientation to be “a little thing” compared to other, larger issues.

Connecting to a core Christian value. Another process that the women used to make connections was to think about their beliefs or involvements as connected to a specific Christian teaching or value. What core value they connected to varied, but the effect was that this value motivated the women to be involved and/or to have certain beliefs.

Two examples of this process involve how the women connected their beliefs about homoattractiveness to their faith beliefs. Olivia and Leah connected their political

beliefs to their faith beliefs by connecting to a core Christian value that was both care and justice orientated.

Olivia was the woman interviewed who was most involved in gay rights issues through her involvement in the Stonewall Democrats. She had done a great deal of thinking about how she connected her faith to her social and political beliefs about GLBT issues. She expressed this connection by connecting her beliefs about attractional orientation to an overall theme or value she took from the Christian faith. She believed that her support of GLBT individuals connected to the overall Christian value of treating others equally. She had spoken about her involvement in the Stonewall Democrats, and at this point in the interview, I asked her how this involvement connected to her Christian faith:

Olivia: I don't think that people should be treated unequally. My favorite book of the Bible is James, and in James it says if a man walks into your room wearing robes and fine jewelry and you offer him the best seat in your house and another man walks in wearing rags and you tell him to go sit over there on the floor that's not right. I think that's kind of what we're doing. You're a man and a woman, you're in love. You can get married. Go ahead. You're a man and a man. You're in love, but you can go sit over there in the corner and have your civil union. That just doesn't sit right with me.

Olivia believed that she was living out her Christian value of “treating others equally” when expressing her opinion that gay couples should be afforded the same rights as heteroattractional couples; one of which is to marry. Treating others equally expressed both a justice and care orientation as it is concerned with how you treat an individual but is also concerned with the equity of how all are treated overall. Olivia even goes beyond connecting it to a specific value and gives an example of this value as it is expressed in the Bible. This would seem to lend credence to her belief that treating others equally is truly a Christian value.

Leah also connected her beliefs about attractional orientation to her faith through what she believed were the “main messages in the Christian faith.” She believed that life and love were the main Christian messages and should be the focus when thinking about political issues, specifically homoattractiveness.

I: I'd like to switch gears just a little bit and ask you if there are some issues that you think about politically or socially that you feel like connect up with your faith and if you want to tell me kind of what you believe about those and where you think that came from.

Leah: I think that a lot of my political issues, my stance on political issues come back to my faith and the way that I feel that, not that I have any idea what God's thinking, but that [she laughs] God might want us to treat certain situations so going on the main one, homosexuality, I think that it's really important. I, because I feel that love is important, I feel that we should be open to all relationships, man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman, you know. I feel like the central theme in that is love and I don't think anyone's doing it to be sinful. I don't think anyone's doing it to hurt other people, so that is definitely one where I think my faith is somewhat opposite of what a lot of conservatives will say about that.

Leah pointed to what she believes was a “central theme” of the Christian faith, which was love. She filtered her beliefs about what the Bible says about homoattractiveness through the lens of this central theme, rather than from specific passages in the Bible. This, along with her belief that people in same-sex relationships are not trying to hurt other people has brought her to different conclusions than some of the other women interviewed.

Other women interviewed utilized the process of connecting to a core Christian value to explain their motivation to be involved in varied service opportunities. It was clear from their descriptions below that their faith was one of the primary reasons the women were involved in service and that the women made this connection through core Christian teachings and beliefs. It was also apparent that the orientation of the core Christian value the women discussed was more clearly care oriented.

Agnes was very involved in hunger ministries through her church and through her involvements on campus. When asked why she was involved in these particular service opportunities, she stated it was because feeding the hungry was one of “the biggest Christian values.” Sara connected her involvements in Peacemakers in Detroit to the Bible and to the words of St. Francis.

I: So why do you get involved in those kinds of things?

Sara: I guess for the same reason that I was just saying about Africa is that you should be able to meet people’s needs with the faith together. But then even if I can’t, I still—I mean, St. Francis said, “Preach the gospel and if necessary use words.” I still want to do that even if I don’t get to say anything. And so I guess that’s why I do it. And Jesus said, “I was thirsty, you gave me drink. I was hungry and you gave me bread.” So and, “Whatever you do for least of these you’ve done for me.” So that’s why I do it.

Sarah and Agnes saw the words and values of Christianity as one of the primary connections to why they were involved in service opportunities.

Paige further expanded on this theme by discussing how her service was directly connected to her faith through the core Christian value of helping others.

I: Since we’ve talked so much about how you’ve been involved in the community, does your faith relate to that, connect to that in any way that you see?

Paige: Mm-hmm. I think it directly relates.

I: Tell me about that.

Paige: Like, I feel very strongly that as a Christian you are called to like help people, and you’re called—I mean, you’re called to share your faith with people. But you’re also called to like treat people the best way you can and help them in any way you can. And like God’s given you all these gifts, and like – so you’re called to like—if God’s given you these like you’re supposed to use them. Like, the way of like honoring God is like using what He has given you. And so like if you’re not—like if He’s given you all these things, and you’re not using them, then like what was the point of Him giving them to you. And like you’re not honoring him by like just like being like “Oh, well, I was using them for myself, then I’ll like go make \$1 million and have a huge house and like not let the rest of the

world exist.” Like, I just don’t think that’s like as Christians, that’s what you’re called to do.

Paige believed that service was a form of honoring the gifts that God has given individuals and helping others. She was involved in community service in college through a living learning community that did many small service projects.

While the topic varied, a number of the women connected their faith to their beliefs and actions through connecting to a core Christian belief, value, or teaching. This connection also seemed to help focus their involvements into specific areas they believed connected most strongly with these core values. For some women, the action of service itself made the connection between their social and religious beliefs.

Service: Connecting social and religious beliefs

Many of the women who were involved in service opportunities tied their involvements directly back to their faith commitments, yet how exactly they made this connection varied for the women. One woman defined the service experiences she had as synonymous with spiritual, which was the most direct connection. Other women interviewed used service to connect their social value to help others with their faith belief in evangelism. As stated in the interviews, being involved in social service offered the women a way to meet the physical and spiritual needs of others rather than one or the other. All of the women who discussed connecting their service to their faith used language that communicated a care orientation.

Megan presented the clearest connection when she stated that “the best way to describe personally my spirituality would just be, like, service. Like, the one word to, like describe my spirituality.” She defined service as “thinking about life and relating myself to the people around me and the world around me and serving other people, and

bettering the community.” Megan went on to describe her service as a doula (trained helper for women before, during, and after the birth of their child) for low-income teens as a spiritual experience.

I: Can you articulate for me why that, why you feel like that particular thing, experience is spiritual then?

Megan: I think that it’s spiritual because, I think it’s a physical realization or physical, a physical, what’s the word? A physical something that like there is a higher being, whatever like somebody may think it is like how like I don’t, I don’t, I can’t fathom how somebody would think, could not believe that there isn’t a higher being that like can that like put us all here to like produce each other. It’s a physical reminder to me that like there is a like there is a God or there is a whatever. And, yeah, I mean it’s also a phys, it’s another reason to just be thankful for life to me.

Megan believed her service experience was synonymous with a spiritual experience as watching a baby being born allowed her to have a physical reminder of her belief in God. She was one of the few women to use the word *spiritual* rather than *faith* which allowed her to describe an experience outside of the church context as spiritual. Megan went on to describe her other service experiences as spiritual, such as her experience of learning and then teaching others a module on AIDS. When asked why this experience was spiritual, she stated, “because you’re empowering yourself to empower others.”

One of the major themes presented by other women interviewed was that being involved in service was a form of evangelism. Some of the women saw service as a less intrusive way to evangelize or share their Christian faith with others. By being involved in a service opportunity, they could develop relationships with people before sharing their faith. Others believed that when God called Christians to “Go and make disciples of all

nations” (known as “the Great Commission” to many Christians) God meant for Christians to help meet the spiritual *and* physical needs of others.

Abby is one of the women who discussed how she would rather share her faith after she had developed a relationship with someone through a service project than to approach a stranger and share her faith. Specifically, she felt that her involvement in K-grams, short for “Kids Programs,” was connected to her faith. K-grams has many programs, but Abby was involved in leadership of the pen pals program that matched up over a thousand college students with elementary students for a monthly letter exchange. She was also involved in a classroom project that was “edu-active (educational and interactive)” (<http://www.umich.edu/~smile/>). After Abby had described a number of her involvements, I asked how she thought the things she had been involved in connected with her faith or faith commitments.

Abby: I think partially, yeah—some of them more so than others. I would say definitely serving people is one of the things that I would say—you know it goes along with the faith background.

I: So which ones – when you say some more so than others, which ones do you feel like connect more specifically or more closely or whatever?

Abby: I guess I would say—I think K-grams has given me a sense—it’s an ongoing thing—but more of an opportunity—like, when I meet people there, that I can share, like my story or, you know, have an opportunity to get to know people better, to where I can like – yeah like tell ‘em about like where I go to church, or like you know, what my background is and stuff like that. So I think that’s given me opportunities to open up. Because I’m not one of those people, too, that like – definitely in the nondenominational church, they have that whole like witnessing and evangelizing and things like that. And I’m not used to that at all. So like my roommate is definitely one of those people who like just right away—like you know, go up to people and be like—you know, can like talk to them on the street, or do surveys, or other—

I: Oh. About their faith or whatever?

Abby: Yeah. Exactly. And with me, I just feel, like—you know I'd like to get to know someone better. And you know not just feel like—like they're a project or something, you know, to sell. I think that has helped.

I: And you feel like you can do that more through the K-grams, because you have more relationships in those?

Abby: Yeah. Exactly.

I: I see. You spend more time –

Abby: It's more long term. Yeah. Exactly.

Abby felt more comfortable sharing her faith through relationship, and doing service allowed her a context in which to develop these relationships that were more long term. It also was a way of serving others, which she felt was part of her Christian values. This focus on developing relationships and caring for individuals falls more in to the caring orientation.

Leah also acted out her faith through her service and felt this was a way of sharing her faith. She described this perspective when discussing the first mission she attended where she helped run a vacation Bible school:

Leah: I think that was, in terms of my faith, that was probably one of the most important moments. It was a time where you learned about others and how you can serve them and how you can serve them with your faith and how you have to kinda know who you are and I learned that where some people might be interested in evangelizing and saying, "You have to, I'm going here. I'm gonna tell you what to believe," I was more interested in, "I'm going here. I'm gonna help you." That's what my faith tells me, it doesn't tell me to tell you to believe. It tells me to help you, to love you . . .

Leah believed that by doing service, which she also described as helping or loving others, people would be able to "see" her faith rather than her having to tell them about it. This perspective of seeing service as a way to demonstrate your faith to others rather than specifically telling individuals what to believe was another way to evangelize to others.

Virginia also saw her service as related to the commission to tell others about her faith. When sharing about the mission trips she had been on, she discussed how she came to the belief that you must meet the physical and emotional needs of others.

I: All right, well, I want to go back to something—earlier you talked about the Great Commission. In your mind, it sounds like you’re talking about taking care—I think you said taking care of people’s physical and their spiritual or emotional needs both. Can you tell me how you came to that? And maybe tell me what you mean by the Great Commission, because I think I know what that means, but everybody thinks of that differently I think a little bit.

Virginia: Okay. Well, Matthew 28:19-20, “Go and preach the Gospel. Bring the Gospel to all nations, all people, and—

I: Right—and so many people, I guess I would say, view that as a spiritual—like, “bring the Gospel,” and they don’t necessarily think about the physical and the emotional. So how have you kind of connected those two, and why is that important?

Virginia: I think looking at how Christ came and when He came He didn’t just meet spiritual needs. He came for the sick, and He healed people. He brought restoration to their lives mentally and physically, and I feel like if He was here and if He was alongside me, He would want me not to just preach to people, but to really care for all their needs. And He is the God of justice, and in the Psalms and Old Testament it talks about God is the God of justice. And then in the New Testament with the Beatitudes and just how—I don’t—like, you can just see God’s heart for the hurting, and I want to mirror that. So I think it comes with both the physical and spiritual. And that’s the whole Gospel like the Good News of Jesus Christ, and looking at what He did and how He wants us to reflect that and bear His image in the same way.

Virginia clearly was focused on caring for the immediate needs of people, which reflects a care orientation, but she also connected her service to a “God of justice.” While she did not elaborate on how this concept of a God of justice affected her actions, she clearly expressed the need to have both a caring and justice oriented concept of God and to incorporate these beliefs into how one serves others.

Being involved in service as a form of evangelism and as a way to care for the physical and spiritual needs of others was one of the ways the women made connections.

The role of parents and peers as mentors was also discussed as a way to make connections as well as courses taken. The topic of homoattractiveness connected strongly with the faith of the women interviewed and provided an example of how some women used the processes of questioning the translation and historical context of the Bible as a way to connect their faith to their social beliefs.

Now that we have examined how women made connections, the following chapter will examine if the women believed their gender or racial identities affected how they made these connections.

Chapter 5: The Influence of Gender and Race on How Women Make Connections

In addition to examining how women made connections between their faith and their political and social beliefs and involvements, this dissertation sought to address how the women believed their race and gender might have influenced these beliefs and involvements. This chapter will examine if the women felt the being a woman or being White influenced their orientation or standpoint on issues or involvements. The results of the interviews support that overall, few of the women interviewed expressed the influence of either their racial or gender identities. Of the few that did, most expressed one of these as it connected to their faith identities but even fewer of the women commented on the connection between multiple identities. This chapter will examine those that did express an influence or connection between their racial or gender identities in an effort to examine what might have been different about their experiences or relationships that promoted such connections.

When examining the influence of gender, the women that expressed any influence stated that gender influenced their social beliefs and involvements but did not express any influence on their political beliefs or actions. The women who expressed that gender had an influence stated that it mainly affected their beliefs regarding abortion and used the process of identification to help them connect their social and religious beliefs about abortion. Many also felt the topic of abortion brought their gender identity and religious identity into conflict. Some of the women also discussed how the expectations of

traditional gender roles might mean that more women are involved in service opportunities and were more accepting of gay marriage than men.

The influence of race was expressed more often than that of gender and connected most directly with their political and social beliefs and actions. Those that believed their race had an effect were often struggling with their White identity and expressed that being at a large, diverse university had a positive effect on their growth by helping them realize and examine their White privilege.

It should be noted that no themes emerged related to the role of gender on the women's political beliefs and actions and only a few connected their gender to their religious beliefs. The questions regarding the influence of gender were later in the interview and the questions regarding their faith development were at the beginning of the interview. This might explain why few of the women discussed how gender affected their faith beliefs. But it is surprising that none of the women interviewed expressed that their gender affected their political beliefs or actions. This will be examined further in the following chapter.

The Influence of Gender

Abortion: A Gendered issue. When asked about the influence of gender on their political and social beliefs and actions, seven of the women interviewed stated that they thought being a woman affected their beliefs and actions regarding abortion. While none of the women admitted to having had an abortion, they often went through the process of placing themselves in the situation of someone deciding on an abortion and believed that as women, they were better able than men to understand this decision. The women used this tool of identification to help make their decisions about their views on abortion.

Thea exemplifies the identification process by putting herself in the position of making the decision to have an abortion to help her decide on her beliefs regarding abortion. When asked what informed her beliefs about abortion Thea responded:

Abortion, just being a woman, trying to picture having a baby – trying very hard to picture having a baby against my will or unexpectedly and deciding that if I ever had a baby, and I didn't mean to have, which won't – shouldn't happen given my choices in life, but if that ever happened then I would not choose to murder a child. I hate to say things like that because it makes me sound like such a crazy pro-lifer. But reading the book that I told you about was a lot of it. There have been a few movies over the last year that have – I read a *USA Today* article.

Thea's gender influenced her beliefs about abortion because it allowed her to picture herself in the situation where she would need to make a decision about having an abortion. Thea's response is also interesting as she uses secular media to help her identify with women who get pregnant unexpectedly or against their will. Earlier in the interview she described the book *The Atonement Child* by Francine Rivers who decided to keep her baby after she was raped. Thea stated this book changed her perspective as she used to think that abortion was appropriate in the case of rape but after reading this book, changed her mind. She also went on to state that the movies *Juno*, *The Waitress* and *Knocked Up* had also helped her come to the conclusion that "the circumstances might not be good, but you should still have your child." These books and movies also seemed to help her put herself in the position of what it would mean to make the decision of having an abortion.

When asked if she felt like gender affected how she viewed the topics she brought up, Marina stated that her gender affected her views on abortion. However, initially she stated her gender only affected the issue of abortion "a little bit, but not really." She went on to state

I guess just because I've been so involved in women's health, and I am a woman, and I guess if I was put in a situation, I don't know which choice I would make, because I've never been in that situation, but I would like to have the option, and I would like to know that it is there, and I think maybe if I was a guy, I wouldn't be so thankful for that option, I guess, but I don't really think my gender has really affected my views on it.

While Marina also puts herself in the situation and believes that being a woman may affect her perspective on abortion, she comes to a different conclusion than Thea. She believes, as did two of the other women interviewed, that as a woman it is important to make your own choice regarding an abortion, and that men cannot fully appreciate the importance of having this choice.

Becca identified that being a woman influenced her views on abortion, and that because she is a woman, her pro-life beliefs hold more weight than if they were held by a man.

But and I guess maybe for abortion that also is totally affected by that I'm a female and pro-life. Which usually you would think, "Oh she's female, she wants to be able to choose if she had an abortion or if she wanted to have an abortion or whatnot." But I almost think that – that because I am a woman and I am pro-life, that needs – that has a bigger statement to say, "No, I feel so strongly that you shouldn't kill off your pregnancy, that even I wouldn't do it." And that's like almost a bigger statement than if a man were pro-life.

And I think that a lot of – I've noticed – I was just having a conversation yesterday with my friend. I feel like a lot of guys now that are, you know, progressive, you know whatever, are pro-choice simply because they think that that's what women want them to be sort of. And I don't think that they even really think about it that deeply. Or they're pro-choice because they wouldn't – because they're sexually active and they wouldn't want to be a father. But I don't think that they really even stop and think about what like an abortion means.

Becca believed being a woman caused her to think more deeply about the issue of abortion, and to be better equipped to understand what abortion means. She also believed that being pro-life as a woman was not the prominent view, so that when she as a woman

was willing to say that abortion is wrong, it lent more credence than if a man or a pro-choice woman was making the statement.

Thea, Becca and Marina all believed that gender affected their beliefs on abortion, because being a woman allowed them to have a unique perspective on the issue. It is interesting that none of the women discussed or acknowledged that abortion may also have an effect on men who are involved. The assumption by the women who discussed the influence of gender on their beliefs on abortion did not acknowledge that the decision to have an abortion might also be emotionally challenging for men, especially for those that might disagree with the decision made by the woman. This points further to how many of the women found this to be a gendered issue, in that they believed the voice of men did not have the same weight when discussing abortion as that of women.

Abortion: Conflict of Religious and Gender Identities. While some of the women's responses regarding abortion focused on identification and comparisons with how men might respond, others focused on the conflict the women felt between their gender and religious identities. Many found engaging the topic of abortion as a way in which to connect their faith to their gender identities, but often this was not easy.

Emily's response regarding her views on abortion highlights the tension between her religious and gender identities. Before the question below, Emily had been discussing women's reproductive rights and feminism, and then began speaking about the discussions she had with her friends in the residential college in which she lived. One such "heated discussion" she remembered was regarding pro-life and pro-choice stances.

I: Do you feel like – do you feel like your gender affects the way you view, in particular, that issue?

Emily: Yeah. I mean, that definitely like – I would say like last year I was probably pro-choice, but yeah. Making myself to be pro-life as a woman I would say it's a lot harder than it would be as a man.

I: Can you tell me more about that?

Emily: Yeah. As a woman it is your body. I don't know. I don't know what you compare it to for a man, but yeah. It's just kind of like it feels like an invasion of property almost for them to say this is what you have to do with this baby. Then obviously for the rape cases, how much more difficult would that be?

I: So, you mean you feel like you're more personally invested you feel then?

Emily: Yeah. Yeah. Than a man would be. And that's a huge generalization.

I: Of course. Well, then tell me – you said last year you would have been pro-choice, and you feel like now you're more pro-life. Can you tell me more about that?

Emily: Well, I think last year a lot of my friends are – well, a few of my friends are pretty politically active, and talking with them about that kind of stuff and seeing – I don't know. I would say different sides emphasize different points of the issue, obviously. But being surrounded by the more democratic opinionated groups kind of brought that side out of me, the feminist side. Yeah. This is our right to have full control over our bodies and how dare you tell us to – like we have to give birth to this baby or that kind of thing.

But, yeah, I mean going back to the Bible, the Bible clearly says it's a life and you can't just like take that life on your own, even if it was not your fault that you got pregnant kind of thing. You have this responsibility. How difficult to accept that, but life isn't easy.

Emily clearly believes that being a woman influences her perspective on abortion, and can make taking a stance on the issue more difficult than for men. But Emily goes on to discuss how being a Christian also influences her beliefs. When speaking with her more politically opinionated friends in the residential college, she felt more of the influence of her gender. But when returning to the Bible or her Christian identity, she believes that being pro-life is the correct belief. Emily's response clearly reflects how the issue of abortion connects her faith and social beliefs but with this can bring conflict with it.

Marina also struggles with her gender and religious identities when discussing the abortion issue. She sees herself as pro-life, but would like to allow for others to be pro-choice if they would like.

Marina: I think you can be a pro-life and a pro-choice person at the same time. I think you can say for society, for everyone else, I am pro-choice. If you want to do this, this is your choice. For myself, I am, like I am pro-life. I don't know that I would ever get an abortion if I was put in that situation. I have never been in that situation, so I can't really make that decision, but I think you can be both at once. You can say, you know, "You are allowed to make your decision, and I am allowed to make my decision, and my decision would be to keep my child, but if that's not yours, then that's fine."

So, and that's kind of a struggle, because obviously the church is very pro-life and very like, "We love all the children," and, but I just don't think that's such a realistic view. Like I guess if, you know, Louise the crack mom who got pregnant from some guy behind the bar, maybe I wouldn't want her to have her child, and that sounds so horrible, but I think it's true. Like she wouldn't really be able to care for the child like the child should be cared for, and then it would go in the foster system, and that usually doesn't work out very well, and blah, blah, blah. So that's, that's a struggle, the faith struggle, definitely, and that's hard to voice to like really faith-oriented people, because I can have my opinion, and then I always feel like, "Are they judging me? Are they thinking I'm a bad person because I think this?" You know?

Marina initially struggles with what she thinks is the right decision for her personally, but that others should not have to agree with her choice. She then moves into discussing the conflict she has between her own beliefs regarding when abortion should be acceptable, and what she believes the church is teaching. She classifies this as a "faith struggle", and has difficulty sharing this struggle with other faith-oriented people because they might consider her a bad person. On the issue of abortion, Marina, like Emily and others interviewed, finds her gender intersects with her faith or religious identities, and often brings conflict between these identities.

Gender as it affects religious identity. Few of the women expressed that gender had an influence on their other identities, but a few of the women in particular expressed

ways in which gender affected how they experienced their faith or religion. Claire stated that it made her more “reserved” because “the Lutheran church is still very male-dominated, like you’re not allowed to have female priests and things like that.” Courtney also acknowledged that sometimes in church women are not given as many leadership roles, but felt she has not really run into that much, but it “bothered her a lot.” Jenny also questions the historical context of the Bible, in relation to how women are perceived in the Bible and states that “where it’s coming from is important for me to understand.”

Emily shared the most about her journey in examining the Bible for what it states about women’s leadership in the church. She had a conversation with her small group leader, and then another as part of the small group, that brought a conflict between her gender and religious identity.

There's a couple verses in the Bible where instead of saying like – I don't know. It pretty explicitly says men in one part, and just like I took that verse and ran with it and saying, "Oh, women aren't supposed to be pastors. We aren't as strong. We aren't as capable." Took it way too far. And she kind of showed me like the assumptions I was making off this one verse and how like we have to take the verse for what it's worth and not try to push it to these other – I don't know – not try to make these assumptions out of it. I don't know if that makes sense.

I: So and where did you end up on what you decided you believed about that issue?

Emily: Well, she showed me that it was pretty clear in the use of pronouns in that verse versus other verses in the same book or even in the other books of the New Testament that women aren't supposed to be pastors or we're not made to be. That's like the man's job, but also that like women have other – I don't know how you describe it. . . . We have other roles in the body that are equally as important, but we have different strengths and weaknesses than men. So, yeah. I would say that's still like a touchy subject for me.

I: As in like you haven't come to resolution on it, or what does that mean?

Emily: Well, I do – I mean, the Bible says that, and I do believe that's what the Bible says, but it's something that still kind of rubs me the wrong way. I mean, I would say that's what I believe because I definitely believe the Bible is true in its

entirety but – I guess like last weekend the CRU Bible study we talked about – there's one part in Ephesians where it talks about how like women should – I don't know – obey their husbands. Anyways, I don't know, the whole verse was leading towards being submissive essentially, and then it talked about how men should love their wives as they love themselves, which is all fine and great, but it's like we're supposed to be submissive here? But I think a lot of it comes back to like cultural differences in the time and how it was written back then. We take these words – we're so sociologically like – I don't know – trained by the media and culture to take that as super offensive, when like back then it wouldn't have been at all. So, just taking it in context.

Emily's response is important because it outlines in detail an example of identity conflict between her gender and religious identity. Like the women examining homoattractiveness from a Christian perspective, she must struggle with the language regarding gender roles in the Bible and seeks a mentor to help her do so. She discusses that the historical context of when it was originally written should be taken into consideration when trying to determine what the Bible states on gender roles. But she remains conflicted as her final conclusion does not support her views that women should be in leadership in the church.

Thea also articulated how her gender affected her conversations about her faith. Thea found herself in conversations that were “battle grounds” with Christians and non-Christians alike. Christians did not agree with her feminist views and some non-Christians held stereotypes about how Christians viewed the role of women.

I think a lot of times when I mention that I'm a Christian or that I am in InterVarsity, people start thinking about very, very fundamentalist Christians who think that women shouldn't whatever, and I'm, like, the opposite of all that. I'm very egalitarian. I think that women are equal to men, and I think that God thinks that women are equal to men. So that's a battle ground for me. Just talking to Christian people who don't agree with me and trying to be respectful of what they think, and also talking to people who aren't Christians who think that that's how all Christians think is very frustrating for me. Because you know what? I'm a woman, and I'm proud of being a woman, and if I thought that Christianity, in any way, demeaned women, I would not be a part of it anymore. Like, I would

choose not to be a part of organized religion if that was how it was going to be. I don't think that that's right.

Thea has made peace with her gender and religious identities, but often feels that she must explain her views to Christians and non-Christians alike. She later states that her mother was influential in helping her develop these beliefs because she is a feminist. This finding further supports the important role of parents in the identity formation and faith development process.

The conflicts shared by the women above would support some of what the women in Slee's (2004) "alienation" phase discussed. Many of them were disillusioned with the ways in which the Bible and the church interpreted the role of women, and some eventually left the faith altogether. While none of the women are expressing complete alienation, they are expressing some discomfort and conflict related to their gender and religious identities.

Gender roles related to service. Another set of responses from the women regarding the influence of their gender centered on generalizations about specific gender roles or traits, and how they might influence service involvement. Generally, the women who made this connection believed that women may be involved more in service, because women are more emotional and have the desire to care for others. These responses support the belief that women may choose to be involved in service because they are care oriented, and prefer to make change through relationships.

Four of the women interviewed noticed fewer men were involved in service than women, and had their own theories as to why. All four of the women's comments focused on the gender roles of men and women. Allison suggested that fewer men may

be involved in service “because women feel like they can relate better to people. Maybe it’s more of like a womanly thing to do, to serve”, or it is “not the macho thing to do.”

Sara believed fewer men might be involved in mission trips because of societal expectations of men to financially provide.

This would just be me guessing about gender. But I feel like boys are probably more driven just by society and their parents to be successful and be able to provide. And I mean, last summer I didn’t make any money, and so also, I mean going back, if I was ever doing relief stuff, that’s – and so I think as far as the stuff I’ve been involved in, those kinds of things, that might – I mean my parents still give me a hard time that I’m not bringing in money. But I think if I was a boy they’d be even more like, “You need to be providing stuff.” So that’s just my own personal theory of why. I mean, there’s more girls on my team to Africa than boys, and that would be my theory as to why.

Sara believed that while her parents wanted her to be able to make money, perhaps the pressure was not as great as it would have been had she been a man. The societal expectation is that men need to provide, so Sara’s guess as to why men were not more involved in service was because they felt they needed to be working to make money.

Another four of the women believed that gender influenced their beliefs and actions, because women are more emotional, and like to care for others more than men.

Two of the women described the influence of their gender on their service opportunities as allowing them to be better able than men to demonstrate compassion and emotions.

Megan M. believed “that, in general, women are much more inclined to be – not that guys aren’t compassionate, but just, like, really demonstrate their compassion. It’s just kind of a natural tendency. And too, like, working with children. Often times the female gender is overrepresented in mentoring and these types of things.”

Paige believed that women may be more in touch with their emotions than men, allowing them to better be able to relate to others.

I think being a girl and like being attached I think a little bit sometimes to my emotions more than some of the – some guys that I can – like when they are having a hard time, like I can relate more maybe than another guy can. I mean, not in some things. I don't go through some of the things that guys go through. But like some more like the emotional stuff, I can be like, "Okay, I relate..."

Paige believed that being a woman and being attached to her emotions affected the type of service she did with others, and allowed her to relate to some of the emotional issues that individuals might be facing.

While some of the women discussed the influence of gender on their social beliefs and service opportunities, only one discussed how it influenced her political involvements. The question asked during the interview deliberately asked about both the political and social aspects, so the women chose to focus only on the effects of their gender on their service.

Influence of race on political and social beliefs and involvements

One of the sub-questions of this research project was designed to examine the impact of race on how White women connected their spirituality to political and social issues, in their beliefs and actions. To address this research question, a version of the following question was asked of the women during the interview: "Do you believe being White affected your political, social or religious beliefs or involvements?" Fifteen of the women answered yes, four answered no, four were not sure, and one answered in a way that did not address the question. In the section below, two themes will be discussed that emerged from the women who answered yes or unsure to the question above.

As presented in the conceptual framework and literature review, this dissertation is concerned with examining Whiteness as a standpoint or orientation for how the women viewed themselves or others (Ahmed, 2007; Frankenberg, 1993; Hunter & Nettles, 1999).

Therefore, the fifteen women who responded that race did affect their beliefs or actions were examined for themes as to how they believed their Whiteness affected their orientation.

One theme that emerged among the women who said race affected their beliefs and/or involvements was that many of the women struggled with their White racial identity. Some felt that being White limited their perspectives on issues, while others struggled with feelings of guilt related to their race. The second commonality among the women who answered yes is that they discussed the concept of White privilege, and how they continued to benefit from being White. Most of the women who engaged the concept of privilege spoke of it as an important factor in moving them to political or social action.

Interwoven into these two themes is what specific experiences lead to these understandings of their White racial identity. Many of the women had grown up in a predominantly White area, and believed their exposure to diversity since coming to the University helped them become aware of their racial (and for some religious) identities. Most of their exposure happened in meeting and interacting with diverse friends, and through class discussions. The women who answered that their race did have an effect had also intentionally sought out diverse environments in which to live and volunteer. This included women seeking out living in a multicultural sorority, a residential college, and a Co-op, in addition to volunteering in organizations which were staffed or attended predominantly by people of color. Having these experiences of being in the minority in certain situations was uncomfortable for some, and also a catalyst for understanding.

Struggles with White racial identity. One theme from the interviews is that some of the women interviewed struggled with their White identities, and with the way in which they felt being White limited their perspectives. Agnes felt that the University setting allowed her to engage the idea of being White, and of race in general, for the first time, as she had grown up in a predominantly White neighborhood. Agnes felt that being White was a limitation because she had never really had a deep discussion about race before the one she had in her Organizational Studies class at the University. When asked if she felt that her race affected any of her involvements or beliefs Agnes responded

Yeah. I think it does a lot because as much as you want to claim that you're colorblind and all these things that I don't think it's possible for me to claim it or for most of the people I know who have experienced it. We were talking about race and socioeconomic status today in my organizational studies class and we were talking about it and I was like, you know, I don't think I've ever discussed, had a deep discussion about race. I've had friends of other races. But I don't think I've ever sat down and talked about race with anyone who isn't pretty White, you know, and I'm pretty waspy, you know. If you're gonna go that route? And so I think that does affect, 'cause I was like, we were, I mean we were talking about it but I was like this doesn't really mean that much when it's just a bunch of, you know, if you take it from an outside, like just a bunch of White people sitting around talking about race.

Agnes realized for the first time that while she had friends of other races, as a White person, she had not “had” to have any deep, serious conversations about race. And the conversation she did have she felt had limited value, because it included only White people who are on the “outside.” With this statement, Agnes implies that People of Color are on the “inside”, and would therefore have a different conversation about race.

Josefina also had some initial frustrations with being White. Her first thought, when asked about how her gender might affect her beliefs and involvements, was of how she wanted to avoid fitting the stereotype of a White woman working on issues of social

justice. While the question was about how her gender might affect the things she shared about, her answer seemed to be more about both her racial and her gender identity.

I'm trying to think about how to answer that. The first thing that comes to mind is like – and this may not be answering your question at all. But being aggravated for a long time about being in all of these activist groups that were a bunch of White, middle-class women, and I was kind of like, please change, like, one part of my identity so I don't fit this.

Josefina went on to state that she had “gotten over these initial feelings”, but that being White limited her ability to fully relate to people in certain situations. Josefina was the only person who was not of color on the staff for the organization where she volunteered, and stated, “I'm very aware that I can't relate to one of my students of color as a student of color. I just can't. I'll never be able to do that. And that's okay. That's who I am, but it's a point of struggle in the students then.” While Josefina had worked through some of the of the limitations of her majority identity, she acknowledged that the students of color that she worked with might feel she could not relate to them in the same way as another person of color could relate to them.

Laurel also expressed challenges to being White and involved. She stated that she often felt like the “bad guy” when interacting with peers of color, but that her perspective could also bring conflict with her White friends. Laurel's interview had gone quite long, so I decided to combine the race and gender question.

I: When you think about the things you're involved in and the issues that you've kind of mentioned as important to you, do you feel like your gender or your race affects how you see those or why you're involved in them?

Laurel: I'd like to say no, but yes. I feel like a lot of the times in organizations I am part of that there aren't – like it's disproportion – it's not the same ratio as a lot of the other organizations I have been in previously, Serve is a lot more diverse than any other organization I've ever been involved in –

I: Racially?

Laurel: Racially – yeah – but it is still mostly girls. But just that a lot of times I kind of feel up against a wall that I was the one who did everything to everyone else, that because of being this –

I: White?

Laurel: White and blonde hair, blue eyes, that suddenly I'm something that is horrible. And I don't know. I don't feel like I can share the same like – I can't share the same heritage with people with all the struggles they've gone through with like the Black civil rights movement and all of that. But I mean, I want to learn, but sometimes I just feel like that – I don't know – that I'm – I feel like I'm the bad guy a lot of the times in the things that I do, and that I shouldn't be there and that I should go be doing my own life and be donating through charity or something. And that's just not the way I see about bringing change. And then I kind of feel odd with my friends when they are like, "Well, why don't you just give them money or something?" . . .

I: Some conflict there.

Laurel: Yeah. If I'm gonna – I try and talk about it – like social change being a commitment to service, and they're like, "No, just worry about yourself." Okay, that one's good! If I better myself, everyone else will be better, right? So I think that – I think a lot of the times my race kind of – it isn't what motivates me to do things, but I kind of – I feel like I'm the bad guy.

Laurel's motivation for her social involvement was to bring about change, which she believed happened through a commitment to service. Yet she continued to struggle with feeling like the "bad guy" in the circles in which she was in the minority as a White person, and she felt that perhaps she should just give to charity rather than do service work. She seems to be stuck in some ways, as she is not completely comfortable in the diverse service organization in which she volunteered, but also was no longer comfortable with her White peer group when discussing social issues.

Positive influence of University: Exposure to White privilege. In addition to the influence of the University setting, and having diverse friends and volunteer opportunities, seven of the women commented specifically on the concept of White

privilege. This concept was very instrumental in helping the women make connections between their race and their political and social beliefs and actions.

Josefina, who we discussed above, embraced the concept of White privilege when she continued in her interview by stating that being White allowed her to be an activist, while others with less privilege may not have had that same opportunity. Her realization arose out of a discussion on the project where she volunteers. The discussion began with someone stating that “everyone can be an activist.” As the conversation progressed, another person stated “I don’t think everyone’s an activist. I think that there are people who can afford to be, and people who have to be.” This statement made a lasting impression on Josefina, who believed that being White, and the privileges that it provided, put her in the category of someone who can afford to be an activist, but did not have to be.

Josefina: No, I feel like I’m definitely someone who can afford to be an activist. So and I think that has to do with growing up in an environment where I could, to an extent speak my mind, and be an athlete. And I had jobs growing up, but that was my spending or my saving money for college. It wasn’t, like, to support my family, or to buy my own clothes, or my own food, or anything like that. So I had the means, and I still have the means. And my parents are paying for half of college, but I still owe them a lot of money from not paying half of it as fast as they are. You know, I have time to an extent that I don’t have any children. I don’t have, like, other commitments outside of things that I commit myself to. Not being a person of color, I think affects me, like, every single day, just in the way that people relate to you and the opportunity you’re given.

Josefina believed that the many privileges she was afforded growing up, and continues to experience in her college years, allow her to take action and be involved. She does not have to face the same outside pressures that might interfere with her ability to take social and/or political action.

Paige shared Josefina's perspective that having certain privileges as a White person made her want to help others that might not have the same privileges. She believed her social science classes helped her learn about White privilege, and found the article *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh especially "eye-opening" in realizing and understanding her White privilege. She then discussed how realizing her White privilege motivated her toward community service.

Paige: But I think like it makes me want to like help some of that injustice and help it some through my community service and things like that, and help – like in the summer, like help some people that will be like African American or something, and you know that like they just don't have some of the privileges and things that like somebody that was White might or things like that. And so I think it – I think it affects just because like I can see more of the injustices, and I can see more of like what I have as a White person in society. . . . And so that like if I have them, then I should be able to like help other people that don't have them type of thing. And it also makes me want to – like if I'm thinking about like in the future, like it makes me want to like help some of the people that are less privileged. . . . I don't know how much I can or can't do to help like equal them out or anything, but like at least like try or be aware that those people might be more in need than like somebody that's White. But they also like might not. But just like be aware that like those injustices are in the world. Be open to, you know, helping in that way if that's what like I'm supposed to do.

I: So you said that you're kind of – you became even more aware of that in college. So some of that sounded like it happened through the class that you had.

Paige: Right

I: Are there experiences in particular that were important in helping you kind of realize that?

Paige: I think I kind of realized like just being here at the university and looking around. You know what I mean? Like if you look around, like it's – I mean like, yes, a lot of our country is White, but there is a lot of other ethnicities in this country, and we're at one of the best universities, and this is a – I mean, like there's a lot of other ethnicities, but this is a majority White university, you know. And I think I can look around – I think you can look around at almost any other really good university, and I think you find a lot of the same things.

I: So noticing that it's still majority White even though there's –

Paige: Right. So I think that is eye-opening because I'm like, "It's not like there's like, you know, African American or Asian or – like people in this United States. Like there's a lot of them, but they're just not here."

Once Paige had her "eyes opened" to the world of inequalities based on race, she also felt that she needed to help out and be involved. She also showed she had a more nuanced understanding of White privilege, as she had realized that while some African Americans may be more in need, others might not. She learned this through exposure to the concept of White privilege while in a class, and also by observing the lack of diversity at the University. It is interesting that unlike the women discussed earlier in this chapter, who stated that the University's diverse student body was influential in their growth, Paige notes that the University's relative lack of diversity helped her realize that racial inequalities still exist. All of these realizations have motivated her to be involved and to be aware that inequities do exist.

Jenny also felt she enjoyed the benefits of White Privilege, and discussed how this may have affected her decision regarding her major. Jenny was an anthropology major, and discussed the influence of her race in detail during the interview. She began by acknowledging the overall influence of being White on her decision regarding her major.

Yeah, I enjoy the benefits from certain things because of racism. It influences where I'm at, and who I am. I don't necessarily like it, but that's just how, you know, I guess some things are. I don't know. . . you know, maybe that's why I started going into anthropology is because I have some sort of guilt that I'm this White woman. So I want to study these other cultures and, I don't know, make sure there's some equality.

Jenny states that the White guilt that resulted from her realization that she enjoys certain privileges from being White may have been instrumental in her decision to be an anthropology major. Jenny went on to state that she often talks with others about how boring it is to be a White person, which is why she likes to read about other cultures and

other people. When asked what it was about the White culture she thought was boring, she stated, “I guess that it’s just the fact that other people are different and I like comparing people.” Clearly, Jenny does not see the same diversity in the White culture as she sees in other cultures.

Virginia also felt like her classes were instrumental in helping her realize that discrimination still exists, and that she has many privileges in being White. Her classes, in combination with her intentionally attending a predominantly Asian church, helped her realize the role and importance of White privilege.

I think I realized just being White that I do have a lot more privilege than African Americans, and through different classes here – I took a Race and Ethnicity class, and I was astonished by so many acts of discrimination that still go on. And even reading about the African American middle class and just in general like I just don’t have an understanding of like walking into a store and being judged right away and just as – “Oh, are they gonna steal something?” – or having to speak for my race. Like no one comes up to me and says, “Okay, as a White person, what do you think about this issue?” you know? And even at my church, I’m a minority. I go to a mostly Asian church, and I feel like that’s even opened up my eyes to White privilege or just like difference between – I don’t know – just seeing how it is a White world.

I: That experience in the church specifically you feel like – how does that contribute?

Virginia: I think just experiencing being an outsider, in a sense – like everyone at my church, they do a pretty good job with like they don’t speak Korean or Japanese or Chinese that much around me or like either in service. But definitely if we’re hanging out or going bowling, and I’m like the one token Caucasian person or – you know. There’s a lot of cultural differences with me, different things, and I’m just like, “Wow!” Like, I’ve never been the one who’s on the outside. So that experience at that church really just blew my mind. Like, “Wow! This is how it’s like for a lot of African Americans,” or my friends who are Asian, or my international students just coming in and not being able to relate in the same way and not being able to have that connection. It’s definitely been harder to make those relationships and to feel comfortable, and still I still feel uncomfortable at times. And it’s really made me realize – like, “Wow!”

Virginia's experience in her race and ethnicity class, and her involvement in a predominantly Asian church, was formational in helping her understand White privilege and relating to those who may be a minority in a majority setting. Her decision to stay in a setting in which she is a racial minority, which is uncomfortable at times, allows her to relate to her friends and to the international students in the group in which she volunteers.

Megan M. brought a unique perspective to those who discussed White privilege, as she connected it to reverse discrimination that she believed existed at the University. She believed that being White "probably provided me with many more opportunities, but not of any merit", and she appreciated that the privileges of being White played less of a role at the University than in the "real world." But she also believed reverse discrimination existed at the University.

I: Well, since it seems like White privilege has been a topic . . . what ways have you thought about that working in your life?

Megan M.: I guess just that when you check the box that correlates to your race, people take that into consideration, but I think that it can work against you too. At least, like, it's the reverse discrimination I've heard a lot of at the University. A lot of kids complain about that if you're White there's no group for you, you know what I mean? It's not like some activist group for you. There's no, like, White male club. And since culturally, like, other groups have their – celebrate their culture or their ethnicity or whatever, it's not like your heritage – my great-grandparents came from Serbia – that really affects me. I think that in terms of, like, scholarships and being selected to be a part of groups or even different jobs on campus, there is some reverse discrimination. And, like, I even know with the R.A. hiring process that they'll flat-out say kind of behind closed doors because it's definitely not something that would be condoned in public is, "Why'd so and so get the job? Oh, because they're a minority. Why did so and so not get the job? Oh, because they're White." I mean, they need to meet the quota. . . . but I think that that's kind of not exactly the best strategy either because instead of, like, turning away people that are equally qualified – like, this might happen in the real world more so in accordance with race or whatever – but definitely people are selected that maybe don't care as much. Or, "Hey, free room and board? I'm a minority. I'll apply for that and just not really do anything." Like that's definitely happened. I mean, there are people that have flat-out said that's what they've done, so that's not even an assumption. That's too bad.

While Megan M. believed that White privilege existed, when asked how it affected her life personally, she actually discussed how reverse discrimination existed at the University. She believed that hiring to “meet the quota” was not a good strategy, and that some individuals who may not care as much, sometimes take positions from equally qualified majority individuals who applied for those positions.

White privilege and identity issues were clearly one way in which some of the women experienced the standpoint of their race. It is of interest that while some the women interviewed did connect their racial identity to their gender and/or beliefs on social issues, none of the women connected their racial identity with their faith or religious identity. Perhaps the diverse culture at the University made them aware of how being White might affect social and political issues, but it does not appear that the faith organizations in which the women were involved were addressing the role of being White as it might affect an individual’s faith development.

Multiple Identities: Race, gender and religious identities.

While many women felt that their race or gender influenced their perspective on social and/or political beliefs and actions, few combined or addressed the pull or complexity of multiple identities. The few that did discuss multiple identities raised the complexities of how to work through the issues, especially if some have majority identities and minority identities working together.

Allison was one of the women who discussed how she had grown up in a very White, Christian community, so coming to the University was an “eye opener to different cultures, different people.” Allison’s comments are especially interesting as she comments on both her racial and her religious identities.

Like when I was growing up, you know I just kind of considered all my friends, we were all like Christian, you know, we were like White Christians. Coming here, my first friends that I made, my roommate is sort of borderline atheist, another girl down my hall is Jewish, and another girl down my hall is like, she's from, her family's from Vietnam so they're kind of Buddhists. So I made these very different friends from what I was used to growing up and it's strange how I like made friends with them. But I think coming to Michigan has opened my eyes to even like different cultures that I want to learn about, and so being White, I guess, like, it's – eh, it's hard sometimes. Because just from growing up in the White community I still feel like, I felt like that's such a bubble and so it's very hard to get to like learn about other people and sometimes to branch out from that. . . . And so I think just, I even think like, my ability to make friends with people from other cultures, it's just something I would never do, like –

I: Before coming to the University?

S: Yeah, before coming to the University. So I think doing that has, like, probably opened up my eyes to more of the world and probably like the issues around the world than ever I thought of living in my little bubble.

Allison believed her exposure to the diversity at the University helped her branch out from what she perceived to be her White Christian bubble. By making diverse friends, Allison believed that she had a better understanding of global issues, which can be assumed to be issues beyond the White, Christian culture she discussed. But Allison also acknowledges that it was still difficult to depart from this White Christian perspective, which continued making it hard for her to branch out.

Layla presented the most complex discussion of the intersection of racial and gender identity. When asked if gender affected her political beliefs and how she thought about issues, she responded that at first she felt that White women would often hide behind their gender identity, so they would not have to acknowledge their racial identity.

Layla: If I'm talking about my gender because I feel like sometimes, White women especially in, 'cause I've done a lot of working, I guess, mediating discussion groups about gender identity, racial identity and I found that a lot of the times White women were hiding behind their gender to sort of deny other privileges, namely their race. So I sort of rejected that for a while, the idea that my, I guess I rejected gender and equality, not that I didn't believe that it didn't

exist but the more that I thought it was kind of getting in the way of getting to deeper issues which I sort of –

I: So it might be secondary to the racial –

Layla: Yeah and I sort of reconciled that, realizing that you don't pick and choose, you know. Everybody has a different kind of privilege and you just have to recognize your obstacles and your privileges and figure how to, figure out where to go from there.

I: Can you tell me how you reconciled that? I mean how did that happen?

Layla: I guess I really had rejected it until last year. I took a women's studies class because it was feminisms of the African-American Diaspora, so I thought it would be more about race and it ended up being more about gender.

And I guess one thing the professor talked about was how black women feel excluded from the feminism of men which I understand but also that White women sometimes give black men a pass for being sexist or, you know, oppressive towards women because they're, because of their race.

And so I thought maybe I was doing that and so I realized that you need to see the whole, huge picture privilege before you can really do anything about it, you know. You can't deny one aspect or another, so I'm still working on that.

While Layla had been involved in, and actually led, many discussions on the influence of race and gender, she initially believed that issues of race should be primary for White women. After taking a women's studies course, she began to address that individuals have multiple identities at work within themselves, and that in order to move forward, you need to recognize your own multiple obstacles and privileges from these intersecting identities.

Later in her interview, Layla also commented on how realizing her White privilege helped her get involved in some of the social action groups she had discussed, once she had worked through some of the guilt she felt about her privilege.

Layla: But White privilege is something that has really helped me be more involved in, I guess, antiracist work because you, I think that you can't do those things without coming to terms with your own privilege and your own identity, so

I guess it was more of a stepping stone, but it was never a motivator. If anything, it was an obstacle because you have to deal with a lot of guilt if you really want to. . .

I: Hm. Say more about that, yeah.

Layla: If you, I guess you really have to admit that sometimes you're gonna be racist and sometimes, you know, that nobody is immune to, I guess, our system of racial assignment. I've been told a lot of things about people of color. I've been told a lot of things about gay people and I'm gonna internalize some of those things and that my obligation is more to just notice that and, because I think feeling guilty about it is debili, what is the word I'm looking for?

I: Debilitating?

Layla: Debilitating, yeah (she laughs). And, yeah, it's debilitating. You can't do anything if you're busy feeling guilty about it 'cause I think that you avoid, naturally you'll avoid those issues so as not to feel like you're being blamed and so it's not that I have take responsibility for an entire race and the entire system of oppression but I have to understand my role in it and the gains that I've had because of it and not, you know, I'm here partially because I'm White. . . I don't have to feel guilty about it but I have to sort of use that privilege that I've gained and give a little back, I guess.

Layla believed that understanding the privileges she had from being White was a "stepping stone", or foundation, for her understanding that she needed to give back. She felt that instead of getting stuck in feelings of guilt, she needed to examine her role in the privileges that still exist.

Layla went on to further examine the connection between her racial and gender identity by stating it was "harder to be a feminist than it is to be antiracist in terms of the way people see you." She stated there were negative connotations to being a feminist.

I: You don't feel like those same connotations are there if you choose to work on racial justice issues as opposed to gender?

Layla: Well, as a White woman, less so. I think there are different stigmas which maybe I can deal with a little better than being, I guess honestly because being a feminist is stigmatized as being unattractive to men and so I think it's harder as a woman to put yourself out there as something that will push guys away, which is like a sad thing to say, as someone who wants to be a feminist.

But, yeah, in a different way and I think that being involved as a White woman in racial justice does have stigmas of being naïve and, I don't know, sort of, it seems, I think some people think of it as a little silly and I guess a goody-goody. I don't know. I don't know how else to put it (she laughs). But, yeah, the feminist thing is, I think it's harder to be something as a woman if it isolates men, to be honest.

Layla believed there were negative connotations to being active in fighting racial and gender injustices, but she would rather be seen as naïve and a little silly than as unattractive and against men. These perceptions of both her racial and gender identities have affected her involvements, in that she has focused on addressing racial injustices rather than gender injustices.

Virginia also combined her racial and gender identity when asked how her gender might affect her beliefs or actions. Like Layla, she struggled with how her gender identity might affect her, versus her racial identity.

Virginia: I think it does – yeah, I feel like everyone has different privileges and different ways that we're discriminated against, and that we also feed into discriminating in others. And as a woman, I can see different areas where I benefit over African American women as a White woman. And also – but in the same sense, not being oppressed as a woman compared to men, but different – I don't know – different – not necessarily discrimination as a woman, but not as many opportunities or just differences there. But I guess that just brings in a different view, as I'm working with Detroit Project, or as I'm working at the Delonis Center.

I: Can you say how you think it's different?

Virginia: I don't – I don't know. I personally don't feel very oppressed as a woman – as a White woman, and that aspect of social justice I haven't felt as – like, yes, we need to fight for women's rights. But I think it's still an area where we could see more equality – in the education system, in different curriculum and like see more writings of women. I don't know, though.

In this passage, Virginia struggles with the intersection of her minority gender and majority racial identities. Virginia clearly feels that her experience as a woman and the

inequities that might still exist for women (educational system, not as many opportunities) are different than, and perhaps less important than, the discrimination women of color may experience. Personally, she has not experienced gender discrimination, and does not feel the same need to “fight for women’s rights” as she does to fight racial discrimination.

Thea also discussed the intersection of her racial, religious and gender identities, which she realized through her involvement in an African American studies class. She was the only White Christian woman in the class and there was one other White Christian man. In this class, those of a majority identity were called “agents”, and those of minority identities were called “targets.” Through this class, Thea connected her feelings of being a women, or “agent” identity, to relate to what those in the racial minority, or “target” identity, might be feeling.

But it was really interesting to be in the minority because all of the sudden you realize – I don’t really break myself down that much or I try very hard not to like look around me and be, like, “Hmm, there are two black people in this class. I wonder how many of these people are Jewish?” because that’s weird. But in that situation it was, like, “Wow. I’m completely in the minority. No one else in this room thinks like I do about these things because no one else has ever been – they call them – agents and –targets. No one else has ever been in the agent in two, because White and Christian, and then female in the other, so all the sudden you’re the target. And it was funny because I had thought – I don’t think that much about racism. And I don’t think that much about anti-Semitism except as it comes into my studies in German. But I think a lot about sexism and how I feel like people are sexist; even women are sexist. And I think a lot about that, and it was, like, “Wow, that’s probably really bad. Like, probably I should try and think how they were thinking, and think about if I was the black person, and I was walking down the street and a White girl crossed the street when she saw you,” which I don’t – I’ve never done. But if that happened, like, how does that affect you?

Thea could use her strong connection to her gender identity to then identify and examine what those of other agent identities might be experiencing. She then went on to discuss

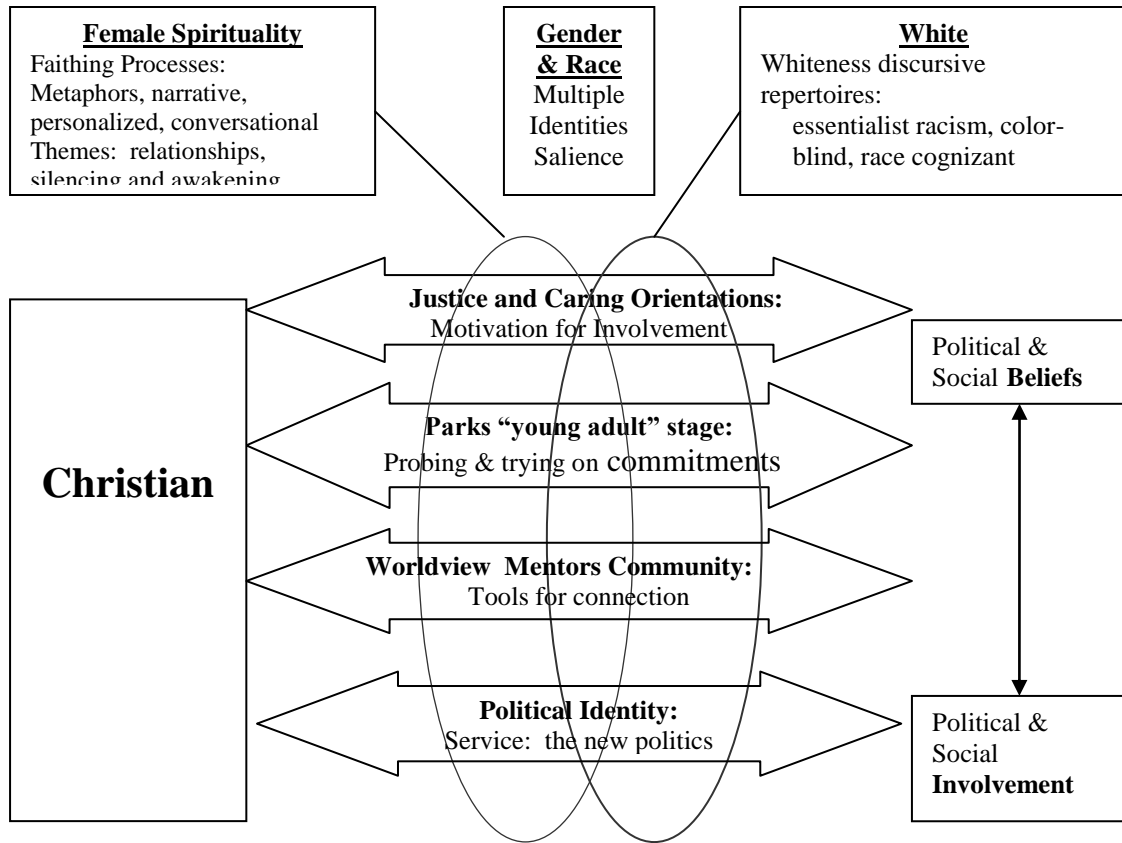
how this has motivated her to try to seek out racially diverse friends. They were discussing at her InterVarsity group how to have friends from other races without tokenizing them. She was “looking for people who wouldn’t mind being friends, and with whom I have things in common other than race, because I don’t think that race is something that we often think of as having in common.” She was doing this by becoming involved in a gospel choir and working with an international student ministry.

The results related to how, or if, the women interviewed thought that gender or race affected how they made connections suggest that women felt the salience of their race more than that of their gender. This is surprising, as the identity literature would suggest that their target or minority status identity of being a woman would hold more salience than that of an agent identity of being White. While many of the woman could connect the influence of being a women to the topic of abortion, few connected being a woman to influencing their political or faith identities. More of the women interviewed expressed their struggles with their White identity and White privilege, and a few expressed the influence of multiple identities. The following chapter will examine how the results presented in Chapters four and five support, and also challenge, the original conceptual framework created for this dissertation.

Chapter 6: Discussion of a New Model for Connection

The main findings from the interviews conducted for this dissertation demonstrate ways in which some of the women connected their faith with their political and social beliefs and actions. Many of these connections were initially presented in the conceptual framework for this dissertation, yet there were also many ways in which the model did not fit the research findings. As a reminder, the original conceptual framework presented for this dissertation is below (Figure 3). This chapter will examine the ways in which the findings of this research support this initial model, and findings that may be missing or different from the original framework.

Figure 3: Original Conceptual Framework



When examining the original conceptual framework, the results of this dissertation support many previous findings, yet also raise new suggestions and questions as to how the women made connections. Because of the complexity created by the multiple constructs grounding this dissertation, the results will be presented in multiple figures rather than trying to capture them all together.

Justice and Caring Orientations Motivate toward Action

The first arrow from the original framework stated that the women may exhibit either a justice, caring or justice and caring orientation as a possible motivation for connecting their faith with their beliefs and involvements, based on the moral development literature. This proved to be true, as the women interviewed discussed their

motivation for being involved in both service and politics as wanting to help others, while also working for justice. Of the women interviewed for this dissertation who made a connection between their Christian faith and some sort of service or community involvement or action, some expressed this connection from an ethic of care perspective, while others expressed a combination of care and justice perspectives. For the women that expressed a care and justice orientation as connecting with their faith, the concept of social justice was a central concept that moved them toward action. Figure 4 outlines one of the major ways women in this study made connections between their faith and actions.

Figure 4: Concept of social justice moves women of faith to action



Some of the women already discussed how they became involved in service as serving other people and developing individual relationships of care (Megan, Leah and Abby). While the women's actions were primarily focused on caring for the individual, they also felt that this caring was a way to give back to the community.

In addition to those women quoted in chapter four, Leah also shares that her motivation to be involved as a peer mentor and to work at a children's hospital is that that they provide her with a way to care for and serve others. When asked if her faith connected to commitments, she indicated that by caring for others, she is enacting her faith.

I feel like the way I go about things, I don't know if it's a direct relationship, but absolutely I feel like it's important to give back to the community. I feel like it's important to care about others, so I feel like in that way it has been influential. I don't know if there's certain things that is my faith says this, so I do that. But I feel like it's been more fulfilling to help others and to feel like in some way I'm serving God by serving other people.

Paige further expands on this theme by discussing how her service is directly connected to her faith through the core Christian value of helping others. When asked if her community service connected to her faith she said "I think it directly relates". When asked to say more about this, she again expressed a strong ethic of caring for others as central.

I feel very strongly that as a Christian you are called to like help people, and you're called – I mean, you're called to share your faith with people. But you're also called to like treat people the best way you can and help them in any way you can.

For the women above, the ethic of care as outlined in Gilligan's theory (1988, 1993) is strongly supported. Gilligan found that women often developed morally along the spectrum of caring for themselves, to caring for others, and moving to caring for themselves and others. For some of the women interviewed for this study, their faith did provide a motivation or connection to act out this caring for others in addition to caring for themselves.

Yet others of those interviewed expressed an ethic of caring and justice as discussed in the work of Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004). For these women, the concept of social justice was strongly associated with how they enacted their faith. Many of them became involved in a service project, mission trip, or took a course which helped them "see" or understand inequities or injustices. As part of these experiences, they often had a peer, professor, mentor, or trip leader that helped them examine these inequities at

the societal level. These relationships caused the women to care for the individual, but also to be moved to address larger societal issues or injustices. The concept of social justice was a key way that the women operating from an ethic of care and justice connected their involvements to their faith.

Allison, who was discussed earlier, brought up the role of her Bible study leader as getting her involved in service to others, but also incorporated that concept of wanting to bring justice to the community:

My Bible study leader my freshman year was really, um, really had a heart for like service and doing stuff. That was the girl who actually started Mission Serve about going to Detroit and stuff. And she said, I think it was like justice without justification is, like, not – like bringing justice to people without, just like bringing justice to people without, just bringing comfort to them for this life isn't, I mean that'll bring them comfort for a short amount of time, but if you don't give them Christ that's not going to, you know, it's not going to like help eternally or anything. So you can bring them justice, but if you have no justification for why you're doing that or what is the really heart behind that.

For Allison, the concept of bringing justice in addition to meeting their immediate physical needs was a new concept shared by a Bible study leader. This was Allison's first model of integrating an ethic of care and justice together as connected to her faith.

When talking about an immersion experience about Darfur, Virginia said the experience helped her learn so much, but the two peers that she talked to during the weekend helped her feel “very inspired and empowered by them to kind of try to bring in more social justice on campus.” She also had to volunteer for a sociology class and chose to go to a homeless shelter. After this experience, she began to think through the lack of social justice outreach opportunities in Campus Crusade.

I've personally had – been upset, in a sense. I've not seen as much social justice through Campus Crusade and as many outreaches, and I think it's more of like me seeing it and then seeing avenues to meet those needs through getting my small group involved or – in the community. . . . But I think just because I've been

involved with like Detroit Project or other organizations, too, or just my own motivation, and studying the Scriptures that do talk about God's heart for the lost and like personal Bible studies and personal just growth in the word and prayer. And realizing that this is the heart of God and somewhere where I'm – I need to actively move – yeah, as part of my faith and not just share my faith with people, but show them and like make a difference. And it shouldn't just be other people. But I mean, I would – I think the church and Christians in general need to be more active in the community and more active in meeting people's needs and ending social injustice. And yeah – more people involved with students taking action.

After her various immersion experiences and processing with peers, Virginia has incorporated a justice and caring ethic through the concept of social justice. She wants to take a more active role in ending the injustices she sees, and wants to do this as an outgrowth of her faith, which she felt was lacking in the Campus Crusade model.

Sara also felt that social justice was lacking from the Campus Crusade organization. She had been on a service trip to Africa that was not lead by a faith organization, and returned with an understanding of the inequities in the world's resources.

And then even I guess this is kind of where the social justice part will come in a little bit is that we have 80% of the world's resources, or 20% of the people have 80% of the world's resources and 80% of the people have 20% of the resources. And I just think there's no reason for that and so that was a little bit about this trip, not that we brought people anything. We didn't bring masses of food or anything, although we did leave a lot of peanut butter. It became really important to me to meet people's needs while preaching the gospel and those things should be together and not separated.

I: So do you feel like there are ways in which you do that here now that you're back in the States?

Sara: Well, no, probably not as much. That's the thing with Campus Crusade actually, is it's not really, there's nothing like social justice at all. And so I've been looking for other opportunities, like maybe homeless shelters

Here again, Sara went on the trip originally to care for others and came back with a sense of the injustices of the world's resources. Like Virginia, she now wants to be able to

connect her faith perspective with finding a way to bring justice in the world, but has to seek ways to do this outside of her involvement in Campus Crusade.

Olivia is the student interviewed who became strongly involved in the Stonewall Democrats. She stated that she began this involvement because a friend invited her. She then began to read the literature of the club and talked to a friend who graduated with a degree in sociology and a minor in inter-group relations. As a result, she “started looking at Democrat stuff and Stonewall Democrat stuff especially and realized this is sort of where my feelings actually aligned and this is what I really think should be happening in the world.” When asked if her involvement in the group connected with her faith, she also brought up the concept of social justice.

There's this whole emerging church movement of these Rob Bell types that I don't necessarily agree with them on all their points, but they're definitely into social justice, and they're showing the world that Christians do care about the world, which I think is one of the big things that ties my involvement with social justice into my faith. The Bible says like feed the widow, take care of the poor. "Whatever you've done to the least of these, you're doing to me." That's – I mean, it's pretty explicit. Jesus isn't messing around when he says that sort of stuff.

So, that was sort of like I've been living my whole life as this Christian, but I've only been caring about my Christian faith. I don't care about the world. I don't care – not that I don't care, but those kids starving in Uganda or whatever it is like, "Uh, doesn't really affect me." More and more I've been thinking about it, especially the last couple of years. That it does affect me and the world should affect me. Jesus cares about it, so I should.

Olivia sees social justice as related to her faith because it connects an ethic of caring for the poor and the widow (a reference to a specific verse in the Bible), and also caring about the world and getting involved to try and make a difference. Through her experiences and her peers, she sees things beyond those that simply affect her directly to those that affect the larger community.

Coley was perhaps the student who had the most to say about the concept of social justice. She described herself as a “social justice freak”, and used the term often to describe her various involvements in the community. Because it was such a central theme to her interview, I asked her why social justice was important to her.

Well, because that’s what Jesus calls us to do. . .I’ve always had this feeling in here that, um, social justice, that basically drives me to do anything social justice. You know good things, helping people in basically whatever way you can. I mean that’s really what social justice boils down to in my mind. . .

Coley goes on to state:

So my idea of social justice is, see I’m really about big ideas and stuff, but I would say it’s just spreading the love. And then you could see that as spreading the money, spreading the resources, spreading privilege, wiping out oppression.

I: . . how you’re defining social justice, right? Does that connect to your faith commitment in your mind? I think originally you said it did.

Coley: Well, yeah, it does. I mean they’re one and the same.

Coley presents perhaps the clearest connection between her faith and the ethic of care and justice as embodied in the concept of social justice. She is involved in various homeless ministries and work with international students. She sees this as helping others, but also as working toward spreading resources, privilege, and getting rid of oppression, which are concepts more closely tied to justice.

The women discussed above, who connected the ethic of care and justice to the concept of social justice, support the thesis of Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004) and Noddings (1999) who postulate that further work needs to be done to allow for both of these worldviews to be expressed in the moral development literature. Arguably, work should also examine how to bring these two moral orientations together in spiritual development literature. The fact that the women interviewed expressed both caring and

justice orientations highlights a gap in the previous research literature on women's faith development. These orientations are primarily discussed within the moral development literature and have not been integrated well into faith development models.

Yet, the women who did make connections connected their desire to care for and seek justice for others with the main values of their Christian faith. Neither the work of Slee (2004) nor Parks (2000) discusses working toward social justice as a main theme that was important to the women they interviewed. This may be because they were working with majority samples, as Slee did express that a sense of justice was discussed by the few women of color she interviewed (p. 77). Yet the sample for this dissertation was made up of White students, and many of them connected their faith to issues of justice. Overall, justice was not a major theme from the women Slee interviewed. Perhaps the context of interviewing women at a university that emphasized the values of diversity, and being exposed to the concept of social justice through course work, might have influenced the way that women made connections and how they expressed their faith.

Growing in Christian Community: Parents, Peers, small groups and mentoring communities

Most of the women interviewed for this study were involved in some sort of Christian church or student organization. The findings support that initially the women sought out these organizations because they wanted to be with others in community. Emily wanted to "meet quality people" and "find some honest people to be friends with". Paige wanted a community that would provide a "strong base" that she could "live life with", and that would challenge and support her spiritually. Virginia became involved in

Campus Crusade for Christ her freshman year as “ a way to meet Christians, which was good because I felt pretty lonely in the dorm – felt like I was the only Christian there.” In addition to the women already discussed, Becca shared that she was looking for a “Christian home”, and found that in the Greek InterVarsity group that she joined. And Courtney really loved the small groups of Young Life because it was “nice to have a sisterhood of believers.”

This desire to be in Christian community supports the work of Parks (2000) as her model suggests that how individuals are in community is an important element of spiritual development. She stated that as individuals grow in their faith, they move from “being in community with those that are broadly similar to us, to multiple groups representing various perspectives, to mentoring groups of ideologically compatible groupings” (Parks, 1986, p. 95). The women interviewed represented all of these stages of being in community. The fact that the women often found Christian community in Christian student organizations and local churches supports some of the findings from Parks regarding the “young adult” stage. The women wanted to be with others who shared the same values, to help them as they probed or examined their beliefs and began to develop their own sense of what they believed, outside of previous authorities like their parents and pastors. It might also be argued that some of the women interviewed were more in the “tested adult” phase, as they were part of multiple peer groups representing their faith, and social and political beliefs, so they were working to integrate the various perspectives represented in each “community.”

The women above described their initial desire to be involved as a desire for relationship and then went on to describe getting involved in small groups as the most

influential part of their spiritual involvements. Only one of the women interviewed discussed the influence of the larger church, or large group meetings of Christian student organizations as influential in her faith development. It was clearly the influence of her small group and the mentors and peers in these groups that were important to the women interviewed.

One of the key expectations some of the women had for these relationships and small groups is that they would hold them accountable for living a Christian life at the University. Some of the women referenced wanting to be held accountable regarding drinking (Olivia and Abby), while others like the community because they didn't like to drink and found that they could be with Christians who didn't drink and could still be social (Abby and Tristan). The role of having accountability in Christian relationships was not a major theme in the previous literature and would deserve more investigation.

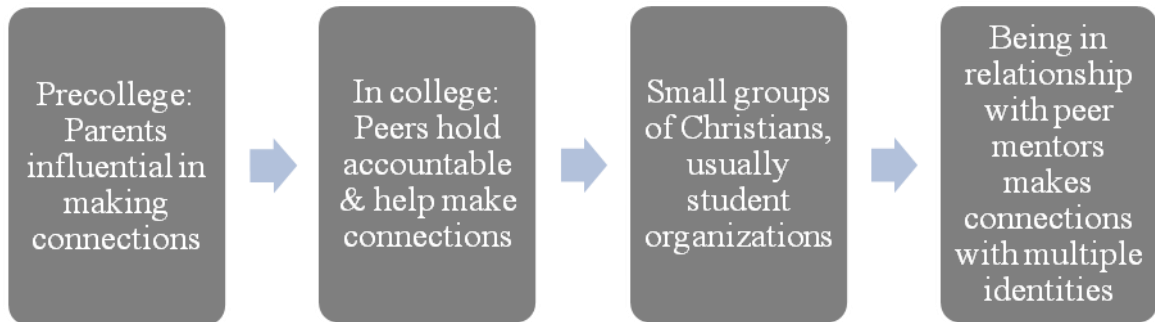
Perhaps the need to have peers keep them accountable to their faith is more prominent for Christian women on a secular campus. The context of the large, secular campus on which the interviews took place was named by many of the women as being influential, both positively and negatively. When discussing what the women needed to be held accountable, it appears that they wanted support to not participate in the level of drinking and sexual activity that may be normalized on a large, secular college campus. A further area of research might include interviews with college women on a Christian college campus to examine if the role of accountability provided by peers would rise as prominent in their spiritual development. That is not to say that drinking alcohol or engaging in sexual activity does not occur on Christian campuses, but the social pressures

to make these choices would most likely not be as strong. Or perhaps, women would express the need to be held accountable to other choices or beliefs.

Peers and Parents are Important in Making Connections

As expected from the spiritual development literature discussed (Garber, 2007; Parks, 2000; Slee, 2004), relationships in women's spiritual development were seen as important by many of the women in how they made connections. Figure 5 outlines the various relationships that the women found important in making connections.

Figure 5: Relationships help women make connections between their faith and their political and social beliefs and actions



Before coming to college, the women stated that the most influential relationships were with their parents, after whom they often modeled how to live out their spiritual commitments. For the women that made connections between their faith and their social or political beliefs, often these connections were initially modeled and encouraged by their parents before they came to college. The women interviewed did share more examples of parents who made connections between their spiritual beliefs and their social beliefs and actions as opposed to political beliefs and actions.

The theme of relationality found by Slee (2004) and the work of other feminist theologians (Cook, 1994; Cooney, 1985; Devor, 1989; Ierardi, 1990) is also supported in

these findings, as the women went on to describe the various relationships that helped them make connections in their faith. Slee's findings support the important role that parental figures, mentors, friends, and partners played in the spiritual development of the women she interviewed. She found that one of the main faithing processes she encountered from the interviews was "personalised [sic] faithing" which she defined as "the way in which faith was articulated by reference to human exemplars" (p. 70). Slee found that the women found individuals that became a "concrete incarnation of an ideal around which the person's core values crystallized and cohered" (p. 71). The findings from this dissertation support that women looked to parents as their early examples of how to live out their faith but also modeled how to live their political and social commitments.

Twenty-one of the women brought up that their parents were influential in their development in some way. As presented earlier, Layla discussed how her parents modeled their social beliefs, which affected her later political beliefs.

They're very politically active and so I'd watch them watch the news and react to things. It wasn't like they ever sat me down and had a talk with me, "This is the way things should be." But I guess I just took after them and they taught me values and that sort of automatically translated into political beliefs.

Coley discussed how her father influenced her later dedication to social justice.

So he taught us about the Native Americans and he brought us to some, like, lecture thing that was, or maybe it was some hearings for the Native American tribes for getting their rights and their equal treatment. I just remember going to that when I was little and kind of learned, okay, so here's, it was like a formal setting, here's professional people working for the rights of people who've been oppressed.

And Agnes discussed how her parents helped her understand how to put the tenants of her faith into action outside of church.

They made it [faith] real to me, I think. Like we could learn, like you could learn about hungry, you know, like feeding the hungry and being, you know, giving of yourself at church on Sunday morning but you didn't necessarily practice that during the week unless you were forced to, especially with a kid.

The comments from these three women exemplify the beliefs of the other women interviewed, that their parents were often influential in their early social, political, and faith development. Yet after coming to college, the role of peers became central to how they made connections.

Eighteen of the women interviewed stated that peers were influential in their development. Some of the women commented on how their peers helped them learn and were supportive. Some of the women discussed how their peer mentors made an impact by helping them make connections between their faith identities and social and political beliefs.

Virginia discussed the impact of talking with two women after an event to raise awareness regarding Darfur.

We just talked about all these different issues and how faith is involved in just talking with the two of them and realizing the importance. So like I can look back to that weekend and just be like, "Wow! I just learned so much," and was very inspired and empowered by them to kind of try to bring in more social justice on campus.

Josefina talked about four people she interacted with and stated that they were

. . .able to have this communication where we don't have to justify it to each other about what you're doing and why. It's like there, and it almost fills a need. . .So having even just a couple of people who get it, who you talk to on a regular basis, who are supportive and encouraging, I think is really essential. And I think that's definitely one thing that's kept me going, and, like, something that I'm aware of, that I have to continue to seek those kinds of alliances with people who are on that page.

Olivia, who was strongly involved in the Stonewall Democrats groups, shared how her friend helped her make the connection between her faith and her beliefs regarding gay rights.

He was one of the leaders in the Bible studies and debates when I was there. And he knew about social justice issues, and he knew how to tie them to church. So, I was like, "As a Christian can I really say this? What does the Bible say about this?"

Like Virginia, Olivia's relationship with a peer helped her bring two of her identities more in line with each other. While some of the women discussed how their Christian friends and their social justice friends were very separate (Allison and Layla), Olivia and Josefina found peers who were instrumental in their development. This supports the Cognitive development literature, which found that women value both learning styles, but often are *connected* (Belenky et al., 1992) and *interpersonal* (Baxter Magolda, 1992) learners, who learn through relationships with others more than by debating a topic.

These connections that the women find when they do make connections between their faith and their social or political beliefs might also be defined as an "awakening" experience, as found in the interviews conducted by Slee (2004). One of the defining features of what Slee defined as the pattern of "awakening" is that it is "marked by a sense of coming together or coherence of different parts of the self—inner and outer, 'secular' and 'religious', emotion and thought—acting in unity" (p. 134). The women who made these connections felt a sense of "power, vitality, energy and confidence" (p. 143) moving forward. The women interviewed for this study shared that these peer relationships helped them make connections, and were important in keeping them

involved in their faith, political and social action commitments. As such, it sounds like their times of connection could be defined as an “awakening”.

The concept of the “mentoring community” from the findings of Parks (2000) presents some interesting connections with the findings of this study. Parks suggests that students in the young adult phase may not grow spiritually just from one-on-one mentoring relationships. She suggests that a mentoring community is really what moves students to growth in their faith, as opposed to individual relationships. Parks believes:

It is the combination of the emerging developmental stance of the young adult with the challenge and encouragement of the mentor, grounded in the experience of a compatible social group that ignites the transforming power of the young adult era (p. 93).

Yet the examples Parks discusses involve mentors that are not peers with students. The findings from this study suggest that women do want a compatible social group, yet most of them discuss peer groups with perhaps a peer mentor as influential, rather than adult mentors, as Parks suggests in her work.

Coley did exemplify what Parks described as a mentoring community through her involvement in a local Methodist church. Coley stated that she started learning about Methodism her freshman year by attending a Sunday brunch with one of the women pastors.

So we went through that stuff again in a Sunday brunch with a woman named _____, who has become my mentor. And she taught us the basics of Methodism and I was like, wow, that’s great that these are the basics because, what do you know, I fit in perfectly and I happened to have been raised in this church.

I: So what parts did you feel like really resonated with you?

Coley: Social justice, service, the openness and the, you know, openness to questions and you can question things for yourself and seek those answers. And if you walk up to a Methodist pastor and you question something they’re not going to tell you to go kneel before the altar and ask for forgiveness for your sins because you’re asking something that’s just totally not supposed to be questioned.

Um, the small groups, I was like oh, John Wesley, you are very smart. Because the small group thing had worked for me.

Later, Coley discusses how the mentor would bring up issues of the day or articles in the paper about religion and have them discuss them together. This process helped further form her social values with her faith and become a “social justice freak”. When Coley is asked how the Sunday brunch has affected her, she stated:

I’ve learned how to reflect a lot from Cathy. Um –

I: On your own life? On others?

Coley: On my own life, my, like my goals and, um, my relationships with other people. Events too, um, yeah she’s very reflective and asks, you know, pointed questions. So that’s, that has affected my spiritual journey.

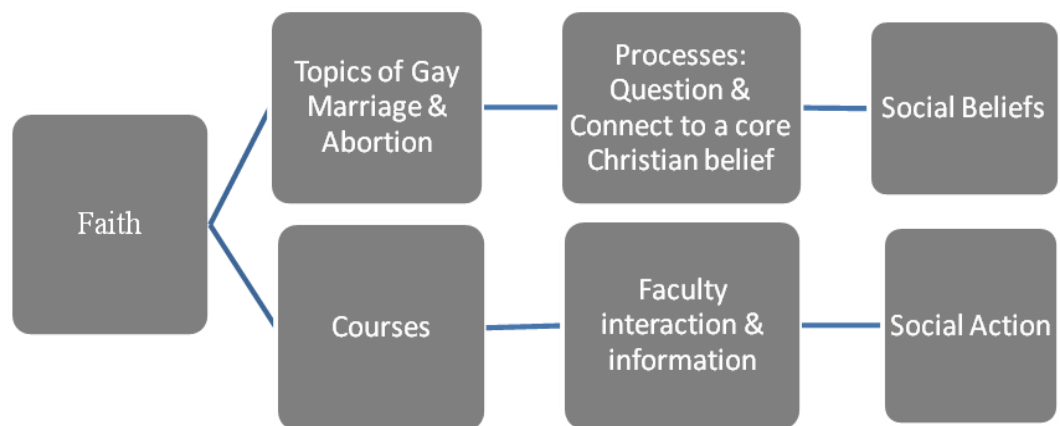
Coley is one of the few women who discussed the role of the larger community (Methodists) with the role of an individual mentor. Parks also presents the features of a mentoring community to include creating a network of belonging, asking “big-enough” and “Encounters with Otherness.” These habits of mind include dialogue, critical thought, contemplative mind, and connective-systemic-holistic thought (p. 144). These characteristics and habits of mind are almost spoken verbatim in the quote from Coley above, and will also be echoed in the sections below as being important processes that the women utilized in making connections.

When one utilizes the term of mentoring communities, small groups or mentors, the women interviewed for this study clearly valued and made connections through individual relationships that challenged and supported their faith and social beliefs.

Making Connections: Topics of Homoattractiveness and abortion, courses and processes

As discussed above, some students made connections through the concept of social justice, small groups and mentoring. But the women also made connections through their involvement in classes and through the topic of homoattractiveness. When participating in one of these activities or discussions, they would often utilize the processes of questioning and connecting to a core Christian belief to make meaning of the experience. These findings are summarized in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Additional ways of making connection: Topics, courses and processes



One finding from this study is that all of the women could state a connection between their faith beliefs and their social beliefs through a social issue, as all of the women had an answer for the question when asked to discuss one social issue they felt connected with their faith. An interesting finding of this study is the consistency with which the women answered this question. Homoattractiveness, specifically gay marriage, and abortion were discussed by 15 out of 24 women. This finding is interesting because there was variety in the political and social perspectives of the women interviewed. As such, it might be assumed that different issues would be brought up as

connecting to their faith. In addition, the majors and service involvements of the women varied greatly. Yet, the Christian women interviewed for this study continue to bring up homoattractiveness and abortion as the two main issues that they connect with their Christian faith. Their views varied on the topic, yet the fact that these two issues remained dominant needs further research consideration, as it indicates that there is a dominant narrative as to what the important social issues are that connect with Christian faith across the political and theological spectrum.

The topic of attractiveness orientation may act as a connector because it may have made their majority identity of being Christian actually be salient to the women. Discussing this topic on a secular campus may be one of the first times that they experienced that being a Christian may make a strong difference as to how they understand and view a topic, and influence the way others “see” them. Based on how many women brought up the topic as an issue that was influenced by their faith, it is clear that it has a strong connection between the women’s faith and their beliefs and actions.

For some of the women interviewed, they connected their faith with the topic of homoattractiveness, but it often brought conflict with others. This happened most often with the women who considered homoattractiveness to be a sin as defined by their Christian faith.

Allison: it’s a very touchy issue. I don’t like to touch it that much, but, because it’s hard because people are like, well you can be born gay and like all this and that. And it’s a hard issue to think about, but there’s definitely people at the University who you can’t say anything, like don’t say that you’re against that because, I don’t know. It’s a very, we try to be accepting of other people and like very diverse.

I: This is the University? That kind of the perspective?

Allison: Yeah, this is the University. So like if I say I'm against that, then like basically they think I'm not accepting of other people.

Allison struggles with the conflict between her religious identity and her social beliefs, which dictates that she should be accepting of all people. She believes she is, but feels that others will not perceive her as such because she is “against” gay marriage and homoattractiveness.

Emily also talked about the conflict she had between her religious beliefs, and her social beliefs or values of accepting others.

I'll hang out with people who I know who may be gay or lesbian, but like, so it's not like I stay away from those people. I'm very accepting of them, so that's what, but some people probably don't understand that if I would say I'm against gay marriage, then they would think that I'm against all gay people or something.

I: Well, specifically on those issues do you feel like faith informs kind of what you believe on those issues? So if you talk about gay marriage and abortion – Emily: Well, I mean, the Bible explicitly says that homosexuality is wrong, giving into those desires is wrong. But I think as Christians that's something that we're told not to focus on. In Matthew Jesus says like, "You fools, why are you asking questions about this? You should be focusing on this" and redirects them multiple times. I just feel like that's not our decision. I don't know. It's not our right to make those decisions for other people. It has to be a change in their hearts. The moment we make that decision for them, we've crossed a big line I feel.

Layla also struggles with the conflict of her faith beliefs when connected to homoattractiveness, but utilizes the process of prioritizing to define the topic as being of lesser importance.

But at the same time, the Bible does say it's a sin and so it's hard for me, and I started just talking about this with my friend who is really involved in gay activism and I was sort of like, “Well, you know, it's a sin but it's not that big of a deal.” And she was like, “Well, but you're still telling people their life's a sin,” and that's true.

So I haven't been able to reconcile that but I do really think that there are ways, like that that's too, that's more divisive than it needs to be, that there's no reason to form political beliefs over that one issue when we have, you know, millions of

people in this country suffering because of other, you know, issues and I, you know, God mentions poverty more than he mentions homosexuality.

These issues may have been of central importance to the students studied for this project because of the context of the large, secular institution. The campus where these students attended stressed diversity and has a large and active gay community. In fact, the office for LGBT students on campus was one of the first created in the United States. Also, during the time in which the women interviewed were at the university, the state in which the university resides passed a constitutional amendment banning same sex marriage and civil unions in the state. The debate about the amendment had been active on the campus. As such, the Christian students on this campus may have had to discuss, debate, or at least face this issue more than students on other campuses.

Processes: Questioning and connecting with a core Christian belief. When connecting their faith beliefs with social beliefs, some of the women utilized the process of questioning as a tool to make connections. Specifically, they questioned the translation and historical context of the Bible. Jenny continues with the theme above by connecting her faith with her beliefs about homoattractiveness. But she utilizes the process of questioning to come to a different conclusion than Layla and Emily.

Jenny: I've always thought that spirituality is strengthened by constant questioning, so I'm always questioning different things, and how I believe it. And I don't like to kind of take, like, beliefs, Christian belief at face value, but I like to question things a lot. So yeah, that's kind of the process of it for me.

I: Are there any examples, recently, or things that you've been kind of questioning or thinking through from that perspective?

Jenny: Well, I mean the issue of homosexuality has always been a question in my mind because, especially now, after taking classes in the – it's not the religion department. I can't think of the department's name, but I've taken the comparative religion course. It gives some historical context and . . . So like trying to get a historical context of – really important for me to think about what

these people who are writing the spiritual texts, what kind of life they were living. Yeah, that kind of thing.

Jenny values the process of questioning and even sought out a comparative religion course to aid her in this process.

Marina also believed understanding the historical context of homoattractiveness was important.

I guess I interpret, like, the message, the message of the Bible as true, the big picture, like grace and faith and heaven and love and all of those things and how you get to heaven and that he died and blah, blah, blah, but I don't think that necessarily because they thought that being gay in, you know, 2000 B.C. was a bad thing that right now it's a bad thing, that it's – like all those things don't necessarily translate to today, whereas some people feel as though all of these things that are in the Bible that were true then are true now, and those beliefs should stand. I don't necessarily feel that way.

Some of the other women also made connections by connecting their social beliefs to a core Christian belief, such as “life and love”, “treating others equally” or “feeding the hungry.” These women used this process to come to different, some may say more liberal, understandings of the connection between faith and controversial topics like homoattractiveness.

Olivia: I don't think that people should be treated unequally. My favorite book of the Bible is James, and in James it says if a man walks into your room wearing robes and fine jewelry and you offer him the best seat in your house and another man walks in wearing rags and you tell him to go sit over there on the floor that's not right. I think that's kind of what we're doing. You're a man and a woman, you're in love. You can get married. Go ahead. You're a man and a man. You're in love, but you can go sit over there in the corner and have your civil union. That just doesn't sit right with me.

Leah: I think that a lot of my political issues, my stance on political issues come back to my faith and the way that I feel that, not that I have any idea what God's thinking, but that (she laughs) God might want us to treat certain situations so going on the main one, homosexuality, I think that it's really important. I, because I feel that love is important, I feel that we should be open to all relationships, man-woman, woman-man, man-man, woman-woman, you know. I feel like the central theme in that is love and I don't think anyone's doing it to be

sinful. I don't think anyone's doing it to hurt other people, so that is definitely one where I think my faith is somewhat opposite of what a lot of conservatives will say about that.

Sara: I guess for the same reason that I was just saying about Africa is that you should be able to meet people's needs with the faith together. But then even if I can't, I still – I mean St. Francis said, "Preach the gospel and if necessary use words." I still want to do that even if I don't get to say anything. And so I guess that's why I do it. And Jesus said, "I was thirsty, you gave me drink. I was hungry and you gave me bread." So and, "Whatever you do for least of these you've done for me." So that's why I do it.

These processes are addressed in the faith development literature of Fowler and Parks as important in questioning authorities to come to your own decisions on faith issues. One such authority in the Christian faith is the Bible, and the role of this book is central to how Christians interpret many social issues. Many of these processes were done with mentors, as discussed above. And for one of the women, taking a specific course to examine the historical context of religions helped her make connections.

Courses. One of the things discussed in some of the examples above was that women made connections between their belief systems and action through courses they took in college. This topic was not addressed specifically in my original conceptual framework, but arose from the data in the interviews as being important. Students specifically discussed the use of service learning, living learning communities, and faculty modeling and discussed how to put these topics into action in the community. The students who claimed that courses helped make connections indicated that they helped make connections between their beliefs and actions, but not specifically to their faith.

Influence of gender identity on faith development

One might think that the women's gender identity would be the most salient, as it is the only target or minority identity of the women interviewed, since they were all White and Christian (although we didn't explore other identities such as class and attractional orientation). But few of the women felt the influence of their gender, except in relation to the abortion issue, and the topic of leadership of women in the church. It is easy to understand that one of the topics that women brought up as connecting to their gender was that of abortion. The women who discussed gender influencing their beliefs on abortion personally identified with the women making that decision, and commented on how being a woman would strongly influence how they would make that decision.

Of particular interest were the two women who discussed the conflict they felt between their faith and gender identities when forming their beliefs on abortion. This caused great conflict for them internally, and also with their interactions with others. Emily stated that she moved from pro-choice to pro-life, so I asked her to tell me more about that switch.

Well, I think last year a lot of my friends are – well, a few of my friends are pretty politically active, and talking with them about that kind of stuff and seeing – I don't know. I would say different sides emphasize different points of the issue, obviously. But being surrounded by the more democratic opinionated groups kind of brought that side out of me, the feminist side. Yeah. This is our right to have full control over our bodies and how dare you tell us to – like we have to give birth to this baby or that kind of thing.

But, yeah, I mean going back to the Bible the Bible clearly says it's a life and you can't just like take that life on your own (I: Mm-hmm.) even if it was not your fault that you got pregnant kind of thing. You have this responsibility. How difficult to accept that, but life isn't easy.

Marina also felt conflict between her religious and faith identities on the topic of abortion.

So, and that's kind of a struggle, because obviously the church is very pro-life and very like, "We love all the children," and, but I just don't think that's such a realistic view. Like I guess if, you know, Louise the crack mom who got pregnant from some guy behind the bar, maybe I wouldn't want her to have her child, and that sounds so horrible, but I think it's true. Like she wouldn't really be able to care for the child like the child should be cared for, and then it would go in the foster system, and that usually doesn't work out very well, and blah, blah, blah. So that's, that's a struggle, the faith struggle, definitely, and that's hard to voice to like really faith-oriented people, because I can have my opinion, and then I always feel like, "Are they judging me? Are they thinking I'm a bad person because I think this?" You know?

Marina and Emily felt that their faith commitments told them that abortion was never an option, yet their social and feminist beliefs led them to consider or believe that women have the right to choose. Depending on with whom they were discussing this topic, the women felt there was pressure to think one way or the other. This finding may explain why others are not motivated to or open to examining issues like abortion from multiple perspectives, as it can bring great inter and intrapersonal conflict.

Some of the other women expressed the conflict between their gender and what the Bible said about women in spiritual leadership, or in relations. Thea has come to her own peace with what being a woman means in relation to her faith, but feels she often has to educate people as to their stereotypes of Christian women.

Thea: I think a lot of times when I mention that I'm a Christian or that I am in InterVarsity, people start thinking about very, very fundamentalist Christians who think that women shouldn't whatever, and I'm, like, the opposite of all that. I'm very egalitarian. I think that women are equal to men, and I think that God thinks that women are equal to men. So that's a battle ground for me. Just talking to Christian people who don't agree with me and trying to be respectful of what they think, and also talking to people who aren't Christians who think that that's how all Christians think is very frustrating for me. Because you know what? I'm a woman, and I'm proud of being a woman, and if I thought that Christianity, in any way, demeaned women, I would not be a part of it anymore. Like, I would choose not to be a part of organized religion if that was how it was going to be. I don't think that that's right.

Emily also struggled with the conflict between her faith and gender identities.

Well, she [small group leader] showed me that it was pretty clear in the use of pronouns in that verse versus other verses in the same book or even in the other books of the New Testament that women aren't supposed to be pastors or we're not made to be. That's like the man's job, but also that like women have other – I don't know how you describe it. . . We have other roles in the body that are equally as important, but we have different strengths and weaknesses than men. So, yeah. I would say that's still like a touchy subject for me. . . I mean, the Bible says that, and I do believe that's what the Bible says, but it's something that still kind of rubs me the wrong way. I mean, I would say that's what I believe because I definitely believe the Bible is true in its entirety.

The results of this inquiry support that only a few of the women (seven) discussed the influence of gender on their political or social beliefs or actions. Most of the women interviewed did not feel that gender affected either their political, social or religious beliefs. These findings do not support the work of Slee (2004), in that many of the women in her study pointed to numerous ways in which their gender affected their faith.

It was especially surprising that few of the women discussed the role of women in their religious institutions as limiting in any way, as many of these churches have specific beliefs limiting the role of women. Yet most of the women interviewed were also not involved in a specific church, but more with on-campus ministries, so this conflict may have been less apparent. Perhaps women were not “feeling” the influence of gender on issues and/or faith because they were not in a religious context. The women theologians examined in the literature review often experienced the alienation phase when realizing leadership positions were not open to them in certain Christian religious traditions. The women interviewed were involved on campus, mostly in same sex small groups, so they would not see any discrepancies in the ability of women to be in ministry and leadership.

The influence of race on making connections

This dissertation sought to examine the influence of being White on how women connected their faith with their political and social beliefs and actions. It is not surprising

that this was a difficult task, as it is challenging to examine what operates as the cultural norm in our society. But fifteen of the women interviewed stated that their race affected their political, social or religious beliefs or involvements, which is twice as many as indicated that gender had an effect.

The findings from this study support the work of Frankenberg (1993), in that nine of the women did not see the influence of their racial identity on how they viewed their social or political actions or involvements. These women could be identified as in the color-evasion discursive repertoire. This was also true of a majority of the women that Frankenberg interviewed for her study over fifteen years ago. She states:

While none of the women I interviewed felt that they were *not* White, Whiteness seemed to be neither a clearly definable cultural terrain nor, for many of them, a desirable one (p.205).

It is difficult to discern exactly how the women who remained in the color-evasion discursive repertoire were framing their interactions, but there is some evidence that they are avoiding addressing issues of race as connected to their faith. To begin, none of these women addressed that they were involved in Christian organizations that were predominantly White. They did not recognize this as possibly influencing how they experienced their faith. While the exact racial breakdown for the small groups in which the women were involved is not known, the overall racial breakdown of both InterVarsity and Campus Crusade for Christ is heavily White. It is interesting that the only women who recognized this spoke about how one of the student organizations she was involved in actually had a separate subgroup of the organization for the students of color.

An interesting question raised by Frankenberg about women who were unaware of their White identity was: If they do not identify with a racial group, than with what

identity do they identify? Her findings supported that they identified with geographic locations, class, and, for those who were Jewish in her study, their religious identity. If not Whiteness per se, what did the women identified name themselves by? Frankenberg found that women identified with their ethnicity, geographic origins, class, and religion (only Jewish women). Perhaps the women in this study who did not identify with their racial identity were more likely to experience their religious identity as salient. They come to identify with their religious identity because they do not feel the salience of their gender, or for some, their racial identity, in the context of the large, secular university.

A second group of women could be in the race cognizant group. The women interviewed by Frankenberg that fell into this group shared two convictions: “that race made a difference in people’s lives and that racism is a significant factor in shaping U.S. society” (p. 157). While Tisdell (2003) interviewed mostly individuals of color for her research into how spirituality intersects with culture, she did come to some general conclusions similar to Frankenberg about those that she interviewed that were White and Christian. She found that those who were involved in cultural and social justice issues manifested this connection in two ways:

1. Through developing a deeper understanding of White culture in general and one’s own particular cultural identity within it, and
2. Through making an active choice for crossing and examining spiritual traditions rooted in other cultures (p. 170).

The women interviewed for this study who said that race affected their beliefs shared the “standpoint”, or worldview, discussed above, in that they were struggling with their White racial identity, and also coming to understand the influence of White privilege. Their exposure to the diversity of the University and things they were learning in their classes helped them “see” their Whiteness and grapple with the impact of their

White privilege. For the women in this position, understanding their privilege then served as a motivation to move to political or social action.

Laurel was one of the women who struggled with her White identity. She believed her race and White privilege was what motivated her to be involved in social justice, but sometimes she still felt guilty, or like the “bad guy.”

White and blonde hair, blue eyes, that suddenly I’m something that is horrible. And I don’t know. I don’t feel like I can share the same like – I can’t share the same heritage with people with all the struggles they’ve gone through with like the Black civil rights movement and all of that. But I mean, I want to learn, but sometimes I just feel like that – I don’t know – that I’m – I feel like I’m the bad guy a lot of the times in the things that I do, and that I shouldn’t be there and that I should go be doing my own life and be donating through charity or something. And that’s just not the way I see about bringing change. And then I kind of feel odd with my friends when they are like, “Well, why don’t you just give them money or something?” . . .

I: Some conflict there.

Laurel: Yeah. If I’m gonna – I try and talk about it – like social change being a commitment to service, and they’re like, “No, just worry about yourself.” Okay, that one’s good! If I better myself, everyone else will be better, right? So I think that – I think a lot of the times my race kind of – it isn’t what motivates me to do things, but I kind of – I feel like I’m the bad guy.

Josefina also discusses her understanding of White privilege when she states: “not being a person of color, I think affects me, like, every single day, just in the way that people relate to you and the opportunity you're given.”

Layla struggled specifically with guilt for being White, but then moved through this to action. Her understanding of her White privilege motivates her to become involved in the community to try and make a difference.

Layla: Debilitating, yeah (she laughs). And, yeah, it’s debilitating. You can’t do anything if you’re busy feeling guilty about it ’cause I think that you avoid, naturally you’ll avoid those issues so as not to feel like you’re being blamed and so it’s not that I have take responsibility for an entire race and the entire system of oppression but I have to understand my role in it and the gains that I’ve had

because of it and not, you know, I'm here partially because I'm White. . . I don't have to feel guilty about it but I have to sort of use that privilege that I've gained and give a little back, I guess.

Agnes is aware that she cannot be colorblind and that she experiences White privilege. One of the ways she experiences White privilege is that she does not have to talk about race, but this conversation can be a daily occurrence for people of color. In addition, she questions how effective a group of majority students is in understanding the experience of being a person of color.

Yeah. I think it does a lot because as much as you want to claim that you're colorblind and all these things that I don't think it's possible for me to claim it or for most of the people I know who have experienced it. We were talking about race and socioeconomic status today in my organizational studies class and we were talking about it and I was like, you know, I don't think I've ever discussed, had a deep discussion about race. I've had friends of other races. But I don't think I've ever sat down and talked about race with anyone who isn't pretty White, you know, and I'm pretty waspy, you know. If you're gonna go that route? And so I think that does affect, 'cause I was like, we were, I mean we were talking about it but I was like this doesn't really mean that much when it's just a bunch of, you know, if you take it from an outside, like just a bunch of White people sitting around talking about race.

Virginia highlights that having an experience where you are "the other" is seen as part of what puts women in the race cognizant group. This kind of experience is also foundational to White identity models such as that of Helms (1984). In her model, a disorienting experience is key to moving individuals into understanding the experience for other minority groups. For Virginia, her experience going to a mostly Asian church helps her understand how being in a minority might make one uncomfortable and feel like an outsider.

I go to a mostly Asian church, and I feel like that's even opened up my eyes to White privilege or just like difference between – I don't know – just seeing how it is a White world.

I: That experience in the church specifically you feel like – how does that contribute?

Virginia: I think just experiencing being an outsider, in a sense – like everyone at my church; they do a pretty good job with like they don't speak Korean or Japanese or Chinese that much around me or like either in service. But definitely if we're hanging out or going bowling, and I'm like the one token Caucasian person or – you know. There's a lot of cultural differences with me, different things, and I'm just like, "Wow!" Like, I've never been the one who's on the outside. So that experience at that church really just blew my mind. Like, "Wow! This is how it's like for a lot of African Americans," or my friends who are Asian, or my international students just coming in and not being able to relate in the same way and not being able to have that connection. It's definitely been harder to make those relationships and to feel comfortable.

Paige also was moved to action after her involvement in the community helped her identify some of the injustices that she did not suffer as a White person.

Paige: But I think like it makes me want to like help some of that injustice and help it some through my community service and things like that, and help – like in the summer, like help some people that will be like African American or something, and you know that like they just don't have some of the privileges and things that like somebody that was White might or things like that. And so I think it – I think it affects just because like I can see more of the injustices, and I can see more of like what I have as a White person in society. . .

Overall, the findings of this study support that race does affect how some of the women made connections between their faith and their beliefs and actions. Many of the examples above discuss how the women's religious identity conflicted with their beliefs on social issues. But only a very few experienced the role conflict between their race and gender.

Layla originally believed that many White women "hid" behind their gender identity so that they would not have to think about their racial identities. But taking a class helped her realize that you need to acknowledge all identities when examining privilege.

Layla: If I'm talking about my gender because I feel like sometimes, White women especially in, 'cause I've done a lot of working, I guess, mediating discussion groups about gender identity, racial identity and I found that a lot of the times White women were hiding behind their gender to sort of deny other privileges, namely their race. So I sort of rejected that for a while, the idea that my, I guess I rejected gender and equality, not that I didn't believe that it didn't exist but the more that I thought it was kind of getting in the way of getting to deeper issues which I sort of –I guess I really had rejected it until last year. I took a women's studies class because it was feminisms of the African-American Diaspora, so I thought it would be more about race and it ended up being more about gender. And I guess one thing the professor talked about was how black women feel excluded from the feminism of men which I understand but also that White women sometimes give black men a pass for being sexist or, you know, oppressive towards women because they're, because of their race. And so I thought maybe I was doing that and so I realized that you need to see the whole, huge picture privilege before you can really do anything about it, you know. You can't deny one aspect or another, so I'm still working on that.

Thea uses her understanding of her gender and religious identity to identify with the experiences of people of color. She shares her experience in an African American Studies class, and how it affected her racial identity and understanding of White and Christian privilege.

But it was really interesting to be in the minority because all of the sudden you realize – I don't really break myself down that much or I try very hard not to like look around me and be, like, "Hmm, there are two black people in this class. I wonder how many of these people are Jewish?" because that's weird. But in that situation it was, like, "Wow. I'm completely in the minority. No one else in this room thinks like I do about these things because no one else has ever been – they call them – agents and –targets. No one else has ever been in the agent in two, because White and Christian, and then female in the other, so all the sudden you're the target. And it was funny because I had thought – I don't think that much about racism. And I don't think that much about anti-Semitism except as it comes into my studies in German. But I think a lot about sexism and how I feel like people are sexist; even women are sexist. And I think a lot about that, and it was, like, "Wow, that's probably really bad. Like, probably I should try and think how they were thinking, and think about if I was the black person, and I was walking down the street and a White girl crossed the street when she saw you," which I don't – I've never done. But if that happened, like, how does that affect you?

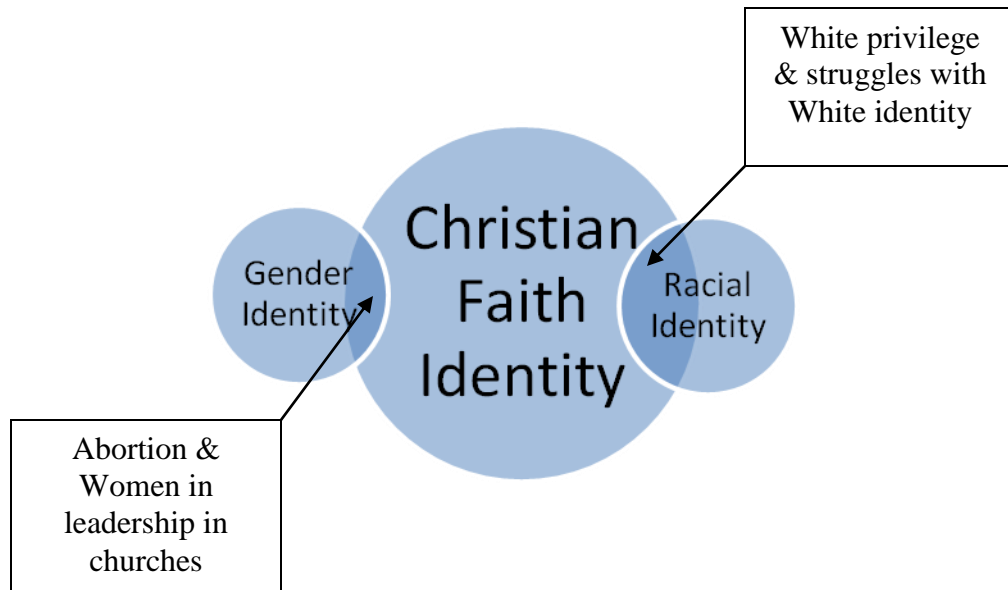
The results from Thea and Layla indicate that some women do experience the conflict of multiple identities, but they are only a fraction of the women I interviewed. These findings challenge the applicability of the multiple identity model of Jones and McEwen (2000) to majority women. Jones (1997) believed that questioning the role of power and privilege was essential in understanding the roles of multiple identities.

The experience of difference associated with the construction of identity could not be fully understood without questioning the role of power and privilege. Both difference and privilege mediated the connection with and the relative salience of various dimensions to the participants” (p. 383).

Herein lies what I believe to be the problem: many White Christian women do not feel the impact of difference, or question the role of power and privilege in their lives. As such, they don’t feel the salience of those identities thus limiting the applicability of the Jones and McEwen model to this study.

Figure 7 provides a visual representation of the findings of this dissertation regarding the influence of multiple identities on how women made connections. It is drawn to indicate that the women experienced their faith (but not religious) identity as the most salient and most did not experience their political identity as important (so it was not included in the figure). The women experienced some overlap with their gender and faith identities around the topics of abortion and women in church leadership, but the influence of their race on their faith identity was stronger.

Figure 7: Intersection of gender and racial identities with faith identity



Connections with Political Beliefs and Actions

While all of the women could discuss their beliefs about at least one social issue that connected to their faith, it was more difficult for the women to discuss how their spiritual beliefs might connect with their political involvements or activities. A minority of the women interviewed were not involved in politics to begin with because of their perceived negative connotations toward politics and politicians. Of the women who were involved politically, they had often seen this behavior modeled by parents, or had been encouraged through peers or mentors to become involved in political issues. Only a few of the women interviewed could discuss specifically how their faith influenced political beliefs. Of these women, it is of interest that none of them pointed to learning how to make this connection through the church or other Christian organizations, but through peers that shared their beliefs.

Many of the women who were involved in service or volunteering saw these actions as political. As much of the feminist literature discusses, the personal is political for these women. They were interested in getting involved at the grassroots or local level where they felt that they could actually make a difference. Very few of the women were involved or stated interest in national or international politics. Of those who were involved in service, they were most often involved in working directly with people where they felt they could develop a relationship to “share their faith”, and affect change that they could see immediately. This finding supports earlier research on current college students that found that students were discouraged with politics in general, and were most likely to want to be involved in local issues and organizations (Levine & Cureton, 1998; Longo & Meyer, 2006).

This chapter has reviewed the ways in which the findings of this study support and challenge the original conceptual framework presented. These findings provide many exciting implications for further research and work with students which will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter 7: Implications for Research and Practice

The twenty-four women interviewed for this project provided a wealth of interesting and stimulating data to analyze, in order to understand how they make connections between their faith and their political and social beliefs and actions. Much of it supports earlier moral and spiritual development literature, but some of the new findings also provide interesting questions and suggestions for further research and practice. This chapter will discuss some of the ways in which this dissertation contributes to the literature, as well as offer suggestions for further research and implementation in student development practice.

Suggestions for further research

Further Examine the Meaning of Social Justice to Women Christian Students:

The findings of this study support that some women express their faith through an ethic of care and justice and that this mode of knowing is connected to the concept of social justice. Because the construct of social justice was not one of the major foundations of the original conceptual framework, it was not a central question of the original study. However, it did arise from the data as important to how some of the women made connections between their faith and their actions or involvements in social and political commitments.

This connection to the concept of social justice was also found in the work of Siddle Walker and Snarey (2004), as they found that African American women wanted to

focus the conversation on moral development of both the individual (justice) and the community (caring). They felt that the work of Kohlberg stated that individuals make moral decisions individually, without the input from others or the context of community. And the moral development model of Gilligan placed too much emphasis on the community. Their model suggested that moral decisions are made by individuals, but with the help and support of community. It is interesting to note that the findings of this dissertation support the desire by some White women to integrate caring and justice, which was connected to their faith identities. This might suggest that the caring and justice model might also apply to White women in addition to African Americans.

Further studies should examine how exactly women define social justice, as this was difficult to determine from these interviews because it was not asked directly. Quantitative data could be gathered to assess how women define social justice, along with general demographic information to see if these definitions vary depending on race, class, religion or even geographic region. Women could also be asked what ways they are involved in political or service opportunities. It would then be interesting to assess if the women who define and utilize the concept of social justice are more likely to take action and be involved.

Another recent study found that students (not specific to women) ranked educating oneself, engaging in community service, and providing awareness to others as the top three activities associated with social justice (Guest, Lies, Kerssen-Griep & Frieberg, 2009). These findings correlate strongly with these results, but further research could examine if exposure to the concept of social justice helped students integrate their faith to their actions, or helped motivate them to action.

Interview other racial and religious identity groups. It would be very interesting to see if the findings as to the influence of race on how students make connections would differ if women from additional racial backgrounds were interviewed. Interviewing African American women would be of particular interest because of the strong historical connection between social justice and many African American churches. It would be interesting to see if this link would be reflected in how the women discussed how they made connections.

Examining how women from other religious backgrounds would make connections between their faith and social and political beliefs and actions would also be of interest, and is needed in the student development literature. As indicated in the literature review, there is very little examination of faith development in students that is not from the Christian perspective. It would be beneficial to repeat this study with Muslim women or Jewish women, for example, to see if the themes and ways of connecting would differ. This would help expand educator's ability to better understand how students from diverse religious backgrounds might make connections.

Examine Women's Faith Development in College Specifically. The women interviewed shared how they developed in their faith that is specific to college women. One finding not previously discussed in detail was the role of accountability from peers. Future research could focus on examining specifically the role of peers in the faith development process of women college students as it relates to accountability and community. Where are women gaining their community that supports their faith development? Conducting case studies of small groups within specific Christian, or other

religious student organizations, would also allow for more detailed examination of how or why these environments provided growth and support for women.

Because the focus of this inquiry was about how women made connections with their political and social beliefs and actions in college, only those faith development experiences that were connected or grounded in those beliefs or actions were examined. It would be interesting to go back and study the interviews specifically for key faith development experiences of the women throughout their lives. In particular, a few of the women shared experiences that could be thought of as fitting the *alienation* theme from the work of Slee and Parks, but they happened pre-college, or were not related to the questions for this work, so were not included.

Examine the connection between belief and action.

The work of Garber (2007) was strongly supported by the findings from this study. Garber found that individuals who stayed committed to their faith after a number of years remained committed because they were able to consistently connect their beliefs and actions through three major factors: convictions, character and community. Many of the women interviewed for this study made connections with their faith through connecting to a core Christian belief or the through the concept of social justice. These “convictions” moved some of the women to take action on their beliefs. Garber also found that those that had mentors and were in community with others that were dedicated to the same ideals also sustained faith over time. Mentors and being in community or relationships were also some of the ways the women made connections in this study.

But not all the women were moved to action as a result of their Christian faith or beliefs. It became apparent through the coding and analysis of this data that most women

connected their faith beliefs to a belief about a social issue or politics, but fewer of the women actually put those beliefs into action. It would be interesting to go back and examine the interviews for specifics as to how and why some women felt motivated to action, while others did not. There may not be enough in these interviews to examine this question in detail, so further research could be designed. Quantitative data could be collected as to what social and political beliefs were held by individuals and what they were involved in. The study would need to separate those who were involved politically and those that were involved in social service, as there was very little overlap between these two populations of women in this study.

Points of intersection in multiple identity models. Jones' (1997) central finding regarding how multiple identities work in women's lives states:

“... multiple dimensions of identity could not be understood without examining the intersections of these dimensions and the contexts in which they are experienced. Similarly, the experience of difference associated with the construction of identity could not be fully understood without questioning the role of power and privilege. Both difference and privilege mediated the connection with and the relative salience of various dimensions to the participants” (p. 383).

Parts of Jones' thesis were supported in this study while others were challenged.

Jones suggested that the *intersections* of identities needed to be examined which was accomplished in this study for a few of the women who expressed the influence of multiple identities. Particular times of growth or challenge for the women occurred when one or more of their identities came into conflict with their faith identities, such as when discussing gay marriage or abortion. The Jones and McEwen model (2000) included religious identity, but they did not find this to be one of the most salient for the women they interviewed. Yet this study found that for many of the women interviewed, religious identity was more salient than that of gender or race. This area of intersection is under-

researched in general, but is especially so as related to religious identity and deserves further study.

Further research should examine those moments when women feel the intersection of multiple identities and how they move through, or out of, these moments of conflict. This study gave a few examples of when women struggled with this intersection, but interviews that focus specifically on those experiences in which identity conflict occurred would provide a more thorough idea of how multiple identities create growth. Previous racial identity literature suggests that often, change or growth, specifically related to understanding our racial development, involves a disorienting experience or interaction that calls into question our previous beliefs and worldviews (Helms, 1984). For the women in this study it seems that an event, relationship or class that caused them to question previous assumptions often led them to make connections. Future research could focus more specifically on these experiences or relationships, and what characteristics encourage connections.

Jones also stated that *context* is important as it affects multiple identities. This certainly proved true in this study as many of the women pointed to the influence, both positively and negatively, of the large secular campus on their ability to make connections. This finding suggests that it would be valuable for further research to not only focus on the experiences of intersecting identities, but also to talk to women in different higher education settings such as that of a Christian college. Would their religious or faith identities remain the most salient or, in the context where this identity is the norm, would other identities arise as more salient?

Methodological challenges and suggestions for future White identity research.

One of the struggles when framing and conducting the research for this dissertation was the lack of detailed suggestions as to effective methodological procedures that would examine students' knowledge, or lack thereof, of their White identity. Some of this struggle is inherent in studying a dominant identity, as the power of that identity is that it is the accepted, or default way of viewing and operating in the world. As such, researchers who are trying to examine a construct such as Whiteness, struggle with how to make the invisible visible. Much of the literature examining Whiteness focuses on examining aspects of culture for how it perpetuates White dominance, and seeks to make these assumed perspectives visible (Fine, Weis, Powell, & Wong, 1997; Hill, 1997; Kivel, 1996; Rothenberg, 2002). Other work helps individuals examine their own White identity (Helms, 1984; Kendall, 2006; McIntosh, 2002). But Frankenberg's work remains one of the few qualitative studies designed to examine White identity that could offer methodological practices for examining Whiteness.

Similar to Frankenburg (1993), it was a struggle to determine how to present a question for the women that would not make them defensive or threatened, but would challenge them to examine and express the influence of their racial identity. She shares that she initially approached women for her study by stating, "I'm doing research on White women and race" (p. 32). But with this question, she struggled to find women willing to be interviewed, because some felt threatened, or that discussing race in any way could be deemed racist. Eventually she tried a more "indirect" approach, and said she was interested in "women's life histories" (p. 34). These interviews did not provide valuable data for the research question examining White identity.

Frankenberg had the greatest success when she tried “reformulating the overall question with which I approached the women in a way that stayed close enough to my purpose to make an interview possible, but that was not so threatening as to foreclose speech” (p. 35). This researcher also found herself trying to do the same thing by asking if they thought being a White woman influenced their views on, or involvement with, social or political issues. It was thought this was a nonthreatening question, and allowed them to say that they did not think their gender or race influenced how they made connections. In retrospect, it would have been better to separate the identities by asking if they thought being a women and/or being White affected their beliefs or involvements. By grouping them together, response was limited because many picked one identity or the other, but did not address the influence of both.

While Frankenburg’s work was helpful as to how White women view race, power and privilege in society, it also provided detailed information regarding effective interview questions that would illuminate an individual’s awareness of their White identity. When looking at other literature, there was little guidance methodologically. The results of this dissertation offer some suggestions as to possible methods for future qualitative research for examining White identity.

To begin, asking questions more closely tied to specific experiences would be helpful. For those interviewed who were in the race cognizant category, asking about a specific experience when they felt in the minority, or when they have worked in diverse groups, would allow some of the details of how they experienced their White identity to emerge. Questions relating to the influence of being White often led to the sharing of these kinds of examples. A suggestion for future research would be to more closely tie

the questions to an experience, which would allow some of those who stated that their race didn't matter to actually be able to examine how their race may influence their daily interactions.

It is also true that Frankenberg's standpoint or research questions were framed to examine how women respond to differences and the workings of power and privilege, and were initiated with a certain generation of women. For many women, this was the first time they had been asked questions examining their race. Many would argue that today's college students have been raised to understand and discuss diversity, and so may approach the conversation about Whiteness differently. Today's student may be hesitant to discuss their White identity, not because they hadn't talked about it, but because they have talked so much about it in their years before coming to college. These discussions have resulted in some changes in the way that current majority students discuss issues of race: mainly that they do not like to discuss race. As discussed in *When Hope and Fear Collide* (Levine & Cureton, 1998), students interviewed were more open and willing to discuss the intimate details of their sexual lives than they were to discuss diversity and race.

Other work examining the connection between racial identity and faith among evangelical Christians also points to the fact that many people associate the word "racist" with the civil rights movement and race relations during the 1960's in America (Emerson & Smith, 2000). But their thesis is that we still live in a racialized society, in that race still matters and affects the everyday lives of Americans. This seems to be a more accessible term for the Christians they studied as opposed to saying racism still exists. Perhaps asking students if they believe race still matters in our society could provide a

start to the conversation that again would allow them to connect more readily than asking specifically if they believe their race influences their beliefs and actions.

Other developmental and contextual lenses that could have been used to examine connections. One of the interesting questions resulting from this work is, why do women who shared similar experiences respond differently? Why is it that certain women who took part in service opportunities made connections to their faith while others did not? Or why did some women connect their White racial identities to their political and social beliefs as a result of courses or interactions with mentors, while others did not? While this dissertation offered some answers as to how women made connections, it also created many questions as to other possible influences that were not examined as explicitly in this dissertation. Three main factors come to mind that could be examined to build on this research in an effort to answer why some women did make connections and others did not: the women's cognitive development level, differences in worldviews or schemas, and the nature of the experiences that the women suggested helped them make connections, such as college courses.

The cognitive development of the women interviewed would make a difference as to how they make connections, and so could be an area for further research. While the cognitive development literature of women was reviewed for this dissertation, these models were not part of the conceptual framework for analysis. Cognitive development research and resulting models would suggest that women need to be at a higher order cognitive functioning to be able to make connections between their beliefs, actions and multiple identities. For example, Kegan (1994) would suggest that individuals would need to be at level four to talk about race or understand the affect of their race on their

interactions, and Baxter Magolda (1992) would suggest that women need to be at what she termed the contextual level, at which individuals consider the context and integrate and apply knowledge to begin to make connections. Belenky et al. (1997) would also suggest that women would need to be at the procedural cognitive level, in which truth is found through “reasoned reflection.” At this stage truth is not easily discerned, and so individuals must focus on various procedures or “ways of looking” to integrate objective and subjective truths. This dissertation did not examine the cognitive functioning of the participants as one of the major constructs, but this would be a helpful avenue for future research.

The worldview of schema, through which an individual views the world, could also affect how they interpret their experiences and therefore make connections. Earlier research suggests that most college students come to campus having lived in mostly racially homogenous areas (Gurin, Lehman and Lewis, 2007), thus making their time in college the first time they must face differences on many levels. With limited exposure to differences before college, students may not be able to make connections between their multiple identities, because they have not had experiences that force them to understand others and examine their own identities.

Other pre-college experiences may also influence students abilities to make connections and could be examined further. For example, Hurtado, Engberg, Ponjuan and Landreman (2002) found precollege opportunities for engagement were strongly related to becoming involved in social action activities once they came to college. In addition, students who interacted with different racial or ethnic groups were also more likely to participate in social action. The focus of this dissertation was on how women

made connections while they were in college, so questions were not presented to examine their precollege experiences. However, some of the women did discuss precollege experiences as influential on how they made connections. Further analysis could examine if those that made connections in college were more likely to have had precollege experiences that predisposed them to becoming involved.

Some of the women interviewed for this study also stated that specific courses were helpful to them in making connections. But it was beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine what exactly happened in these classes that helped the women make connections. Reason, Cox, Quaye & Terenzini (2010) found that what faculty did in a class, rather than who the faculty member was (demographic characteristics), was more likely to facilitate student encounters with difference. Faculty members who engaged students in active teaching and assessment practices, such as frequent student presentations, in-class discussions, community service and frequent and detailed feedback helped students encounter difference. Future research could examine this from a qualitative perspective and see if there are certain teaching tools that could be utilized to promote students making connections between their political, social, racial and gender identities.

Further examination of the connection between evangelism and social action.

The results of this dissertation suggest that some Christian women see evangelizing to others as a core reason they become involved in service or social action. A recent book titled *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Hunter, 2010) suggests that for many Christians, especially evangelicals, the foundational belief as to how to bring about positive change in culture is

to change the values of the individual. He states “Evangelism is not only a means of saving souls, but of transforming individuals and, in a roundabout way, the culture” (p. 9). Some of the women in this study clearly support this hypothesis, as they sought to build relationships and meet the spiritual needs of others as a way to bring about change. This belief in evangelism helped them bring their faith identities into action. It would be interesting to examine specifically those Christian organizations that encourage service as a form of evangelism, and if this focus affects how, or the extent to which, women make connections.

Hunter suggests that the view of culture is flawed and simplistic, and that improving the individual does not bring lasting change in society. Another avenue of further research would be longitudinal qualitative research to see if the women who were involved in service as a way to evangelize would remain committed to this worldview and action, or might become disillusioned when they do not see larger societal change result from focusing on the individual.

Further examination of the dominance of the topics of abortion and gay marriage for today’s Christian college students. One of the clear findings of this study is that the topics of abortion and gay marriage remain key social issues to which the women interviewed connect their faith most directly. This was true for students across political lines, and also across opinions on the topic (those that agree and those that disagree with abortion and gay marriage). This finding was surprising in some ways, as there has been an emerging conversation amongst those that consider themselves politically liberal, but also Christian, that they would like to diversify the topics that dominate the political agenda and social commentary regarding Christians (Wallis, 2005). The suggestion is

that Christians on the left would like to focus more on poverty, hunger and social justice than abortion and gay marriage. Yet the findings of this work do not support that this conversation has reached college students. The question that remains is why do these two topics continue to be the dominant discourse of Christians?

After completing the research for this dissertation, new book by Robert Putnam and David Campbell (2010) was suggested that examines how Americans have become polarized along religious lines, and how this polarization is reflected in partisan politics (p. 3). As part of their work, they found that abortion and homosexuality are “the glue that holds the coalition together”, in that these two issues brought both ends of the religious spectrum together, who had previously had little in common. The authors state that these two issues have dominated the conversation since the 1980s when America’s two major political parties claimed them as part of their party platforms (p. 388).

While the topics have remained dominant since the 1980s, the authors found the present generation was changing their views, with many more people being open to gay marriage and more conservative on abortion (but more willing to put restrictions on the types of abortion). The authors suggest that “the floor for those attitudes will keep moving higher and higher. . . As the floor rises, opposition to homosexuality, like opposition to womens’ rights, will cease to be politically viable” (p. 414-415). Longitudinal data on student’s beliefs on these two issues would be fascinating to examine to determine if this prediction becomes a reality. And if it does, what will the new issues become that connect their Christianity and politics?

Implications for practice

Mentors, mentors and more mentors. It is hardly a new concept that the role of mentors is valuable in helping students grow intellectually and spiritually. But this dissertation narrows that focus to encourage those of us in higher education institutions to be intentional in modeling the integration and conflict of our various identities and belief systems. The women interviewed shared the importance of having mentors, peers and others, to share with, but few had role models that integrated multiple identities and then talked with others about this process. Those that are spiritual or religious, should share this identity with their students, especially as they seek to integrate it with our various racial, gender and political identities. Those who are working toward social justice should share with students how these beliefs and involvements might affect their political beliefs or involvements. Modeling and sharing how we make sense of our various identities will help our students know this is a natural process and encourage growth.

Small groups and discussions. The women who had integrated these identities had strong models and safe, caring environments in which to have conversations and ask questions. As higher education professionals, we should be modeling this for students, and also promoting small groups and peer mentoring that intentionally examine the intersection of multiple identities. It is a troubling finding of this research that while the women felt that these small groups helped them grow spiritually, they did not indicate that they actually helped them make connections to current social or political issues, or between their gender or racial identities. Primarily, they encouraged the women to connect their faith and service. But, a few that seemed to intentionally provide readings and speakers, examining current social issues and individuals that discussed their

intersecting identities, were instrumental in helping women make connections. Further research to examine those small groups that promoted connections could provide further suggestions as to how to be intentional in creating effective groups for making connections between faith and social and political actions and beliefs.

It could also be interesting to see if there are ways that virtual communities and mentors could be created to examine these topics for women. If mentors that model their faith, political and social values are not available locally for students, could they find these mentors through social networking sites or other online communities? Even if they are available, would online communities be preferred by today's student? With the possibilities of technology, such as social networking and other tools, mentoring connections could be created and encouraged that would not otherwise be available to women in their surrounding community.

Intentionally Creating Teachable Moments. Those of us who teach, talk or work with women college students must also intentionally create opportunities where these identities might intersect. Service learning was one way the women discussed integrating their beliefs and learning about social issues to actual action in the community. Religious organizations also encouraged service in the community. Perhaps there are ways to connect religious organizations doing service to college classes, so that all three identities could be discussed. For example, the classroom work could examine the social and political ramifications of homelessness, and then have a service learning component that would involve them working at a homeless shelter that is run by a religious organization. The religious organization could then discuss how their involvement with the shelter

connects to their faith. This way students could have time and space to examine the issue of homelessness from multiple perspectives.

Create Political Involvement at the Local Level. The results of this dissertation also offer some insights as to how to get White women involved politically. Many of the women were not involved at the national level because they did not feel that it would make a difference, but were willing to be involved at the local level. This finding suggest that providing opportunities for women to discuss issues on a personal level, and offering opportunities for them to be in discussion in small groups may be more effective than large debates or mailers. They also were more likely to be involved politically if offered a chance to be of service in their community, so offering opportunities to make a difference locally that might be sponsored by a political party might also engage women politically.

Understand and Discuss Religion, Faith and Spirituality in Higher Education Settings. Higher education professionals also must help teach and model how to engage in civil discourse on the topics of race, gender and religion. The findings of this dissertation support recent research on students' religious and faith development, in that they were not involved religiously, but were interested and involved in spaces that allowed them to ask significant questions about their faith and how it applied to real life situations. As such, especially within secular institutions, faculty and staff must be trained and comfortable discussing religion, faith and spirituality, because for many students, their faith intersects with the various social issues that will be discussed in class and as part of student organizations and living spaces. If faculty and student development staff ignore or avoid discussing students' spiritual and faith beliefs because of their own

lack of comfort or knowledge about spirituality, they are ignoring a key part of how students make sense of their world. Not discussing the role of faith and religion will also leave students uneducated as to the role these beliefs play in how many individuals view the world, on and off campus.

The women who identified as conservative in this study, and even those that were middle of the road, often felt misunderstood or even discriminated against, for some of their faith beliefs. This resulted in them being hesitant to be open about their Christian faith on campus. The need for civil and open dialogue is especially important on the topics of abortion and attractional orientation. As indicated by the women in this study, these topics tie closely with an individual's religious beliefs, so helping students articulate and understand this connection will promote a more civil society, and also promote mutual understanding.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the work of this dissertation supports and expands upon the findings of previous researchers studying the faith development of women and college students. The women interviewed expressed that they grew in their Christian faith through relationships with peer and parental mentor, in addition to being in community with those that shared their faith and social values. While some of the women did make connections between their Christian faith and their political and social beliefs and actions, many struggled to make connections because their faith and political identities remained separate, and the women had negative connotations towards becoming involved in politics.

The processes of questioning the translation and historical context of the Bible, connecting their social or political beliefs to a core Christian value, taking courses, and being involved in service, all provided avenues for women to make connections. Future research and implications for practice could build on these findings to promote and support women in becoming politically and socially involved.

Lastly, the lenses of gender and race did affect how some of the women understood their experience. They felt the influence of their race stronger than that of their gender as they expressed their struggles with their White identity and understanding White privilege. Those that were able to express the influence of multiple identities often had mentors and classes that helped them identify and examine these identities.

I hope the information here will help students, staff and faculty think about ways they can intentionally help students make connections and grow, in addition to ways they can grow themselves. It may also help women to know that making connections between various identities may bring conflict and disharmony at times. Often when we know these conflicts might happen, it allows us the distance to examine and work through the conflict in a less stressful way.

Future research and practice will hopefully build on this work to examine how women from different racial and religious backgrounds make connections. And most importantly, I hope this work will help motivate and inspire educators to mentor students. They are seeking models as to how to examine and integrate their beliefs in ways that they can give back to their communities and integrate their faith with social and political issues of our time. This dissertation is a result of many individuals in my life who have modeled this integration for me. I hope it will inspire others to do the same.

Appendix A: Invitation Email to Student Participants

Dear student,

I am writing you to tell you about an exciting opportunity to contribute to research on college students and learn something about yourself. You would be compensated \$25 for a 60-90 minute interview as part of a study to examine how White Christian women students connect their spirituality with their political and social beliefs and actions.

I am looking for students who fit the following description to participate in the study. Students who are:

1. A junior or senior in college
2. Female
3. White
4. Protestant or Evangelical Christian
5. Involved in some sort of political or social action on or off campus.
This involvement could be defined in a variety of ways. It could mean being involved in political groups like the Democratic or Republican party or groups involved in addressing social issues like abortion, the environment, racial justice etc. Or, this involvement could mean performing community service like volunteering at a school or homeless shelter. Political actions could also mean being involved in a political or social issue related website on-line, voting, being in a protest or reading about political issues.

Your responses would remain completely confidential. If your responses are used in my final dissertation, they would be identified by a pseudonym of your choice. In addition, your participation in this study would be completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time.

If you would be willing to help out, please fill out the attached questionnaire and email it to me at the address below.

Thank you so much for your consideration and I hope to meet you soon!
Julie DeGraw
Doctoral Candidate
Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
jdegraw@umich.edu

Appendix B: List of Groups sent Invitation Email

1. On-campus student groups:

a. Campus Crusade for Christ

Purpose statement: “Helping to fulfill the Great Commission in the power of the Holy Spirit by winning people to faith in Jesus Christ, building them in their faith and sending them to win and build others; and helping the Body of Christ do evangelism and discipleship”

(<http://www.ccci.org/about-us/index.htm>)

b. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

Purpose Statement: “to establish and advance at colleges and universities witnessing communities of students and faculty who follow Jesus as Savior and Lord: growing in love for God, God's Word, God's people of every ethnicity and culture and God's purposes in the world.”

(<http://www.intervarsity.org/about/>)

c. Greek InterVarsity

“We are Greek InterVarsity, and we are part of a national ministry specifically designed for Greek students. We are a Christian group for Greeks, by Greeks, and to Greeks! We have students who meet together for friendship, growth in their Christian faith, and encouragement for doing a ministry in their houses.”

d. College Democrats

e. Stonewall Democrats (Democratic group specifically to address Gay rights)

f. College Republicans

g. Christ Rules Everything Around Me (C.R.E.A.M)

Mission: “to reach out to our lost peers and help build the body of Christ. It is our intention to introduce Christ to those who may not know who he is, as well as allow the Lord to use us to bring His lost sheep back to him.”

h. Coram Deo (Christian Business graduate students. Subgroup of InterVarsity)

i. Episcopal Student Foundation

j. Lutheran Campus Ministry

k. Wesley Foundation (Methodist)

l. H2O Campus Ministry (Church on campus affiliated with Assemblies of God church)

m. Women of Proverbs 31

Mission: “To grow in Christ and to effectively minister to souls that would like to get to know God”

2. Courses:

a. Women’s Studies/Psychology course: Race, Gender and Ethnicity in Group Context

b. Intergroup Relations Courses

Appendix C: Student Demographic Questionnaire

Name _____ Age _____

E-mail _____ Phone _____

Do you consider yourself Christian? _____

If yes, with what denomination (if any) or religious community do you consider yourself most affiliated? _____

Race/Ethnicity:

Caucasian/White

Bi-racial or Multi-racial

Political Affiliation (check the one that applies):

Far Right Conservative Middle of the Road Liberal Far Left

Are you an international student? Yes No

Academic Major(s) _____

Academic

Minor(s) _____

Please list any ways you have been involved during college in on and off campus political, religious, community service and race/ethnicity groups or organizations. This involvement could be defined in a variety of ways. It could mean being involved in political groups like the Democratic or Republican party or groups involved in addressing social issues like abortion, the environment, racial justice etc. Or, this involvement could mean performing community service like volunteering at a school or homeless shelter. Political actions could also mean being involved in a political or social issue related website on-line, voting, being in a protest or reading about political issues.

Appendix D: Pilot Interview Protocol

Title: Examining Connections between Spirituality and Political and Social Beliefs and Actions in the Lives of White Christian Women at a Research University

Introduction to Study

I. Reintroduce purpose of study and why they have been chosen to participate.

The purpose of this study is to find out about your Christian faith and your beliefs and involvements in social and political issues that are important to you. The format is very loosely structured and is intended to be more like a conversation about your experiences. I will be asking you to describe your experiences in detail and in the process I may ask you to reflect on issues or topics that may be sensitive to you. Please feel free to stop and ask questions at any time during the interview or just let me know if you are not comfortable answering a specific question.

II. Review and have students sign the Informed Consent forms including payment information and picking of pseudonyms for reporting.

III. Ask if there are questions.

Questions

I. Questions about spirituality.

Question 1: Can you tell me where you are at in your spiritual life right now?

Possible probes:

- How did you come to this understanding?
- Were there important relationships in bringing you to this understanding? If yes, who were they and how were they important?

Question 2: Are there some important experiences or influences in your Christian faith background that are important in bringing you to where you are in your Christian faith today?

Possible probes:

- Please describe what happened.
- Can you tell me what you were feeling at the time?
- Please tell me why this experience was important to you.
- Can you tell me more?

Question 3: Have you experienced any significant challenges to your Christian faith? If yes,

- Please describe what happened.
- Can you tell me what you were feeling at the time?

- How did this challenge affect your faith at the time?

II. Question about political and social involvements.

Question 4: Can you tell me about any ways you are involved in social or political issues? (involved in service learning, a political group, an issues group, vote, watch a debate, read about political candidates, part of a study group etc.)?

Possible probes:

- How did you come to be involved?
- Why did you become involved?
- Were there significant events or influences on your political development thus far?
- Do you think your identity as a White woman affects your involvement?

Question 5: Do you connect your spirituality to your beliefs and actions on political and social issues? If yes, how are they connected?

If no, why do you think they are not connected?

Possible Probes:

- Where do (or did) you get input on how to make this connection?

III. Question about political and social beliefs.

Question 6: Can you share your beliefs and thoughts on one social issue that you think connects with your Christian faith?

Possible Probes:

- How do you think they connect?
- How did you come to your decision on this issue?
- Were there important events or influences that brought you to this decision?
- Do you ever feel like you have to choose between the beliefs of your faith community and those of your political community?
- Do you think your identity as a White woman affects your perspective on this issue?

Question 7: Have you ever had a situation where you felt pressured to *not* bring up your spiritual beliefs when talking about a social or political issue? If so, when and where did this happen?

Possible Probes:

- How did you respond in the situation?
- How did you feel?

Question 8: Can you tell me about any key relationships that have helped you develop your Christian or political beliefs?

Possible Probes:

- Why do you feel this relationship was important to your growth?
- What did you learn from this person/s?

Question 9: Are any of your key political, social or religious beliefs different than your parents? If yes,

Possible probes:

- Can you tell me how your views differ?
- How has this difference affected you?
- Has this difference affected your relationship with your parents?

Question 10: How do you think Christians ought to be involved in political and social issues?

Possible Probes:

- Where do you think you formed these expectations?

Question 11: Why do you think Christians disagree about these issues? Do you have an example of when this has happened in your life?

IV. Concluding Question and Comments

Question 12: Do you have any experiences that we have not discussed that you think are important related to your faith or political and social commitments and beliefs?

Final Comment to student: If you have any other thoughts or experiences you would like to add, please feel free to email them to me later. I know sometimes we think of things to add after the interview and I encourage you to share those with me as they are important. Thanks for your time and effort. I appreciate it!

Appendix E: Final Interview Protocol

Title: Examining Connections between Spirituality and Political and Social Beliefs and Actions in the Lives of White Christian Women at a Research University

Introduction to Study

I. Reintroduce purpose of study and why they have been chosen to participate.

The purpose of this study is to find out about your Christian faith and your beliefs and involvements in social and political issues that are important to you. The format is very loosely structured and is intended to be more like a conversation about your experiences. I will be asking you to describe your experiences in detail and in the process I may ask you to reflect on issues or topics that may be sensitive to you. Please feel free to stop and ask questions at any time during the interview or just let me know if you are not comfortable answering a specific question.

II. Review and have students sign the Informed Consent forms including payment information and picking of pseudonyms for reporting.

III. Ask if there are questions.

Questions about spirituality.

Question 1: Are there some important experiences or influences in your Christian faith background that are important in bringing you to where you are in your Christian faith today?

Possible probes:

- Please describe what happened.
- Can you tell me what you were feeling at the time?
- Please tell me why this experience was important to you.
- Can you tell me more?

Question 2: Can you tell me where you are at in your spiritual life right now?

Possible probes:

- How did you come to this understanding?
- Were there important relationships in bringing you to this understanding? If yes, who were they and how were they important?

Questions about political and social involvements.

Question 3: Can you tell me about any ways you are involved in social or political issues? (involved in service learning, a political group, an issues group, vote, watch a debate, read about political candidates, part of a study group etc.)?

Possible probes:

- How did you come to be involved?
- Why did you become involved?
- Were there significant events or influences on your political development thus far?
- Do you think your identity as a White woman affects your involvement?

Question 4: Do you connect your spirituality to your beliefs and actions on political and social issues? If yes, how are they connected? If no, why do you think they are not connected?

Possible Probes:

- Where do (or did) you get input on how to make this connection?

Questions about political and social beliefs.

Question 5: Can you share your beliefs and thoughts on one social issue that you think connects with your Christian faith?

Possible Probes:

- How do you think they connect?
- How did you come to your decision on this issue?
- Were there important events or influences that brought you to this decision?
- Do you ever feel like you have to choose between the beliefs of your faith community and those of your political community?
- Do you think your identity as woman affects your perspective on this issue?
- Do you think your race or ethnicity affects your perspective on this issue?

Question 6: Can you tell me about any key relationships that have helped you develop your Christian or political beliefs?

Possible Probes:

- Why do you feel this relationship was important to your growth?
- What did you learn from this person/s?

Concluding Question and Comments

Question 7: Do you have any experiences that we have not discussed that you think are important related to your faith or political and social commitments and beliefs?

Final Comment to student: If you have any other thoughts or experiences you would like to add, please feel free to email them to me later. I know sometimes we think of things to add after the interview and I encourage you to share those with me as they are important. Thanks for your time and effort. I appreciate it!

Appendix F: Informed Consent

For participation in the University of Michigan Research Study Examining Christian Faith and Social and Political Issues.

I volunteer to be a part of the study conducted by researcher Julie DeGraw at the School of Education at the University of Michigan. The researcher is supervised by faculty member Dr. Michael Bastedo. I understand the purpose of the study is to examine how Christian students connect their spirituality with their beliefs in and actions on political and social issues.

I also understand that:

1. My participation is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time during the study. If I withdraw I may indicate if the data already gathered may be used in the study.
2. Participation involves one, sixty to ninety minute interview by Julie DeGraw, the researcher from the University of Michigan.
3. I understand that I have the right to decline to answer any verbal or oral question or to end an interview at any time.
4. I understand the risk involved in participation is minimal, that all interview information will be confidential and located on a password protected, personal computer in a locked, secure location in the United States.
5. I agree to be audio recorded for the interview portions of the study. I understand that these recordings will be transcribed by an outside transcription company. This company will not receive my name with the audio recording and is bound by a confidentiality agreement.
6. I understand that both the written and audio files will be used only for the purposes of this study. I will select a pseudonym which will be assigned to all written materials. A list of student names and corresponding pseudonyms will be kept on the researchers password protected personal computer along with a backup hard copy in a locked cabinet in the researchers' home. My name will not appear on any reporting of results.
7. I understand that this research study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Michigan and my home institution. If you have any questions about this study please contact Dr. Michael Bastedo, 2117 School of Education, 610 East University Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259, email bastedo@umich.edu; or Julie DeGraw, email jdegrow@umich.edu.

Appendix G: Summary of Participants and Involvements
(As self reported on demographic questionnaire & in interviews)

Name	Age	Denom	Political	Major 1	Major 2	Minor	Campus Faith	Politics	Service Organizations
Abby	21	Catholic/ Non-Denom	Middle	Movement Science			Crusade		Kgrams, Health Sciences, Living Learning community, Food Gatherers, Big Sis, SOS community services, Alt. spring break, Inncity cleanup, SERVE America Reads, Alt. Spring break
Agnes	20	Lutheran	Middle	Org. Studies			Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice	Moveon.org	
Allison	20	Wesleyan /Baptist	Conservative	Atmospheric Science		Math	Crusade		
Ashley	19	Non-denom	Middle	Movement Science					
Becca	21	Non-denom	Middle	History			Greek IV	Watch political TV, learn about past Am. Politics in classes, Rallies for Women in politics, Coll. Democrats, vote, readings and conversations	Officer, society of women engineers, Bridges International, Homeless outreach, Nursing home, Homeless Shelter, Street Evangelism, Dance Marathon, hospital
Claire	21	Lutheran	liberal	Material Science	Engineering	Hist. of Art			
Coley	20	Non-denom	liberal	Sociology	Global Health		Crusade		
Courtney	21	Methodist /Non-denom	middle	Social Science	Pre-nursing		Crusade		Homeless shelter
Emily	19	Non-denom	liberal	Economics	French	Hist. of Art	Crusade		Nursing homes, America Reads, 10 Thousand Villages, Co-op leadership position, Vol. with local physicians, Pre-med club, Relay for life
Jenny	20	Lutheran	liberal	Anthro	Spanish				
Josefina	23	Methodist	liberal	Social Science	Youth Empowerment	Spanish	IV		

Laurel	22	Lutheran	Far Left	English	Sociology	Philosophy			vote Coll. Democrats, create non-partisan coalition of campus orgs interested in civil rights & social justice	Campus Volunteer Org. , SERVE lead team, America Reads,
Layla	20	Baptist	liberal	Sociology	Poli Sci					Children's Hospital, Peer Mentor,
Leah	21	Lutheran	Middle	Psychology					Helped with No on 2 campaign (support Affirmative Action) College Republicans	
Marina	22	Lutheran	liberal	Biology	Nursing					Retirement Centers Co-chair World AIDS week, Center for the Childbearing Year
Mary	21	Protestant	Far Rt.	Nursing						Tutoring, Kgrams, Service Projects from Cru and church
Megan	21	Lutheran	Far Left	Oboe Perf.		Wms Studies			RESULTS (lobbying)	LGBT Commission, Ally Outreach Coordin, Youth leader Prisoner reentry Initiative (created film), facility for low income individuals with psychiatric issues or help with substance abuse, innercity cleanup
Megan M	21	Baptist	Middle	Org. Studies	Psych	French	Crusade			Stonewall democrats, student assembly
Olivia	21	Baptist	liberal	History			Crusade			
Paige	20	Lutheran	Middle	Social Work						
Sara	21	none	middle	Nursing			Crusade			
Thea	20	Non-denom/Baptist	Middle (Conservative.)	Business		German	IV		College Republicans	Innercity cleanup Local physicians, Pre-med club, Relay for life Medical Clinic, Human rights group, Habitat for Humanity
Tristan	21	Methodist	Conservative	Bio/Pre-med	History				College Republicans	
Virginia	21	Methodist	independent	General Studies	Pre-Health		Crusade		College democrats, March against war	

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