CONNECTING THE DOTS BETWEEN FAITH AND LIFE: A NARRATIVE STUDY

OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN EMERGING ADULTS AFTER COLLEGE

by

NATHAN COOK BYRD, III

Under the Direction of Wendy E. A. Ruona

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative study was to gain understanding into the faith development of Christian emerging adults after graduation who were leaders in a Christian collegiate ministry while undergraduates at a large southern university. Three questions guided the narrative interview process and data analysis. First, how does the faith of Christian emerging adults change after college graduation? Second, how do emerging adults negotiate the relationship between faith and identity? Third, what happens in the experience and expression of faith during emerging adulthood?

Two face-to-face interviews were conducted with each of the fourteen participants seeking to elicit narratives of faith development and experience. Participants were also asked to select and bring an artifact, representative of their faith or faith journey, to the first interview. After the initial interview, narrative analysis was conducted and initial findings were discussed with each participant in a second interview.

Narrative analysis of the data revealed five key findings: (a) faith was influenced by each participant's relationship with others; (b) faith was influenced by "the bubble" constructed by each participant. The *bubble* is the cultural environment that gives

meaning to one's life and experiences while providing insulation from influences

contrary to one's chosen or preferred perspective; (c) the significance of faith was

indicated and influenced by each participant's activities; (d) each participant's faith was

influenced by mystical experiences; and (e) faith development was influenced and

motivated by his or her hopes and dreams for the future.

Four conclusions were derived from the themes. First, the participants in this

study operationalized their faith. Second, faith remained vital through emerging

adulthood. Third, participants negotiated faith and identity within the *bubble*; the

culturally situated, holistic, worldview that serves as the lens through which each

participant viewed and made meaning of the world. The *bubble* was also an insulator

from unwanted "differences." Fourth, self-authorship was a continuous narrative process

mediated through experience and relationships.

INDEX WORDS: Faith development, emerging adulthood, narrative analysis,
                 narrative identity, self-authorship

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Karen Fields Byrd, my partner in life, without whose love, support, and encouragement I would not have finished the course; and to Nathan C. Byrd, Jr. (1922-2004), who taught me that the foundation for successful campus ministry is to "love God and love students."

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INTRODUCTION

I believe in the Kingdom Come
Then all the colors will bleed into one
Bleed into one
But yes, I'm still running

You broke the bonds
And you loosed the chains
Carried the cross
Of my shame
Oh my shame
You know I believe it

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for
– U2 (Clayton, Evans, Mullen, & Bono, 1987)

"God has blessed us so much since we graduated!" exclaimed a twenty-something

alumni couple who were leaders in Baptist Collegiate Ministries at the University of

Georgia while in college. I asked, "Where are you attending church now?" There was a

long pause in which the couple exchanged uncomfortable glances and admitted, "Um,

nowhere, really; we can't find a church that meets our needs, so we don't have a church."

The needs of young adults are mysterious to those in positions of religious

leadership. Young adults are often not able to verbalize what they want or need from

church. Leaders of traditional churches are making changes to prevent the institution's

decline without really understanding those needs. New expressions of worship are

continuously being created or merged with traditional forms. In spite of these changes,

current research indicates that emerging (18-30 years old) adults (Arnett, 2000) and

young adults (24-40 years old) are doing less with churches and dropping out of

participation in religious institutions (Barna Group Research, 2006, 2010; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). Many of those who leave church are not abandoning their Christian faith, but are finding new ways to express it. Others are incorporating ideas from other spiritual approaches, modifying their once traditional Christian faith into a new expression and understanding of God, self, and the world.

<div align="center">Lack of Participation in Religious Organizations</div>

Many have proposed reasons for this lack of involvement, but much of the research has focused on those labeled "unchristian" who have never participated in organized religion (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007), on Christians who return to church (Rainer & Rainer, 2008), and on those who have remained in church (Black, 2006, 2008; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993; Nelson, 2003). Missing from research studies are those focusing on Christians who, after high school or college, leave church and do not return and those for whom their Christian faith changes significantly in meaning, structure, and practice. Smith and Snell (2009) report on the third wave of the National Study of Youth and Religion, a large longitudinal study examining religion and spirituality among early emerging adults. This and other studies find that those who drop out of religious groups and churches do so during major life transitions, such as between middle school and high school, between high school and college, or after graduation from college (Barna Group Research, 2005, 2006; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). The assumption of church leaders and parents has been that, during the transition to adulthood and the busyness of young adult life, people will leave church until they get married or have children, and after these transitions, young adults will come back to church in order to provide their children with the same spiritual nurture that they had (Rainer & Rainer,

2008). However, research shows that when emerging adults leave church, most do not come back (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008).

Religious practitioners have also explored reasons for this lack of involvement, seeking to bring back those who have left church (Rainer, 2001; Rainer & Rainer, 2008). These writers have proposed new worship styles, evangelistic strategies, and small community groups as solutions to the problem. However, these innovations have not affected the declining rates of participation and involvement. McLaren (2000, 2007, 2010), Schweitzer (2000, 2004) and others (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007; Sweet, 2003a) propose that the problem of declining participation is due to a clash of modern and postmodern ideology and culture. Ebert (1988) defines ideology as,

> The organization of material signifying practices that constitute subjectivities and produce the lived relations by which subjects are connected – whether in hegemonic or oppositional ways – to the dominant relations of production and distribution of power (and the consequent relations of exploitation) in a specific social formation at a given historical moment. (p. 23)

Thus, ideology implies more than ideas, but also includes the resulting perceptions that influence actions. Ideology is always influenced by culture and the politics of power.

McLaren's (2007) historical annotation of current Christian orthodoxy identifies colonialism as the driving force for current theologies and doctrines, and not attempts for more accurate biblical scholarship as many have concluded. His conclusions lead him to proclaim its title, "*Everything must change!*" In the spirit of Martin Luther, McLaren (2010) has proposed a "96th thesis" in *A New Kind of Christianity*: "We need not a new

set of beliefs, but a new way of believing, not simply new answers to the same old questions, but a new set of questions" (p. 18). Not surprisingly, his exploration into a new, narrative way of viewing scripture and practicing faith has been received with disdain and cries of heresy from many church leaders (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010). Conversely, his work has also been received and adopted by many in the emerging church movement of young evangelical pastors and parishioners who have grown frustrated with current church doctrines and practices.

Schweitzer (2004) identifies three challenges that individuals face in the increasingly postmodern milieu, including reconstructing the process of human development, finding and adopting a faith that provides "ultimate meaning" (p. 16) to one's life, and maintaining one's faith in a world of religious plurality. Schweitzer (2000) notes a gap in the research. He writes, "The relationship between religious development and religious (dis)affiliation in late adolescence and early adulthood has not been given attention in the research on church membership or on dropouts" (p. 71).

<center>The Postmodern Milieu</center>

Many have said that America is rapidly becoming *postmodern* in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century (Grenz & Franke, 2001; Kegan, 1994; Schweitzer, 2004; Smith, 2006; Sweet, 2000). The term *postmodern* was coined to refer to the period following the Modern era, an era where the scientific method promised to provide answers to all of the big questions of life. As Lyotard (1984) demonstrated, there are no metanarratives, or master stories, that are able to explain all things to all people. One of the effects of this new frame is that, beginning in primary school, students are taught to think critically. According to Baxter Magolda (1999a) and Kegan (1980) the

goal of postmodern education is to develop independent critical thinkers. However, these frames of thought have not been invited into the church classroom. Most Christian churches and denominations are not engaging in postmodernism, but are pushing against it or building walls in an attempt to keep out the worldly influences (Sweet & Crouch, 2003, McLaren, 2000). While a new generation of members lives and is being educated in schools influenced by postmodern philosophy and the resulting effects on popular culture, most churches stick to propositional education, a practice from the modern era of defending the Christian faith through teaching apologetics and offering intellectual proofs for doctrinal beliefs (Grenz & Franke, 2001; Sweet, 2003a). Yet churches have not been able to provide sanctuary to members to insulate them from the ideological changes brought about by this pervasive worldview. Misunderstanding postmodernism and the new generation that is increasingly influenced by postmodern thought has resulted in an ideological clash within the Christian faith. As a result, a contemporary exploration of human development that includes spirituality and faith is needed.

<div align="center">The Problem of Categorizing Faith Development</div>

There have been few attempts to study the development of faith across the lifespan. James Fowler's (1980, 1981, 1984) model continues to be the one with which other studies are compared. Noting that existing theories of human development leave out serious consideration of spirituality, Fowler's (1984) team interviewed almost 400 participants in an effort to provide a theory of faith development that is holistic in nature. Spirituality, according to Tisdell and Tolliver (2001), is complex.

> It is related to: (a) a connection to what many refer to as the Life-force, God, a higher power or purpose, Great Mystery, or Buddha Nature; (b) a sense of

wholeness, healing, and the interconnectedness of all things; (c) meaning-making;

(d) the ongoing development of one's identity (including one's cultural identity)

moving toward greater authenticity; (e) how people construct knowledge through

largely unconscious and symbolic processes manifested through image, symbol,

and music, which are often cultural. (2001, p. 13)

Fowler (1984) conceives of faith as a verb meaning, "to set one's heart" (p. 11). In his

understanding, faith can be found in any life guiding ideology. His theory is primarily

built on the cognitive approach of Piaget (1926), the ego development model of Erikson

(1962, 1968, 1980), the moral model of Kohlberg (1969), and the lifecycle model of

Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, and McKee (1978).

Tisdell (2003) shows that spirituality is connected to human development by

making sense of one's relationships and experiences. Kegan (1980) posits, "Human being

is meaning making" (p. 374). Making meaning from experiences is a key activity of adult

learning. Thus, in Fowler's theory, faith development is bound to identity development.

Herein, identity is best understood in relationship between self, others, and "Ultimate

Reality" (Fowler, 1981, p. 33). It is "*covenantal (triadic) in form*" (Fowler, 1981, p. 33,

italics in original). The stages provide a composite of psychological and moral

development theories viewed through a lens of meaning-making.

<center>*Fowler's Theory of Faith Development*</center>

Fowler's (1981) stages of faith development are (1) Intuitive-Projective Faith, (2)

Mythic-Literal Faith, (3) Synthetic-Conventional Faith, (4) Individuative-Reflective

Faith, (5) Conjunctive Faith, and (6) Universalizing Faith. The first two of Fowler's

(1984) six stages are situated in childhood, after infancy, and therefore, do not concern

adult faith experience. They are marked by a movement from magical or fantastic thought to a concrete perception of reality. Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Fowler's (1981) third stage, begins in adolescence and can continue for the remainder of an individual's life. Faith development may not continue after adolescence in Fowler's framework. Individuals may become so accommodated to negotiated patterns of identity that they lose the capacity for growth to greater complexity (Erikson, 1968; Fowler, 1981). The social dynamics recognized in previous stages take root as an individual in this level seeks solidarity and conformity with peers, while seeking to incorporate many different images of self into a coherent whole. Most students arrive at college firmly entrenched in stage three.

As emerging adults develop critical thinking skills and learn to apply them to their own beliefs, they may begin to move to stage four, Individuative-Reflective Faith (Fowler, 1991b). A task of this stage is understanding that the social systems of which one is a part are largely determinative of personal ideology. In this stage, young adults begin to understand that they have personal authority. Movement to the next stage can begin with feelings of conflict over compromises and "dissatisfaction with existing perceptions and meanings" (Courtenay, 1993, p. 158).

Stage five, Conjunctive Faith, does not begin before age forty (Fowler, 1981). As in early childhood, adults in this stage again appreciate myth, mystery, and symbols as referents of truth. Though his view of faith development is not restricted to formal religious practice, Fowler (1976) observes that transitions to this stage and the next can only be accomplished within the structures of an organized religion (Courtenay, 1993).

Movement to stage six, though rare, features the recognition that the world is flawed and that I can make a difference.

In Fowler's (1981) original study, only one participant had reached the pinnacle, stage six, Universalizing Faith. However, in *Weaving the New Creation*, he identifies historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Merton as embodying the traits found here (Fowler, 1991b). Unfettered by the ideological traits and conflicts of earlier stages, those who attain this level are free completely to live their faith for others in love; they are selfless and transcendent (Courtenay, 1993).

Fowler's (1981, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1991a, 1991b, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004) work provides the most complete theory of faith development to date. In *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Fowler (2000) states, "Our very life meanings are at stake in faith stage transitions" (p. 45). Moving between his six stages of faith development is not a simple process that occurs on a specific birthday or graduation to a new grade in school (1984, 2000). Though Slee (2004), who studied women's faith development, criticizes much of Fowler's theory, she posits that a holistic view of human development can best be understood from within a faith development framework as opposed to one that leaves out or minimizes spiritual or religious dimensions.

Borrowing from Piaget (1926), Fowler (1984) understands human development to be epigenetic, moving from simple to complex structures of development in hierarchical stages. One cannot skip stages or simultaneously be present in multiple stages. As with Kegan (1982), Fowler believes development to be evolutionary and growth occurs when one's cognitive perspective is challenged by new biological possibilities of thought that do not fit with one's former frame. One assimilates new capabilities into one's identity,

adapting new biological abilities into new perspectives. The adjustments from one stage to another are often tumultuous and demand soul searching and emotional turmoil as one leaves behind former ways of thinking and believing that no longer work or make sense for one's life (Fowler, 2000). This process of transition is similar to that of Mezirow's (1991) transformational learning theory and Bridge's (2003) theory of change.

Like the psychosocial developmental theories on which it is based, Fowler's (1981) stages are situated in foundationalism, which suggests that all healthy identity develops according to the same epigenetic process. While they have been helpful for understanding development, such models have been criticized as too formulaic and disconnected from individual contexts (Courtenay, 1993, 1994; Schweitzer, 2004; Slee, 2004). There is a tendency that stage models may come to be seen as prescriptive (Courtenay, 1994).

Fowler's (1981) model is informative of some key aspects of development in providing broad psychodevelopmental categories to situate meaning making experiences for many individuals. Nevertheless, Schweitzer (2000, 2004) proposes that the contemporary postmodern society demands a view of development that incorporates the influences of context, fluidity, and individuation. Fowler (1996, 2001, 2004) has identified the complex needs that have been brought by postmodernism and many other theorist's challenges to his ideas. He has responded in two ways. First, Fowler (2001) defends his theory as the best approach based on empirical research while acknowledging that a parallel model that identifies "faith types" may be feasible. He proposes some faith-types that are appropriate, including (a) totalizing type (marked by fundamentalist authority), (b) rational critical type (those who seek a rational consistency among all

ideological areas of life), (c) conflicted or oscillating type (marked by a conflicted self or a searching, sick soul), and (d) diffuse type (who hold a fragmented or drifting faith). These faith types would not replace his stage theory, but help to give another view of a participant's faith within each stage.

Second, Fowler (1996) attempts to identify how each postmodern challenge fits into each stage of his theory; however, people of faith do not so neatly categorize their development. The diverse challenges facing people of faith today are encountered across the lifespan and, as popular Christian author Mckinley (2006) suggests, represent a "beautiful mess" when compared with the experiences of previous generations. Smith and Snell (2009) concur. In their recently published findings from the third wave of the longitudinal National Study of Youth and Religion no mention is made of faith development or a structured process of maturing. Instead they present many different forms and experiences of spirituality and religiosity during early emerging adulthood (18-23 years old).

Alternatives to Fowler's Theory

Schweitzer (2004) joins Arnett (1994) in proposing a new developmental period between adolesence and adulthood, spanning ages 18-30. Schweitzer (2004) deems this period *postadolescence*, while Arnett (1994) has coined the term *emerging adulthood* to refer to this period of life. Loder (1998) and Parks (1991, 2000) caution that humanistic models of faith development, like that of Fowler, do not allow for the influence of "The Divine" to impact an individual's growth. In their understanding, the term faith implies religious belief that includes a transcendent concept of The Divine. They argue a theory that only includes spiritual sensitivities is an ideology, not a faith. In his inquiry of

spirituality in adult education, Malacci (2006) suggests that the term "spirituality" has become co-opted and has lost its referential religious meaning. Therefore he argues for use of the term faith to refer to spirituality that is religious. For him faith is "loaded with meaning; meaning that is grounded in historical, theological, and etymological contexts. Inherent in faith are notions and understandings related to foundations, fundamentals, and foundational or core beliefs" (p. 230).

In this study, faith is understood both as a verb and a noun. As with Fowler, here faith is a verb, meaning the act of setting one's heart in response to a triadic relationship between self, others and God. As such, in this study, faith as a verb implies religious practice. However, faith is also a noun that refers to a holistic composition, manifested as "trust, knowledge, emotion, value, and action, permeating every facit of…existence" (Parks, 2000, p. 32). Faith is dynamic and changes over time. As a result, in this study faith development refers to the process of transformation that occurs during this composition of meaning throughout life.

Some authors have suggested that contemporary Christians do not approach their faith propositionally, but relationally and experientially (Grenz & Franke, 2001; Parks, 2000; Slee, 2000; Sweet & Crouch, 2003). A multidemensional, interdisciplinary understanding of the process and experiences of faith development is needed in order to better educate young adults prior to and through developmental transitions in this postmodern milieu. A study is needed that seeks to hear the voices of Christian emerging adults to better understand their meaning making experiences and how faith and identity are constructed in this process as residents in our increasingly postmodern society.

Narrative Identity and Faith Development

Christian theologian and sociologist Stanley Hauerwas (1980) calls for a broad exploration that does not focus on stages of development, but on the diverse ways individual Christians seek to merge their life story with the redemptive story of Jesus Christ in the biblical narrative and the stories of other Christians in local communities and throughout Christian history. Narrative theory can address this challenge. From a narrative perspective, individuals edit and recompose their life stories to incorporate new, emerging meanings and understandings of self, others, and the world.

Thus, central to my perspective is McAdams' (1993) life-story model of narrative identity development. McAdams (1985, 1993) and McAdams, Joselson, and Lieblich (2006) suggest that one knows one's self and is known by others through the stories of one's life. McAdams (1993) proposes that contemporary adults understand their identities in terms of a story or a narrative that they compose, recompose, or edit throughout life. Rossiter and Clark (2007) concur, "we make sense of our experience, day by day and across the life span, by putting it into story form. We *are* stories" (p. 3, italics in original). Bruner (2004) concurs in his aply titled article, *Life as Narrative*. The primary function of the life story is to integrate the many aspects of one's life into a coherent whole. The narrative theory of identity suggests that there are multiple dimensions of every self. Depending upon one's context, one can have multiple, sometimes incongruent, even contradictory selves forming one's sense of identity (James, 1892/1963; McAdams, 1993, 1996; McAdams, Bauer et al., 2006). McAdams (1993) declares that the problem of such an identity is in the conflict of "connecting the dots," of finding "overall unity and purpose in human lives" (p. 306).

Narrative theory is based on the ideas of constructivism, which is also known as social constructivism and constructionism (Hill, 2005). Social constructivists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) understand "human reality as social constructed reality" (p. 189). This position is in dynamic opposition to Kohlberg's (1974) advocacy of Natural Law upon which his theory of moral development is based. According to the theory of constructivism, identity is not predetermined. Even self-knowledge and understanding are but constructs of the dialogue between self (subject) and other-than-self (object). This theory does not deny that ultimate truth exists, but suggests that knowing truth is contextually subjective (Grenz & Franke, 2001; Smith, 2006). From McAdam's (1993) and Williams' (2007) perspectives, each individual narrates his or her life stories into a coherent and dynamic whole.

Narrative theory will provide a unique lens through which to examine emerging adult faith experiences. Seeking to understand the ways emerging adults experience and process faith through the stories of their lives should offer a broader view of faith development.

<center>Problem Statement</center>

Increasing numbers of emerging adults are leaving church after college. Explanations offered by researchers and practitioners do not address a current understanding of the process of contemporary faith development for late emerging adults 22-30). Though Fowler's (1984) theory of faith development has been helpful, it is insufficient in this postmodern milieu (Schweitzer, 2004; Slee, 2003). A qualitative, narrative exploration is needed to investigate the faith experiences of late emerging adults through "young adult transition" (Erikson, 1980) from the university into adult life and

responsibilities. An indepth study of the multifaceted developmental experiences of a new generation of learners is needed in order to better provide them with more appropriate and meaningful educational services and experiences and to tend to their faith development.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this narrative study is to gain understanding into faith development during late emerging adulthood. The following questions will guide this research.

1. How does the faith of Christian emerging adults change after college graduation?

2. How do emerging adults negotiate the relationship between faith and identity?

3. What happens in the experience and expression of faith during emerging adulthood?

Significance of Study

This narrative exploration of the faith of emerging adults may lead to both theoretical and practical advances. Theoretically, this study may influence understandings of human development, adult learning, practical theology, and sociology of religion. Practically, this research may benefit university officials, faculty, parents, campus ministers, and church personnel and others who seek to educate emerging adults.

Theoretical Significance

This study may contribute to theories of human development, faith development, and adult education. As noted earlier, Schweitzer (2000, 2004) proposes that our contemporary milieu necessitates a more encompasing view of human development that

incorporates the influences of context, fluidity, and individuation. For such a perspective to be balanced, it must include the dynamic processes and experiences of faith. This study will help us to better understand the meaning-making experiences of Christian postmodern emerging adults as they construct faith and identity. Introducing *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, Smith and Snell (2009) suggest that their study will provide greater understanding into the journey from adolescence into adulthood. They write,

> Understanding the religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults better will also provide important insight into the nature of basic life course changes, both religious and otherwise, as youth transition out of their teenage years into adulthood. What does it mean to shift from one phase to the other? How are people changed by undergoing that process? What implications does that transition have for the different way people's lives turn out? How do different features of American culture and society facilitate or complicate the transition to adulthood? (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 4)

Though Smith and Snell examined religious experience in early emerging adulthood (18-23 years old), this present study will provide similar data for late emerging adulthood (22-30 years old) while addressing the areas of human development and faith or spiritual development.

The research may also assist adult educators in exploring how religious faith, and spirituality in general, influences learning. Educators have studied themes of life change, most identifying a crisis of perception. Mezirow (1978b) named this experience a "disorienting dilemma," while others have deemed it a "provocative experience"

(Pascarella, 1999) or "the transforming moment" (Loder, 1980b, 1989). Loder (1989) has shown how theories of religious education hinge on experiences of conversion and transformation. Tisdell (1999, 2001, 2003, 2008) and Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) have explored how spirituality influences adult learning and transformation. This study will add to this conversation, focusing on the experiences of emerging adults who were leaders in a Christian organization in college. Understanding the contemporary process of transformation, facilitated by faith, may inform the study of transformational learning theory.

This research exploration will address Hauerwas' (1980) appeal for an exploration into the diverse ways contemporary Christians incorporate their personal narratives with the narratives of their families, their communities of faith, and the Bible (Grenz & Franke, 2001). Such an exploration could begin incorporating narrative identity theory into the growing field of practical theology (Osmer & Schweitzer, 2003; Schweitzer, 1997, 2000). This study may also help to diminish the artificial distinctions between developmental psychology, sociology, adult learning, faith development, and religious education.

The study of sociology of religion has received increased attention of late (Schweitzer, 2003; Smith & Snell, 2009). The cultural shift from a modern to a postmodern worldview has ignited interest in the study of spirituality and religion in this ever-changing world. This research enters into the conversation and may further demonstrate a connection between culture, faith, and identity.

Practical Significance

In the changing postmodern milieu, it is important that university officials, parents, collegiate ministers, and church personnel understand the transitory experiences of their emerging adults and their new ways of *faithing* (Fowler, 2001). Such awareness may provide a foundation from which new educational practices and systems can be formulated. A more holistic understanding of development, one that includes matters of faith and spirituality, may offer educators a better perspective on which to base programs of study that meet students' needs (Tisdell, 2003).

This dissertation follows the format outlined by the University of Georgia and my dissertation committee. In chapter two, *Review of the Literature*, I will review research pertinent to this study in order to enter into the conversations on adult education, human development, faith development, and emerging adulthood. Chapter three will present the *Research Methodology* to be used in this exploration. In chapter four, *Participant Profiles*, I will offer the faith biographies I compose from the collected, transcribed, and analyzed interview data. I will discuss the thematic findings from each narrative and from the cross-narrative analysis in chapter five, *Findings*. I will conclude with chapter six, *Discussion*, presenting conclusions and discussing this research in relation to the existing theories presented in chapter two.

Definition of Terms

Emerging Adult/Emerging Adulthood – is a new developmental phase of life between adolescence and young adulthood that encompasses the ages of 18-30. Found primarily in industrialized countries, most emerging adults are involved in some sort of higher education or transitional endeavor and are seeking to determine what and who

they will be as adults and citizens (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood is a time of great experimentation and change. This study will focus on late emerging adulthood (18-30 years old) following college graduation.

Spirituality – is an individual's acknowledgement, discovery, and pursuit of the sacred (Tisdell, 2008) and the mysterious connection between and in all things (Tisdell, 2003).

Religion – refers to the beliefs, practices, and corporate *faithing* of a particular spiritual ideology. Religions are usually practiced within a community of faith that utilizes a set of specific doctrines, rituals, preferred behaviors, organizational structures to form a standard of participation and membership (Fowler, 1984; Tisdell, 2003).

Faith – (noun) a religious term that implies the holistic composition of meaning making that encompasses all facets of life including the cognitive, spiritual, emotional, and relational affecting life-purpose, values, and actions (Parks, 2000). Faith implies religious practice, though not necessarily in an organized religious institution.

Faithing – (verb) the act of setting one's heart in response to a triadic relationship with self, others, and God (Fowler, 1984). Simply, *faithing* is the act of applying one's religious beliefs to one's life.

Faith Development – the process of transformation that occurs during the composition of meaning throughout life. Faith is dynamic and changes over time amid changes in human development, cultural milieus, and relationships.

Postmodern – literally means after the modern era and features the deconstruction of metanarratives or singular explanations of reality. Postmodern theorists question the scientific theory and the premise of modernity of the existence of universal truth. In an

edited book of essays where each author offered inter-textual dialogue with the other writers, Crouch (2003), Horton (2003), and McLaren (2003) noted that there is a difference between philosophical postmodernism and cultural postmodernism. Cultural postmodernism represents the historically situated effect of philosophical postmodern thought on individuals, communities, and the resulting cultural ideology.

Narrative Analysis – is a method of quantitative research that seeks to hear the voices of participants through the stories they construct and tell in the effort to make and compose meaning of their lives and experiences (Riessman, 1993, 2001, 2008; Rossiter & Clark, 2007).

Narrative Identity Theory – Suggests that individuals make meaning of their diverse experiences and their multiple selves (Rossiter, 2007) through the composition of a lifestory. The lifestory is a composite of the stories individual's recall, compose, and recompose throughout their lives (McAdams, 1985, 1988, 1993). One recomposes the narrative according to experiences and learning (Polkinghorne, 1996).

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"Faith was an embarrassment in the modern world. It is what you had to settle for when you couldn't have scientific certainty. In the postmodern world, it seems, everyone lives by faith" – Brian McLaren (2000, p. 174).

Human beings develop in myriad ways. Traditionally, adult educators understand development as growth towards more complex frames of meaning (Courtenay, 1993). Current researchers, exploring development from a narrative frame, have suggested that conventional developmental perspectives are lacking; a new, more holistic framework (Slee, 2003) is needed that allows for regression, creativity, and more attention to personal and contextual experiences (McAdams, 1996).

One way to frame human development is from the perspective of spirituality or religious faith. Spirituality is the acknowledgment, discovery, and pursuit of the mysterious connection between and in all things (Tisdell, 2003). Religion refers to a structure of spiritual practice, typically within an organized community, with specific doctrines and rituals. Faith is a commitment to a particular spiritual ideology. James Fowler (1984) conceived of faith as a verb meaning, "to set one's heart" (p. 11). In his understanding, faith is not solely religious, but is in any life ordering ideology. The concept of religious belief is often referred to as having faith. However, faith is also used in non-religious contexts. Fowler merged the ideas of H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich in developing a definition of faith. He explained,

Faith involves ties of mutual trust and loyalty between persons and groups who commit themselves, explicitly and tacitly, to loyalty to and trust in shared centers of value and power. Shared commitments to the values of truth telling, fairness, noninjury, and the practice of procedures that guard and fulfill the common good help to constitute a viable social faith. Religious traditions help to evoke and form commitments of this sort but also call their members to more specific commitments and visions, including those which can provide critical and transformative perspectives in relation to routinized or corrupted forms of societal faith. (Fowler, 2001, p. 169)

Having faith is an experience for all humans for Fowler. While there are differences in the object of one's faith, Fowler believed all people base their lives on an *Ultimate Other*. This Ultimate Other is not always religious in nature, but can include any life-guiding principle or ideology.

This study is an exploration of the ways late emerging adults experience, practice, and incorporate religious faith into their lives after graduation from college. Religion refers to the beliefs, practice, participation, and corporate *faithing* (Fowler, 1981) of a particular spiritual ideology. Knowles (1982) found the concept of *faithing* compelling for Adult educational research because it is possible to develop a list of faith competencies that can be taught and measured. As a verb, *faithing* implies actions and activities that can be measured and compared; whereas the concept of faith is nebulous, involving beliefs and attitudes that are difficult to observe, specify, and measure (Fowler, 1981; Stokes, 1989).

Religions are usually practiced within communities of faith that utilize specific doctrinal practices and rituals to form standards of participation and membership (Fowler, 1984; Tisdell, 2003). I have approached this study from the perspective of a Christian who was educated in a traditional Southern Baptist Seminary, but who is intrigued with the ideas of the emerging church movement (Kimball, 2003; McLaren, 2000, 2010) and the vast array of experiences and expressions of faith among contemporary collegians and young adults (see Appendix A for a reflexivity statement).

The purpose of this narrative study is to gain understanding into faith development during late emerging adulthood. The following questions have guided this research:

1. How does the faith of Christian emerging adults change after college graduation?

2. How do emerging adults negotiate the relationship between faith and identity?

3. What happens in the experience and expression of faith during emerging adulthood?

This chapter will review existing developmental literature. I have included a concept map listing concepts and literature presented because of the complexity of the discussion (see Figure 1). First, I will discuss the constructs of spirituality, religion, and faith. Second, I will explore the concept of change and transformation in adult education. Third, I will present theories of human development from various perspectives. Fourth, I will examine theories of faith development.
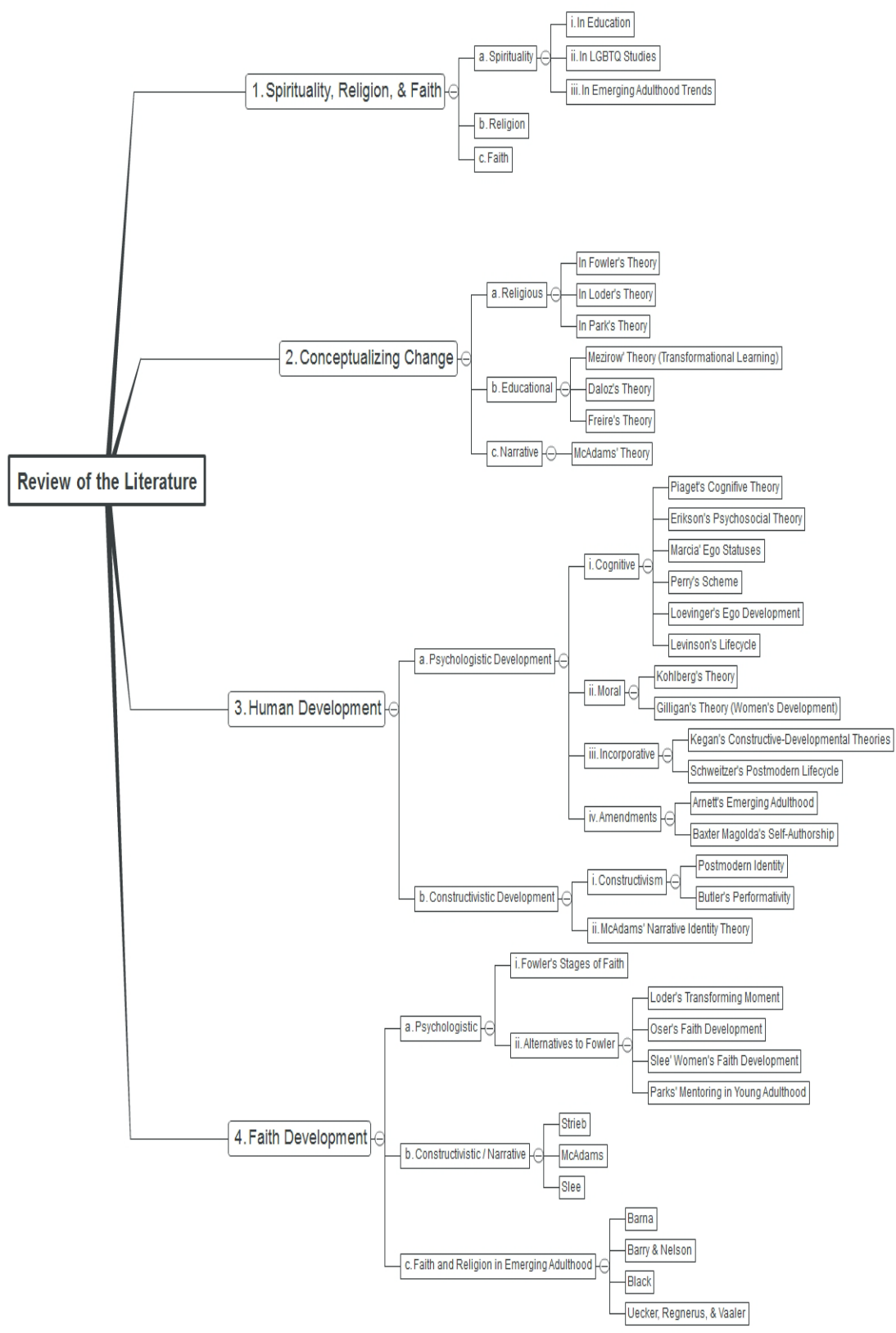
Figure 1. Map of the literature.

Conceptualizing Spirituality, Religion, and Faith

Scholars began investigating the effects of spirituality and faith on growth and learning

after becoming discontent with incomplete research on human development (Tisdell,

1999). Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott (1999) have shown that "Religion and

spirituality have been characterized…as dynamic processes interconnected with all types

and levels of experience including the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, the social

and situational as well as the personal" (p. 912). Traditionally, development in adult

education means moving to more complex frames of meaning (Courtenay, 1993). Most

models of faith development are anchored in the hierarchical, progressive models of

human development. However, as Dykstra (1986), an evangelical Christian, showed,

faith experiences often involve regression. The findings in Slee's (2003) research on

women's faith and spirituality demonstrated that development often involves periods of

emptiness or of absence of the divine as reflected in apophatic traditions. Dykstra (1986)

suggested that understanding faith development involves examining "patterns of

intentionality that constitute a person's fundamental orientation in life" (p. 61). He

posited that to interpret the movements in faith, a researcher must "discern the narrative

of a person's life and see how the different themes, events, and experiences in it hold

together" (p. 61). Growth and development are individual in nature, yet are rooted in

one's social contexts.

This section will examine theory and research in the areas of spirituality, religion,

and faith among emerging and young adults. There is much confusion and disagreement

on specific definitions of spirituality, religiosity, and faith (Halkitis et al., 2009). For

some writers, one or more of the terms are synonymous and are used interchangeably. All

of the terms seek to "name distinct albeit overlapping experiences, beliefs, and values" (Halkitis, et al., 2009). Schweitzer (2000) suggested that further research was needed to examine the particularities of faith and spirituality in the postmodern era. A discussion of the differences between philosophical postmodernism and cultural postmodernism will be discussed below. Because of the pluralistic nature of culture, conceptions of truth are highly individualized. He wrote, "To my knowledge, the relationship between religious development and religious (dis-)affiliation in late adolescence and early adulthood has not been given attention in the research on church membership or on dropouts" (p. 93). Questioning the relationship between education, religious development, and religious disaffiliation, Schweitzer demonstrated that young adults in their twenties are influenced by a plethora of factors.

Spirituality

Spirituality has received much attention recently in literature of higher education (Allison & Broadus, 2009; C. L. Anderson, 1995; Astin, 2004; English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Love, 2001; Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005; Rogers & Love, 2007; Smith & Snell, 2009), adult education (Buzzanell, 2009; English, 2001; T. J. Fenwick, English, & Penwick, 2004; Parks, 2000; Tisdell, 2003, 2008), religious education (Barna Group Research, 2009; Black, 2008; Chan, 2009; Schweitzer, 2004), and human development (Caffarella et al., 2000; Cartwright, 2001; Cates, 2007; M. C. Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Nahavandi, 1999; Poll & Smith, 2003; Tisdell, 1999; Walters, 2006) . Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott (1999) surveyed research from the perspective of sociology of religion in an effort to delineate differences between the constructs of spirituality and religion in historical and modern times (see Table 1). While in the past

Table 1

A Sample of Definitions of Religion, Spirituality, and Faith in the Psychology of Religion

Spirituality
"The human response to God's gracious call to a relationship with himself" (Benner, 1989, p. 20). "A way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate" (Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988, p. 10). "A transcendent dimension within human experience…discovered in moments in which the individual questions the meaning of personal existence and attempts to place the self within a broader existence and attempts to place the self within a broader ontological context" (Shafranske & Gorsuch, 1984, p. 231). "A subjective experience of the sacred" (Vaughan, 1991, p. 105). "The diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life" (Palmer, 1998, p. 5).
Religion
"A system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and practices of worship or other rituals directed towards such a power" (Argyle & Beit-Hallahmi, 1975, p. 1). "Whatever we as individuals do to come to grips personally with the questions that confront us because we are aware that we and others like us are alive and that we will die" (Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993, p. 8). "The inner experience of the individual when he senses a Beyond, especially as evidenced by the effect of this experience on his behavior when he actively attempts to harmonize his life with the Beyond" (Clark, 1958, p. 32).
Faith
The human activity of setting one's heart in response to a triadic relationship between self, others and Ultimate Reality (Fowler, 1981). The process of individual and corporate structuring of meaning and seeking the Divine that is founded in the historical practices and doctrines of the Christian church (Malacci, 2006).

Note: adapted and expanded from Zinnbauer, Pargament, and Scott (1999, p. 893)

there was little, if any, distinction between the two constructs, contemporary researchers suggest minor clarifications. Simply defined, spirituality is the human search for the sacred (Pargament, 1997; Zinnbauer, et al., 1999).

Referring to Wuthnow (1998), Chan (2009) showed that American spirituality moved from one of *dwelling* within religious institutions and houses of worship, to one of *seeking* through personal explorations disconnected from institutions, to the postmodern practice of *spiritual practices* where individuals select aspects of different religions and institutions to incorporate into a personal spirituality. Chan (2009) explained that for postmodernism,

> The concept of truth as timeless, universal principles that shaped modernity has given way to the concept that truth is irreducibly particular and narratival in character, and makes sense only in relation to the interpretive community that 'indwells' the narrative. This does not mean that truth is purely relative (Christians claim that their particular story revolving around the person of Jesus Christ is universally significant); what it does mean is that this particular story can only make sense when one participates in the community where this claim is lived. (p. 221)

Evangelical church leaders who understand the significance of the church becoming a place where parishioners can embrace the spirituality and spiritual practices of the group will be able to weather the storm of this paradigm shift. Chan explained that within evangelical churches, the postmodern era has brought a challenge to remain spiritually relevant. Several denominations have sought to reframe their practice, while others have entrenched, returning to strict, fundamental orthodoxy focusing on traditional doctrinal

purity. Chan cautioned that while evangelicals seek to engage relevant spirituality there is a danger of capitulating to the prevailing culture and losing valuable traditions and meanings found throughout Christian history.

Spirituality is a key aspect of religion (Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005; Zinnbauer, et al., 1999). Pargament (1997) noted that religion is a broader concept than spirituality. For spirituality to be religious, it must involve the sacred as a pathway and a goal. Religion provides an organized framework for the search for the sacred. However, many outside of religious structures experience spirituality. In the following section, I will explore spirituality in education and in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) spirituality. The section will conclude with an examination of the trends of spirituality in emerging adulthood.

Spirituality in Education

Leona English demonstrated that spirituality has been a "full and integral part of adult education" (English, 2005, p. 1173) from its earliest days. Though there was some decline of spirituality in adult education conversations in the later twentieth century, English noted that the humanist turn and focus on meaning making and self-actualization are also spiritual endeavors. English (2000) identified three components that can be fostered by adult learning: "a strong sense of self; care, concern, and outreach to others; and the continuous construction of meaning and knowledge" (p. 30). These elements are spiritual in that they are "relational, people-centered opportunities for meaningful dialogue, connected to personal and social fulfillment" (English, 2000, p. 37).

Elizabeth Tisdell is perhaps the most prolific adult educator researching spirituality. She suggested, "spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater

authenticity or to a more authentic self" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 29). She wrote that something

of the "essence of spirituality" is in "discovering the extraordinary in the ordinary

business of life" (Tisdell, 1999, p. 88). In *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and*

Higher Education, Tisdell (2003) noted that spirituality is difficult to define and is an

"elusive topic" (p. 28). Instead of offering a definition, she presented seven assumptions

about spirituality and education:

> (1) spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are
>
> interrelated; (2) spirituality is an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the
>
> interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many refer to as the
>
> Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or
>
> Great Spirit; (3) spirituality is fundamentally about meaning making; (4)
>
> spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning
>
> environment; (5) spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater
>
> authenticity or to a more authentic self; (6) spirituality is about how people
>
> construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often
>
> made more concrete in art forms such as music, image, symbol, and ritual, all of
>
> which are manifested culturally; (7) spiritual experiences most often happen by
>
> surprise. (Tisdell, 2003, p. xi)

These assumptions demonstrate how spirituality is involved in all dimensions of life

including identity formation and development. Some argue with the idea of an authentic

self. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the idea of multiple selves

represents a constructivistic perspective of identity. Fenwick (2008) explained, "Answers

to the questions, 'Who am I and what is my purpose?' are not ultimate truths waiting to

be revealed, but are continually emerging as we work through one situation after another"
(p. 299).

For adult learners the search for the spiritual is often a search for meaning. For
Tisdell (2008), spirituality is the key for successful spiral learning (Bateson, 1995;
Kegan, 1994), learning that continues to incorporate previous experiences. Tisdell
explained,

> Adults who value spirituality often describe their adult spiritual development as a
> process of questioning or moving away from earlier beliefs or experiences from
> one's childhood religious or cultural tradition, as other ways of being in the world
> are explored through education or other life experiences related to cognitive and
> moral development. (Tisdell, 2008, p. 33)

English (2001) delineated the difference between sacred and secular, or public
spirituality. While sacred spirituality is found in religious practice,

> A public spirituality is worked out in the everyday world of human existence and
> may or may not have a religious or institutional dimension. This is a spirituality of
> living and being, which is broad enough to be inclusive of all practices and
> beliefs: its focus is on the living of relationship and the development of our
> meaning-making capacity as adults. (English, 2001, p. 2)

Meaning making is also an issue of human developmental studies and adult education.
These topics will be explored more in later sections.

Although spirituality can be an experienced independently, Tisdell (1999) noted
that spiritual learning is most often connected to relationships. Community is a key
ingredient in helping adults find and live according to "one's spiritual path" (p. 91). The

group defines the cultural dimensions of spirituality, including image and symbol. She explained that community also informs how adults conceive of and understand a "higher power" (Tisdell, 1999, p. 93).

Spirituality in LGBTQ Literature

Some of the most original and significant work in spirituality has been done in the area of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) studies (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Boisvert, 1999; Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001; Garcia, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles, 2008; Goodwill, 2000; Halkitis, et al., 2009; Henrickson, 2007; Kubicek et al., 2009; Roseborough, 2006; Seegers, 2007; Tan, 2005; White & White, 2004). Rodriguez (2010) wrote, *At the Intersection of Church and Gay: A Review of the Psychological Research on Gay and Lesbian Christians*. In his literature review he found that a shift had occurred in research where gay men and lesbians are now being considered "as spiritual and religious beings in their own right, rather than merely sexual beings needing to be compared and contrasted with religious others" (p. 8). He also found that many in his study have successfully integrated Christian faith with a gay or lesbian identity without the assumed identity or religious conflicts. Halkitis, Mattis, Sahadath, Massie, Ladyzhenskaya, Pitrelli, et al. (2009) explained that many LGBT persons define their spirituality, faith, and identities differently than others because they are often negotiating the constructs in the midst of hostile environments of religious communities that do not approve of their lives. In their study of the meanings of spirituality and religion among the LGBT people they studied, 28% defined spirituality as a "belief in, knowledge or, or relationship with a higher power" (p. 256). Nineteen percent indicated that spirituality was about self-understanding and acceptance. Seventeen percent of

participants understood spirituality to be a positive acceptance of others that included the values of "respect for all life, compassion, kindness, forgiveness, and love" (p. 256). Sixteen percent defined the construct as an interconnectedness of everyone and everything.

Shallenberger (1996), researching the integration of spirituality and identity for gay men and lesbians, stated that individuals in his study described the coming out process as akin to a second spiritual awakening or being "born again" (p. 204). He wrote,

Many of the participants in this study saw this step [coming out] as a deepening and acceptance of their identities, a movement toward fuller integrity. In this vein, it was inherently spiritual, for it led to a deeper acceptance of who one was, both alone and before God. (Shallenberger, 1996, p. 203)

Rostosky, Riggle, Brodnicki, and Olson (2008) confirmed this finding, suggesting that for many same sex couples "spiritual and psychological identity development are intersecting and mutually influential processes" (p. 400).

Yip (2000) showed that in some cases gay men left the stresses and social pressures of religious institutions to save their faith. After leaving the strictures of traditional churches, these men were able to find community with other gay men outside of organized religion in order to find spiritual fulfillment and growth of "personal faith" (p. 133). Alternatively, Rostosky, Riggle, Brodnicki, and Olson (2008) found that many same sex couples desired participation in traditional churches or synagogues. While some were able to find congregations that accepted them without prejudice, most did not.

Trends of Spirituality in Emerging Adulthood

Schweitzer (2000) observes that there are no current completed longitudinal studies on spirituality throughout the lifespan. Such an examination may reveal differences in the ways culturally postmodern individuals assimilate spirituality and faith into their pluralistic lives. Christian Smith has reported on the first two parts of a longitudinal study on faith and spirituality. The third part of his research is not been complete. The first report of the study was in *Soul Searching: The Religious Lives of American Teenagers* (Smith & Denton, 2005). The second was presented in Smith's and Snell's (2009) recently published, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults.* The latter report focuses on early emerging adults (18-23) as they process religion, spirituality, and faith. Over 3000 emerging adults were interviewed (telephone and face-to-face) in their homes for this phase of the study.

Supplanting the Higher Education Research Institute's (Astin et al., 2005) study as the most recent, comprehensive, and accurate examination of the faith and spirituality of early emerging adulthood, Smith's and Snell's (2009) *Souls in Transition* is not restricted to collegians, but included a diverse spectrum of emerging adults. This study found that almost half of the participants valued religion or some sort of formal spiritual practice. Though emerging adults in the study may have changed from one form of religious or spiritual practice to another, most did not shift from practice to no practice or vice versa. The participants in the study fully captured the constructivistic ideas of postmodernism. The authors reported, "most have great difficulty grasping the idea that a reality that is objective to their own awareness or construction of it may exist that could have a significant bearing on their lives" (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 45). For the majority of

these emerging adults, moral decisions were easy. There was a culturally pervasive, universal sense of normal morality that crossed over religious boundaries. One of the commonly understood principles presented was, "do not hurt anyone" (p. 47). The study demonstrated that in addition to a collective individualism among this generation, there was also an appreciation for and identification with other cultures, people, and beliefs.

The most important factor contributing to *highly religious* emerging adults was having *highly religious* parents as teenagers (Smith & Snell, 2009). While the majority of emerging adults said religion was important in their lives, less than half actually attended religious services. Additionally, only 15% of emerging adults in this study attended bible studies, prayer groups, or similar meetings in addition to a weekly corporate worship. Even among the *highly religious*, most emerging adults believed that most religious or spiritual paths are equally acceptable forms of practice.

Smith and Snell (2009) identified six major religious types among emerging adults. *Committed traditionalists* represented about 15% of those surveyed. Most in this group represented mainstream faith traditions, such as Protestants and Mormons. Not as committed, the *selective adherents* chose to practice some elements of their chosen faith tradition and ignore other aspects. They represented approximately 30% of their peers. The *spiritually open* emerging adults (15%) were nonreligious but were interested in spiritual matters. Those who were *religiously indifferent* included about 25% of the population of emerging adults. While they professed to be members of a particular tradition, they were too involved in other things to make religion or spirituality an important part of their lives. *Religiously disconnected* emerging adults, only about 5%, not only were not involved in religious activities, they had had little or no exposure to

religious people, ideas, or conversations. Only about 10% were deemed *irreligious*, having negative attitudes towards religion and "rejecting the idea of personal faith" (Smith & Snell, 2009, p. 168).

More than half of those in the Smith and Snell (2009) study indicated that they remained level in their practice or lack of faith throughout emerging adulthood. However, as the above religious typology shows, most were "simply not that interested" in religious or spiritual matters (p. 295). The authors did not speculate on what the next wave of the study will reveal, as it will examine the second half of emerging adulthood (24-30).

The *Spiritual Life of College Students*, a research report by Astin, et al. (2005), includes data from 236 colleges and universities and representing the spiritual attitudes and opinions of 112,232 students. Eighty percent of respondents expressed interest in spirituality and 79% stated that they believed in God. Sixty-nine percent reported that they prayed and the same percentage said, "religious beliefs provide strength, support, and guidance" for their lives (Astin, et al., 2005, p. 5). While 81% of the collegians reported that they occasionally attended religious services, only 40% said that they followed religious teachings in their everyday lives.

The differences between this college specific report and the more inclusive one by Smith and Snell (2009) are intriguing. It does not seem possible that the extreme differences are solely due to the five years that separates the research studies. Does college attract those who are more interested in spirituality or religion? Does the environment of colleges and universities present more opportunities for students to investigate spiritual or faith matters?

A recent study on emerging adult religious practice was *Religion among the Millennials* (referring to those born after 1981) reported by the Pew Research Center (2010). Twenty-six percent of this generation reported being unaffiliated with any organized religious group. This is substantial when compared with previous generations. In Generation X (born 1965-1980), 20% were unaffiliated with religious groups. However, among Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) only 13% reported being unaffiliated. While almost half of contemporary emerging adults reported praying daily, only 18% attend religious services often or almost every week.

The above explorations of spirituality and contemporary trends in research serve to inform the present study. Spirituality is both religious and secular in nature (English, 2001). For the purposes of this study, spirituality is defined as an individual's acknowledgment, discovery, and pursuit of the sacred (Tisdell, 2008) and the mysterious connection between and in all things (Tisdell, 2003).

Religion

Similar to spirituality and faith, there are numerous definitions of religion. Often the definitions between the three terms appear blurred or overlapping. Refer to Table 1 for a variety of definitions from the perspective of psychology of religion. Argyle and Beit-Hallahmi (1975) suggest that religion is a system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power, and includes practices of worship or other rituals directed towards that power. For most scholars, religion refers to systematized belief and practice (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott (1999). In this study, religion refers to a structure of spiritual practice, typically within a structured community (Tisdell, 2008) with specific doctrines, rituals, preferred behaviors, organizational structures, and professional clergy.

As noted earlier, spiritual learning occurs best in community. Zinnbauer and his colleagues (1999) recognized that religion includes both spiritual and secular processes and goals, seeking to sanctify the secular as sacred, holy, or ordained by God. While acknowledging the positive communal aspects of religions, Halkitis et al. (2009) also identified the negative dynamics of social and economic control within some religious structures. Hans Küng (1988) advised that the challenge for religion in a postmodern world is learning to incorporate all of life into religious thought and practice. He noted that for religion to be relevant to a postmodern world it must be diverse and holistic, including all people and all subjects.

Many religious institutions organize into local churches, parishes, or synagogues. The organization is often further structured into regional, national, and international structures within denominations. Denominations and churches may also have ministries that are accomplished in cooperation such as campus and social ministries and mission agencies.

Faith

Fowler (1982), the most influential reseacher working in faith development, explained that faith is a common human experience; everyone has faith. For Fowler (1981), faith is the human activity of setting one's heart in response to a triadic relationship between self, others and Ultimate Reality. Fowler believes that faith can be secular. He wrote that "faith is not to be equated with religion or belief" (Fowler, 1982, p. 180). He continued, it is "a generic or universal feature of the human struggle for identity, community, and meaning" (p. 180). In her narrative exploration of the faith of collegians, Wells (2003) found, "in the lives of individuals, particularly during the college years, it is

virtually impossible to separate the notion of overall faith from the particular faith perspective" (p. 239). To achieve the higher stages of faith in Fowler's scheme, one must be involved in an organized religious structure. In his understanding, ultimate reality is individual in nature. Though not always consciously, each individual determines the ultimates upon which he or she bases his or her life. Negotiating meaning is therefore a cognitive experience done in specific social contexts. As such, faith is a verb as well as a noun. This act of making meaning is the act of *faithing*. Fowler's theory will be explored in more detail in a later section.

Malacci (2006) deliniated between faith and spirituality. He suggested that spirituality is a general term refering to common human experience and acknowledgment of things of the spirit, while faith has a specific religious meaning. For him the term *spirituality* has become co-opted by secular society. Therefore, he argued for use of the term *faith* to refer to spirituality that is religious. For him, faith refers to a process of individual and corporate structuring of meaning and seeking the Divine that is founded in the historical practices and doctrines of the Christian church. Küng (1987) would agree. He separated knowledge into two types, intellectual knowledge and faith knowledge. Faith knowledge is a spiritual enterprise. It is a type of knowing innate in all humans, but only attuned by some. Faith emanates from the image of God (*imago dei*) within every person. Taken literally, the image of God is a divine spark, the very Spirit of God that is able to recognize and worship the Spirit of God outside of the person. Faith is a process that can only be fulfilled in dialogue. For Küng, faith is completed in communication with God and in community with others. In this view all people are spiritual and have the potential for knowing God and connecting to others through exercising faith.

Faith is understood both as a verb and a noun in this study. As with Fowler (1981), here faith is a verb, meaning the act of setting one's heart in response to a triadic relationship between self, others and God. Because this study investigates the faith experiences of alumni who were leaders in a Christian campus ministry while in college, the starting frame for faith in this study is religious practice. Faithing refers to the act of applying one's religious beliefs to one's life. Faith is also a noun that refers to a holistic composition, manifested as "trust, knowledge, emotion, value, and action, permeating every facit of…existence" (Parks, 2000, p.32). However, faith is also dynamic and changes over time. In this study faith development refers to the process of transformation that occurs during this composition of meaning throughout life.

Some authors have suggested that contemporary Christians do not approach their faith propositionally, but relationally and experientially (Parks, 2000; Slee, 2000; Sweet & Crouch, 2003). For them, faith is more than a cognitive process. These scholars judge existing theories of faith development as lacking serious attention to the social, emotional, and experiential areas of human development.

Conceptualizing Change in Faith, Human Development, and Education

A key aspect of developmental theory is found in the motivators and processes of change. The earliest theories of human development suggested that growth was the result of adaptation to new cognitive and biological abilities. Many critics of developmental models focus on explanations of the factors and motivators of movement to new levels of maturity they deemed to be inadequate (Kelcourse, 2004b). Research has shown that normal life transitions in emerging adulthood may affect development (see Appendix B) by providing crises prompting transformation. Arnett (2001) and Schweitzer (2000) noted

that this is particularly true for those in industrialized, so called first world countries. As a result, they have argued for a new developmental period, emerging adulthood or post-adolescence, respectively. Most of the major studies of transitions between ages 18 and 30 revolve around adjustments in and through college. Aultman (2005) and Bohnert, Aikins, and Edidin (2007) explored the effects of the transition into college. Astin (1993a), Baxter Magolda (1992), Lefkowitz (2005), Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), and Perry (1968/1999) examined the challenges, changes, and transformations that occur for collegians while in school. Baxter Magolda (2004) realized that the acquisition of self-authorship did not occur for all participants during college. As a result, she extended her longitudinal study until age 30. Baxter Magolda (2006, 2007; 2006) also proposed educational techniques to promote the development of self-authorship during college. This was primarily accomplished through teaching critical thinking skills by promoting student reflection on experiences and hypothetical situations.

Learning often involves changes in perspective (Mezirow, 1978b). Mezirow (1991) proposed, "perspective transformation is the central process of adult development" (p. 155). Though Mezirow's ideas are foundational for transformative learning theory in adult education, there are numerous interpretations and applications of change across the lifespan. In her comparison of transformational changes in various historical contexts, Deepa Awal (2010) demonstrated how deep transformational change occurs in fields of leadership, coaching, and religion under a variety of guises. Religious change, educational change, and narrative change will be examined below.

Religious Change

Religious change, personal change resulting from institutional religious practice, is commonly known as *conversion*. Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo (1999) explained that religious conversion means *to turn*. Their study reviewed literature to explore the effects of religious conversion on changes in personality. They wrote,

> It is in religion that we find attempts to transform people in the most fundamental yet comprehensive ways. Religious changes are intended to be foundational. People have needs for meaning, belonging, identity, and definition, and commitment to a religion is a way to meet them. (Paloutzian, Richardson, & Rambo, 1999, p. 1048)

The adoption of a specific religion from another religious practice or from no practice is deemed a *conversion*. The study by Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo focused on changes that occur because of transformations inspired by religious adherence and practice. They found that religious change "influences people's goals, strivings, and identity, but seems to have little appreciable effect on basic personality structure" (p. 1073). The researchers concluded that religious practice could be the best place to test personal change because of the deep level of commitment involved.

Loder (1980a, 1980b, 1989, 1998) developed an interdisciplinary theory of transformation in Christian education. He delineated "a grammar" of transformation "which intertwines novelty and continuity" (Loder, 1980b, p. 14) in five sequential steps. These are (a) a conflict, (b) an interlude, (c) an intuitive insight, (d) an energetic release bound with the conflict, and (e) an interpretation of the experience that results in new meaning construction or a decision that an erroneous intuitive insight was made. This

reflective process continues until meaning is constructed that seems to fit both the conflict and the desired outcome. One may enter into the sequence at any point depending upon the person, the context, and the situation. In some circumstances, Loder noted that the entire process might seem instant. However, in other cases, the process might be an extended experience. What is distinctive about Loder's process of transformational learning from many others is the influence of God. For Loder, Christian transformation implies divine interaction. To borrow Fowler's (1981) term, Christian transformation is a process of *faithing*. A key aspect of faith for Loder is learning to use one's intuition to determine God's influence in one's life and then adjusting one's pursuits and plans to follow God's motivation.

Sharon Parks (1986) adopted Loder's (1989) theory in her exploration of collegiate, young adult, faith development. She found that Loder's idea of intuition fit well with Levinson's (1986) concept of *the dream* in human development and imaginative change in young adulthood. Successfully negotiating change was a significant factor for the young adults in her study in becoming fully responsible, participating, adult citizens (Parks, 2000).

Educational Change

Just as in religion, a key aspect of education is change. The acquisition of new knowledge and skills may provide new tools for making meaning and re-constructing one's worldview. There are many theories of adult learning including Andragogy, experiential learning, skill development, situated learning, socialization, transformative learning, and many others (Merriam, 2001; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2006). All of these theories include conceptualizations of transition and change.

As an adult learning theory, Mezirow's (1978a, 1978b, 1985, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2006) transformative learning has had tremendous, yet controversial impact on the field. Taylor (2007) noted that the theory has replaced Andragogy, Knowles' (1970) theory of self-directed adult learning, as the preferred theory of research in adult education. Mezirow's initial research was with a small group of women reentering the workforce. Soon he expanded his study to include a diverse selection of adults.

In his book, *The Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, Mezirow (1991) explains that transformative learning

> is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

The process of transformative learning begins with a "disorienting dilemma," an event or circumstance that challenges perceptions and meanings. Second, feelings of guilt or shame prompt self-examination. Third, through critical reflection, one examines one's assumptions. Forth, one realizes that others have also negotiated similar change through self-reflection. Fifth, one explores the options for new meaning. Sixth, a course of action is planned. Seventh, new knowledge and skills are sought. Eighth, new roles or meanings are tried. Ninth, confidence is built through the above attempts. Tenth, the new perspective is integrated into one's life and meaning structure.

Taylor (1997, 1998, 2007) compiled three literature reviews of empirical research involving transformational learning theory. Over the years, Mezirow and others have

modified and changed the theory. John Dirkx (1998) outlined four strands of transformative learning theories, consciousness-raising, critical reflection, development, and individuation. Each of these segments emerged from the work of particular theorists. Transformative learning as consciousness-raising is found in the work of Paulo Freire (1993) and Miles Horton (1990) where an effort is made to educate for empowerment and social change. The most prominent type of transformative learning in the adult education literature is critical reflection and may be seen in the writings of Mezirow. Transformative learning as personal development can be seen in the work of Larry Daloz (1986) and his colleagues (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996) and Robert Kegan (1994).

Kegan (1982, 2000) incorporated transformational learning theory into his concept of human development, focusing on the changes in worldview and meaning making delineated in Mezirow's (1978b) idea of perspective transformation. Brookfield (2000) effectively demonstrated that transformative learning theory is also applicable to ideological perspectives and meaning structures, including religious beliefs. In summarizing the edited volume, Wiessner and Mezirow (2000) distinguished that in such cases change only becomes transformational learning when people are able to use critical reflection to "*mindfully* transform *all* problematic frames of reference" (p. 352). As such, when religious change or qualitative changes in faith are not the result of critical reflection, they do not involve transformational learning. However, when changes in faith and subsequent faith development are the result of critical reflection, transformational learning theory is applicable. Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) argued that "transformative learning is perhaps better anchored if we engage on the spiritual level as well, and draw on how people construct knowledge through unconscious processes" (p. 14).

While Mezirow's theory has had great influence on adult education, it has been criticized for not addressing the spiritual, affective, contextual, catalytic, and relational aspects of learning (Baumgartner, 2001; Dirkx, 1998; E. W. Taylor, 2007). Merriam and Ntseane (2007) examined transformational learning in Botswana. Their findings confirmed that both the process and the resultant education of transformative learning is deeply dependant on context. As a result, contrary to Mezirow's findings, some of the participants did not achieve more autonomy as a result of transformative learning, but became "more aware of their interdependent positionality" (p. 420). The theory has also been criticized for not sufficiently addressing a pedagogical aspect. Much of the research reviewed by Taylor (1997, 1998, 2007) and Baumgartner (2001) explored the efficacy of teaching for transformative results.

There are two other models of change that adult educators have found useful. Lewin's (1946) psychological theory of change involves unfreezing, change, and refreezing. Similarly, Bridges (2003, 2004), writing about individual and organizational change, described three phases of transformation: ending, neutral space, and beginning. Before change can occur, individuals and groups must let go of previous assumptions. This process involves grieving what is being lost or let go. After letting go, one moves into an undesignated period or neutrality or settling. This is the liminal, or empty space described by Turner (1969), McWhinney and Markos (2003), Rohr (2003), and Schapiro (2009). After a period spent in this neutral zone, the individual or group is ready to test new possibilities through a new beginning. Even though there are several theories of change, educators have not adopted one comprehensive theory of transformational pedagogy.

Narrative Change

In McAdam's (1993) theory of narrative identity key moments in one's life story are identified as "nuclear episodes." Such events may or may not be properly labeled transformative learning. However, if critical reflection is involved in the creation or recollection of such nuclear episodes, then it may become transformative as in Mezirow's (1991) theory. McAdams (1993) advises,

> If you are a young adult eager to fashion a niche for love and work in the world, you may need to explore the ideological setting you have consolidated to determine exactly what your most cherished beliefs and values are, so that they can be personified in the imagoes you are about to create. (p. 271)

Here, a nuclear event may become a disorienting dilemma that spurs the emerging adult to change their myth or edit his or her lifestory, giving new meanings to past events and prompting directions for future development. The process of narrating one's experiences can educate self and others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Wells, 2003).

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2006) discussed the relationship between narrative learning and transformative learning theory. They suggested that the two theories are compatible. Citing Randall (1996) they demonstrated that people in contemporary society transform meanings through re-writing past experiences thereby creating new stories. Brooks and Clark (2001) explained,

> Conceptualizing transformative learning as a narrative process seems to offer promise as a means of increasing our breadth and depth of our understanding. It addresses some of the problems that accrue when transformation is thought of in constructivist terms. (p. 6)

Merriam et al. (2006) and Brooks and Clark (2001) showed that narrative learning attends to the affective, somatic, and spiritual dimensions of human experience not included in Mezirow's (1991) theory. Merriam and her colleagues conclude, "Narratives are…windows into development and transformational learning. They enable us to make sense of our experience, which is what adult learning is all about" (Merriam, et al., 2006, p. 215).

<p align="center">*Summary of Change in Faith, Human Development, and Education*</p>

Change is a universal experience. In *Nurturing Soul in Adult Education,* Dirkx (1997) suggested that when teaching, adult educators need to give attention to matters beyond the text. Learning involves the human spirit as well as the head. Adult educators need to learn to teach with the soul in mind. He advised educators to look to "constructivist, active, and experiential forms of teaching and learning marked by high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity, contradiction, and paradox" which "invite expressions of the soul" (Dirkx, 1997, p. 82). The most effective educational practice is attentive to the whole person.

<p align="center">Human Development</p>

Theories of identity development abound. There are theories of gender identity, sexual identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity, spiritual identity, religious identity, familial identity, vocational identity, narrative identity, and many others. While a great number of developmental theories exist, this chapter will only address those that have most influenced research in adult identity and faith development. There are two broad domains of developmental theories: psychologistic and constructivistic. The table in

Appendix C summarizes the major theories of development presented and illustrates how early theories influenced later thought.

Psychologistic Development

The majority of developmental theories taught in educational programs are psychologistic. These include theories of cognitive development, moral development, and incorporative theories (that seek to offer a more inclusive understanding). Each of these categories will be explored in this section.

Theories of Cognitive Development

The majority of human development research in education and psychology is from the perspective of cognitive development. This section will examine the theories of Piaget (1926, 1971), Erikson (1968, 1980), Marcia (1966, 2002), Perry (1968/1999) and Levinson (Levinson, et al., 1978). Each segment includes a table summarizing the theory.

Piaget's Cognitive Development. Sigmund Freud's (1910) work in the field of psychoanalysis resulted in a theory of identity development emerging from attachments in early childhood (Thomas, 1985). Carl Jung built upon the work of Freud by expanding the theory of inner and outer dimensions of self (Storr, 1983). However, it was not until Jean Piaget presented his findings that a true theory of human development emerged. Piaget's (1926, 1971) cognitive theory emerged after observing the ways in which children process information (see Table 2).

Piaget diverged from Anna Freud's (his mentor) and Sigmund Freud's theories, however, believing that although the relationships with parents and caregivers are important, human development is due to many other cognitive factors, including the brain's ability to process information. For Piaget, development proceeds in a set of

rational and logical processes of thought (Kelcourse, 2004b). Development is the result of

biological changes that enable higher cognitive functions. One moves to new, more

advanced stages of development as one's brain matures and becomes capable of more

complex thought processes.

There are several weaknesses in Piaget's framework (Kroger, 2007). First, he

believed the majority of identity development work to be complete prior to adulthood.

Second, he did not consider the impact of sociological and contextual issues in his theory

(Kelcourse, 2004b). Third, he does not include the impact of emotions in his theory

(Fowler, 1995). Forth, his explanations for transitioning to succeeding stages are weak

Table 2

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Age	Domains	Description
Infancy	Sensorimotor	Learning is the result of the interactions of self with one's body and surrounding environment.
Early Childhood	Pre-operational	Learning is entirely subject to imagination, observation, and what is taught by others. There is no difference between fantasy and reality.
School Age	Concrete operational	Children begin to think systematically in this stage; conservation is achieved, abstractions begin to be considered.
Adolescence	Early formal operational	The ability to think abstractly, hypothetically, and systematically becomes possible.
Adulthood	Full formal operational	Individuals apply the skills learned above in all areas of life. As a result they are able to develop their own moral loyalties and commitments to ideals.

(Kelcourse, 2004b). In answering his critics, Piaget (1971) noted that his theory deals with cognitive and rational domains, not with imagination, memory, or other aspects of identity. He understood transitions to be biological and to occur naturally when the individual is ready or capable to move to more complex thought and reasoning.

Piaget's work has been fundamental for elementary educators in understanding their pupil's capacities and limitations for learning. Piaget's theories are relevant to my research in that they influenced most of the developmental stage theories that follow, particularly those of Kohlberg (1969), Kegan (1982, 1994), and Fowler (1995).

Erikson's Psychosocial Development. Equally important for the field of education is the work of Erik Erikson (1968, 1980). Erikson's psychosocial theories (see Table 3) were influenced by the developmental theories of Freud (1910) and Piaget (1926), but extended the understanding of growth past adolescence throughout adulthood. His eight-stage model is based on identity struggles between opposing categories.

Contrary to Freud's (1910) framework, which emanated from work with neurotic adults, Erikson's model is based on the development of a healthy personality from birth through old age (Erikson, 1980; Thomas, 1985). Erikson also believed that Freud did not give sufficient weight to social influences on development (Thomas, 1985). Theoretically, a person composes a self as he or she seeks to differentiate from and make sense of the world. For Erikson (1980) development is driven by the epigenetic principle, which states that structures of personality and growth are innate in every human from birth. Thus, everyone develops according to the same patterns and processes. Erikson also tied development to biological processes. As a child matures physically and

cognitively, he or she becomes able to accomplish new tasks and think in new ways.

These changes affect self-awareness, self-concept, and, thus, identity.

There are many critiques of Erikson's theories. Ollhoff (1996) argues that

Erikson's theories are "untestable" (p. 4). There have been studies seeking to test and

quantify Erikson's ideas in terms of successful progression of the developmental goals of

each stage (Waterman, 1982). However, no one has successfully proven the early

Table 3

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

Age	Domains ("balances")	Description
Infancy (0-1)	Trust verses mistrust	Basic trust or mistrust of the world is developed in relationship with the caregiver.
Early Childhood (1-3)	Autonomy verses shame	Through parental limits and freedom, the child learns a healthy independence.
Play Age (3-5)	Initiative verses guilt	Children learn to balance getting what they need over against the rules and considerations for others.
School Age (6-11)	Industry verses inferiority	Children learn to work hard to achieve competency and learn to accept defeat.
Adolescence (12-19)	Identity verses diffusion	Teens try on different identities while seeking inclusion in a group of peers.
Young Adult (20-40)	Intimacy verses isolation	Individuals are coupling and starting a family while becoming more independent and industrious.
Adulthood (40-60)	Generativity verses self-absorption	Individuals are working to leave their mark on the world.
Late Adulthood	Integrity verses despair	Declining abilities are marked by reflection on a life well lived or a life wasted.

ideations in the childhood stages while they are occurring. As with Freud's (1910) ideas, much of the theory is based on adult assumptions made from observation of children's development (Kelcourse, 2004b).

Erikson's framework assumes the western idea that autonomy is the goal of development (K. Taylor, 1999). Gilligan (1982) argues against the perspective that independence equals maturity. The assumption does not fit the experiences of women in her studies nor the social connections that are needed by most adults. While Erikson's sixth stage does negotiate intimacy, his theory does not sufficiently allow for the impact of socialization on identity development (Kegan, 1982). Feminists Sorell and Montgomery (2001) argue that the theory does not demonstrate how biological changes affect development after adolescence.

In an effort to redeem the framework, Kegan (1982) suggested that Erikson missed a stage between industry and identity. He determined that the additional stage should be "affiliation verses abandonment" wherein the budding adult negotiates the social connections obvious in late teenage years (Kegan, 1982, p. 87). Other scholars have offered similar suggestions to add a stage to Erikson's theory because of the contemporary postindustrial cultures in the United States and much of Europe (Arnett, 2006a; Schweitzer, 2004).

Erikson's theory remains one of the most influential to the fields of psychology and education (Reeves, 1999). His theory extended ideas of development throughout the life span and included some effects of socialization on the development of identity. His work influenced other process-based developmentalists including the moral theory of Kohlberg (1969), the constructive-developmental work of Kegan (1980), Levinson's

(1978) model of men's lifecycle, and various theories and practice of adult learning (Knowles, 1980; Merriam, et al., 2006).

Marcia's Ego Statuses. The work of James Marcia (1966, 2002) is helpful in conceiving the various ways individuals negotiate Erikson's (1968, 1980) developmental levels in and beyond late adolescence. Marcia (2002) proposed four identity statuses: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, or diffusion. These statuses do not provide a separate theory of development, but seek to clarify the ways ego develops. A person who is identity achieved has successfully negotiated a period of crisis and has emerged with commitment to a new ideology and sense of self. One who is in identity moratorium is in the midst of a crisis, testing various identity outcomes. An individual who is in identity foreclosure has not begun to wrestle with the issues that should mark continued development and maturing appropriate for his or her situation. In young adulthood, such a person still holds uncritically to the ideas and beliefs that he or she was taught and has accepted without question. Those who are identity diffused are marked by a lack of commitment to growth or development. A weakness of Marcia's theory is that he assumes that change in perspective or ideology to be the sole factor of growth. To mature, one must leave ideologies of one's youth and adopt new, more complex ways of knowing. A young adult who examines his or her ideology and does not deny it, but confirms it as the guiding principle for life is labeled "foreclosed" not "achieved."

Perry's Scheme. Like Marcia, William Perry (1968/1999) did not present a new theory of human development, but sought to clarify one aspect of development. Perry studied two different groups of students at Harvard and Radcliffe over a period of 16 years. He sought to understand student reactions to relativism. His research resulted in

the development of *The Perry Scheme* (see Table 4), which includes nine positions of

intellectual knowing (1968/1999). In his understanding, students entering college arrive

in position one, basic duality, featuring a concrete view of knowledge as right or wrong.

As they mature and move through school, they progress through more complex,

multiplistic perspectives in which knowledge is uncertain, and finally grow into a

Table 4

Perry's Scheme

Position	Domain	Explanation
1	Basic duality	The world is seen in absolute dichotomies of right and wrong or good and bad; defer to authorities.
2	Multiplicity pre-legitimate	While pluralism is perceived, those who are different are viewed as alien ("I am right, they are wrong"); assimilated to authorities.
3	Multiplicity subordinate	Can understand pluralism, but continues to see self and chosen authorities as ideal.
4	Multiplicity correlate or relativism subordinate	"Anyone has a right to his [sic] own opinions;" authority is viewed as telling followers how to think, but my ideas are more right.
5	Relativism correlate, competing, or diffuse	Relativism is intrinsic; authority is also viewed as relative to subject areas.
6	Commitment foreseen	In the pluralistic world, one must begin to make personal commitments; all authority is relative.
7	Initial commitment	Begin to make personal commitments as an authority (includes religious matters)
8	Orientation in implications of commitment	Implications of commitments are realized, sense of identity and style result.
9	Developing commitment(s)	New commitments are viewed as growth; has a sense of being "in" one's life.

relativistic perspective in which contextual evidence may be used to justify one's knowledge claims. If young collegians successfully navigate through the scheme, they emerge from college in position nine, "developing commitments." In this last domain, the graduating student is becoming self-actualized, taking responsibility for who he or she is becoming. This graduate is open to change and accepting of differences in others.

The total sample in the project consisted of 112 men from Harvard and 28 women from Radcliffe. Only 84 of the participants remained in the study for their entire four-year collegiate experience. Though one fifth of the participants were women, Perry notes that the "illustrations and validation in this study" were generated almost exclusively "on the reports of the men" (Perry, 1968/1999, p. 17). While Perry's theories have been criticized because of the limited sample studied, his work was seminal in focusing on the effects of college on students. His theories were also helpful in directing attention to the post-adolescent period of life. Perry's ideas have influenced the work of Kegan (1994) and Parks (1986, 2000). His theories demonstrated the dualism found in contemporary society's transition from a culture of modernism, where a singular identity and rationalistic approach to life was operationalized, to one of postmodernism where multiple identities are formed in an era of rapid change and chaos (Kegan, 1994).

Loevinger's Ego Development. Loevinger developed a scale of ego development that built upon the work of Erikson and Piaget (see Table 5). Using a simple sentence completion protocol, she sought to discover how people made sense of their experiences. Initially her research was primarily with women. However, she expanded and modified her theory to include men. As a result, she presented nine stages of ego development. The greatest contributions of her theory were the balance between women and men in her

study, the continuation of ego development throughout life, and the impact of

socialization on growth and development. However, her work has not received much

attention in educational theory and literature.

Table 5

Loevinger's Ego Development

Age	Position	Domain	Explanation
Infant	1	Autistic / Symbiotic	Ego is bound with the mother; speech begins separation and movement to the next stage.
Toddler	2	Impulsive	Dichotomistic, egocentric: the individual is concerned about responding to his or her own feelings, needs, and basic impulses.
Childhood	3	Self-protective	Still egocentric, one is more aware of the consequences of actions and more skillful getting what is desired through bargaining.
Late childhood/ adolescence	4	Conformist	Peer groups are the primary motivator. Ego is evaluated according to other's ideas and opinions. Morality is concrete.
Adolescence	5	Conscientious -conformist	Ego becomes self and other-aware. Abstract thinking begins to emerge.
Late adolescence	6	Conscientious	Ego becomes one's own. Through self-reflection, motivations for right, wrong, and responsibility are internal. Relationships that honor and respect the other are valued.
Adult	7	Individualistic	Ego is solidified. The idea of other's individuality increases. Conflict occurs over other's needs and personal independence.
Adult	8	Autonomous	Ego is marked by tolerance of individuality; differences are appreciated and enjoyed.
Adult	9	Integrated	Ego is fully integrated and self-aware while being completely accepting of others.

Levinson's Lifecycle. In the attempt to create a complete picture of adult development, Daniel Levinson, Charlotte Darrow, Edward Klein, Maria Levinson, and Braxton McKee (1978) studied the life cycles of forty men through interviews and observations. Influenced by the work of Freud, Jung, and Erikson, the researchers focused on development that occurs after adolescence through the end of life. Like Erikson (1968), Levinson believed that men's development is epigenetic; all men transition through the same consecutive stages or seasons, although each proceeds through the stages in a unique manner. Levinson's (1959) work began with an examination of the many roles men have in society and the effect these have on individual development and resulted in the theory of a developmental lifecycle (see Table 6).

A major element in the theory is in the transitions between stages. Levinson (1986) noted that over half of life is spent in periods of transition. The transitions between stages can last up to five years, and there may be overlap between stages as a man works through the various problems or challenges inherent in each era. Levinson's conception of life change in these periods of transition is not the same as Mezirow's (1991, 1997) *transformative learning* or Loder's (1989) *transforming moment*. For Levinson, transition is a normal part of biological, social, and cognitive development where each person seeks to find meaning in the ebb and flow of life. Each stage is sub-divided into transitional segments. The early half of "early adulthood" is "novice adulthood" (Levinson, et al., 1978). The novice adulthood sub-stage encompasses my area of research with collegians and recent alumni.

A major influence on men's identity in Levinson's (1978) theory is his concept of

the dream. The dream is an idea, hope, or calling that often serves as a primary

motivating force for men during early adulthood. Successful pursuit of the dream results

in a positive sense of self. The converse is also true; when men fail in achieving the

dream, the result is a negative self-image. For his dissertation in Adult Education at the

University of Georgia, Scott Walker (1983) researched the impact of the dream on

ministerial identity during Levinson's (1978) age thirty transition. Walker found that all

of the men in his study were highly influenced by their dream, most of which included

Table 6

Levinson's Men's Lifecycle

Age	Domains ("eras")	Description
Childhood (0-12)	Childhood	The era of the most psychosocial growth, where separation from the mother occurs, and socialization begins.
Adolescence (13-17)	Adolescence	Also deemed *Preadulthood* where individuation and education occurs that can lead to responsible adulthood.
Young adulthood (18-40)	Early adulthood	Begins with novice adulthood (18-22) and encompasses early adult transition where one begins to develop one's own meaning structures. Early Adults establish a place in society, begin a family, and find meaningful work.
Adulthood (40-60)	Middle adulthood	Midlife transition begins this stage where one becomes more individuated, yet more compassionate and less disrupted by normal life conflicts. Here one becomes an expert.
Late adulthood	Late adulthood	In this stage, generativity becomes the most important task.

religious dimensions. Sharon Daloz Parks (2000) also found that the dream is vital for young adults to achieve a healthy adult identity.

The work of Levinson et al. (1978) was seminal in the attempt to map adult development throughout the lifespan, providing an examination of growth that included "personality, social structure, culture, social roles, major life events, biology" (Levinson, 1986, p. 11) and other influences. Developing a holistic theory of development was ambitious. The findings have influenced subsequent research on adult development as well as the practice of adult education. However, there were deficiencies in their work. The sample was too narrow for a theory of development that was to be representative of all men. Only forty men were included in the study, all were in middle adulthood, selected from only four vocations, and were from the northeastern United States. While the researchers considered religion as one of the many influences on the development of participants, they note that only a small percentage of their sample claimed religious belief and only a few of those in the study were deeply committed in their faith. Research suggested that almost half of the population claims to believe in God and declares that faith is a vital aspect of their lives (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008).

Theories of Moral Development

Another way of examining human growth is from the perspective of moral development. Two researchers have been of primary significance. While Kohlberg's (1969) model is foundational, Gilligan (1977, 1982) argues that it does not sufficiently represent the experiences of women. In this section, I will elucidate these two theories.

Kohlberg's Moral Development. Emanating from theories of cognitive development, behaviorism, and the philosophy of Kant (1788/1956), are theories of moral development (Kelcourse, 2004a). Lawrence Kohlberg (1969, 1974) sought to understand how people learn and practice morality (see Table 7). When researching for his dissertation, Kohlberg interviewed a group of boys aged 10-16. In that interview, he posed a series of moral dilemmas. One of the scenarios involved a fictitious figure, Heinz, who deliberated stealing a drug that he could not afford that could heal his ailing wife. Kohlberg's theory of moral development has three broad categories and six stages.

Table 7

Kohlberg's Moral Development

Position	Category	Domain	Explanation
1	Pre-conventional	Punishment-Obedience	Evaluation of right or wrong is based on externally imposed consequences.
2		Instrumental-Relativist	Rules are followed based on a reward-exchange basis.
3	Conventional	Interpersonal	Behavior is based upon relational factors – good behavior helps others.
4		Law and order	Right behavior reflects laws of the community.
5	Post-conventional	Social contract	Just laws represent the needs of the majority, but unjust laws should be challenged/changed.
6		Universal	Laws are transcended by principles of universal justice and conscience.

Each category contains two stages. In Kohlberg's framework, it is rare that anyone reaches stages four or five without some postsecondary education (Dawson, 2002).

The most prominent criticism of Kohlberg's (1969) theory is that it does not allow for regression to a lower stage, even in times of stress or crisis (Kegan, 1982). His initial research was conducted with men and boys. When women were included they were automatically given a lower level of moral maturity (Kelcourse, 2004b). Another critique common to all stage theories, seeks to codify development into segments tied to age or some other consecutive or systematic theory (Kegan, 1982). Because individuals progress at different times due to biological, contextual, or cognitive factors a better designation would be levels of moral thought that could allow for regression or a re-examination of previous stages given influences of socialization, personal experience, and transformational learning (Arnett, 2006b). Others have commented on the fact that Kohlberg's moral reasoning is primarily based on rational and social dimensions (Blomberg, 2009). He ignored a third significant factor *divinity*, identified by Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997). Elements of divinity were found in both religious and secular elements of the people they studied in India. It includes consideration of the sacred, order of nature, value of life, and attention to humanistic care for all individuals and nature.

Through his ideas, Kohlberg acknowledged the effects of socialization on personal development. The process he identified provides a theory of the social construction of identity in combination with cognitive developmental issues. Because of his novel approach, other researchers have been seeking an integrated or metatheory of human development that encompasses all aspects of the person (Kegan, 1980).

Kohlberg's theory was instructive to Kegan's (1982) constructive-developmental theory and Fowler's (1995) theory of faith development.

     Gilligan's Women's Moral Development. Carol Gilligan (1977, 1982) was a student of Kohlberg who did not agree with his theory that males and females developed morally in the same individuated ways. After a personal struggle over whether or not to have an abortion, she studied how adolescent and adult women make moral decisions by researching twenty women who were considering ending their pregnancies (see Table 8). She surmised that women's moral development is different from that of men. Gilligan concluded that before passing judgment on women one must hear their stories and understand their personal struggles and methods of making meaning (Kelcourse, 2004a). She found that in the moral dichotomy of reasoning verses relationships, men rely more on moral reasoning (justice) and women rely more on relational factors.

     Rolf Muuss (1988) found that the empirical evidence does not support Gilligan's conclusions that there are definite, universal differences in the ways males and females construct and make moral judgments and decisions. Auerbach, Blum, Smith and Williams (1985) also examined Gilligan's work and have offered an insightful critique.

Table 8

Gilligan's Women's Moral Development

Position	Domain	Explanation
1	Individual survival	Moral decisions are made on the basis of one's own needs.
2	Self-sacrifice	One's needs are sacrificed for the needs of others.
3	Nonviolence	A balance is found between needs of self and others.

They noted that she does not demonstrate why or how changes occur within the process of development or whether the differences she identifies are the result of biology or conditioning. Auerbach, et al. also noted weaknesses in the methodology used, as Gilligan failed to consider, or perhaps ignored, differences of race, religion, class, or ethnicity in her analysis.

The benefits of Gilligan's work in the continuing conversation of human development is found in her call to give attention to the individual person, whether male or female, and her call for integration of the dimensions of reasoning (justice) and interrelatedness of persons (Auerbach, et al., 1985; Muuss, 1988). Despite the deficiencies of her work, the feminist call to attend to the individual and not generalize about groups has influenced adult education and subsequent theories of development. Gilligan's voice joins that of other theorists noting that development does not end after adolescence, but continues throughout adulthood. Her participant's ages mirror those in my research. It will be important for me to give attention to all major aspects of each participant's life and developmental experiences in conducting my research.

Incorporative Theories of Development

In the effort to develop a more holistic model of development, several theorists have offered incorporative theories, combining ideas presented in previous research. Kegan (1980, 1994) presented a theory of constructive-developmental maturation that he later elaborated in light of postmodernism. Schweitzer's (2000, 2004) theory was developed from dissatisfaction with existing developmental theories regarding human development between adolescence and adulthood in contemporary society. As a result, he

developed a theory of postmodern human development that includes attention to psychological, biological, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions.

Kegan's Constructive-developmental theories. The most developed incorporative theories are those of Robert Kegan (1980, 1982). Kegan first proposed a constructive-developmental theory based on the work of Piaget (1971), Kohlberg (1969), Loevinger (1976), and Marcia (1987). He later modified his theory, offering clarifications for the process of development.

In his initial work, Kegan (1980) argued that adult development occurs in the effort to make meaning out of the experiences of life; "Human being is meaning making" (p. 374). He continued, "Researchers and practitioners do not learn about a person's meaning-making system by asking the person to explain it, but by observing the way the system actually works" (Kegan, 1980, p. 374). Kegan (1982) initially referred to the levels of development as balances and later, as orders of consciousness (Kegan, 1994).

Kegan (1994) rejected the idea that development is linear, instead he offered the image of a spiral to suggest that development is an evolutionary process where one uses tools learned in previous stages to face challenges in later levels. Kegan's constructive-developmental orders of consciousness (see Table 9) move from the most simple and concrete form of knowing (having *the* answer), to forms that are more complex (there are *other possible* answers), to full critical thinking.

People seek balance when negotiating relationships between *subjects* and *objects*. As one develops, what was the object in a previous stage becomes the subject of the new stage. For instance, in the third order, one understands one's identity and can discuss and

describe it. In the fourth order, one can author one's identity while understanding and appreciating the external influences that were a part of self in previous orders.

Within each of Kegan's (1982) balances the individual moves from a culture of embeddedness (the *object*) transitioning to the next stage and a new understanding of self and the world. This balance does not last. As development continues, the individual begins to let go of the local culture (*object*) by exploring a larger, surrounding culture of family, friends, and new knowledge (the *subject*). As connections are found with the

Table 9

Kegan's Constructive-Developmental Theory

Age	Domains (*Balances*)	Description
Early childhood	Incorporative	Embedded a mothering culture (or primary caregiver), meaning is made using reflexes, sensing and moving.
Play age	Impulsive	Embedded in the family triangle, the individual finds meaning through impulse and perception.
Adolescence	Imperial	Embedded in peer related roles, meaning is made in discovering "enduring disposition," needs, interests, and desires.
Late adolescence (no age norms)	Interpersonal	Embedded in a culture of mutuality, meaning is made in one-to-one relationships
Adulthood	Institutional	Embedded in a culture of self-authorship, meaning is made in autonomy and self-chosen systems.
Late adulthood	Interindividual	Embedded in a culture of intimacy (marked by love and compassion), meaning is made in interpenetration of multiple systems

newly discovered cultures, movement is made towards new ways to make meaning, creating disequilibrium, and potential transition to a new stage.

The demands of life are too difficult to manage with a static perspective. As the title of Kegan's (1994) second book suggested, the modern person knows that we are *In Over Our Heads*. As one matures, one seeks to find balance between the need for independence (in the first, third, and fifth levels) and the need for social interaction (the second, fourth and six levels). In response to criticism from colleagues, as well as to answer the needs of our increasingly postmodern culture, he modified his theory to suggest that in seeking balance, individuals may choose independence or community at any level (see Table 10).

In seeking to explain the transitions between balances, Kegan (1982) employed Piaget's (1971) ideas of assimilation and accommodation. Contrary to Freud's concepts of returning to infancy in times of stress, Kegan theorized that persons are constantly returning to the same tasks or tools in working through transitions throughout all of life. Thus, one is not returning to an infantile mode of relating to the world, but is using tools of transition. It is a process of "adaptation shaped by the tension between the assimilation of new experience to old 'grammar'" (Kegan, 1982, pp. 43-44) and vice versa. Life is comprised of periods of balance followed by periods of instability. Often these periods of imbalance are times of emotional crisis or the transformation inspiring "disorienting dilemmas" (Mezirow, 1991) or "provocative experiences" (Pizzolato, 2003). Kegan (1994) incorporated Mezirow's theory and extended it to be a key to personal growth in the postmodern world. When one reaches a point on his or her journey where his or her

expectations are no longer sufficient to explain his or her experiences or encounter's with others, a transition to a new form of meaning must occur.

Kegan's (1980, 1982, 1994) stages are indicators of a continuing process of development. Growth is never static. There is a balance between the person creating his or herself and the environment creating the person. Identity creation is the result of a dialogue between self and context. Kegan did not view stages as the core of his work. He reminded readers that the focus must be on the person, not the stage. While the levels he

Table 10

Kegan's Orders of Consciousness

Age	Domains	Description
Childhood	Single point	Meaning is made in negotiating the external subject composed of perceptions, fantasies, and impulses with the objects (or self) of movement and sensations.
School age	Durable category	Meaning is made through the subject composed of concrete ideas of internal and external actualities with the objects of perceptions and impulses.
Adolescence	Traditionalism: trans-categorical	Meaning is made through the abstract subjects of role consciousness and mutual reciprocity and the internal objects of concrete perceptions and enduring dispositions.
Young adulthood	Modernism: System	Meaning is made through the subject of self-authorship and the internal complex object of mutual interpersonalism. This stage represents the goal of the modern era: independence and exclusivity.
Adulthood	Postmodern: Trans-system/complex	As self-authorship is realized (object) the individual begins to dialogue with the subject of complex others. This stage represents the pluralistic, postmodern era.

presented are instructive, Kegan insisted that every person navigates growth uniquely. In his theory, change is accomplished by navigating three steps: confining, contradicting, and continuing (Kegan, 1982; Schapiro, 2009). When one notices an imbalance between self and current context, the ill-fitting idea or practice is confined, or isolated. Through contradiction, the new idea or practice is tested against the old one. Then the new idea is accepted or discarded and the person continues with life.

In her review of *The Evolving Self*, Baxter Magolda (1985) suggested that what is profound about Kegan's (1982) presentation is that his theory integrated many of the aspects of other schemes that have been sources of discontent for critics. For instance, by including cognition and emotion, he integrated the theories of psychological and social development (Baxter Magolda, 1985). Seeking a new balance that encompasses the newfound culture of meaning, the self adjusts and evolves to a new culture of embeddedness and therefore a new sense of meaning. People often experience this consequential imbalance as a loss of self. For instance, the shift from the third to fourth order of consciousness often occurs after the loss of a significant relationship. In the third order, young adults are their relationships rather than having them. A loss of relationship can be an emotional crisis, wrought with pain and confusion, but it can also serve as a motivator for change. Such a disruption can be the impetus for a young adult to begin to think of him or herself independently, developing his or her own self-hood, or beginning to self-author (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

By involving cognition and emotion in his presentation, Kegan (1994) integrated the theories of psychological and social development. Baxter Magolda (1985) compared Kegan's (1984) theory with that of Gilligan (1982). His ability to account for Gilligan's

gender differences made the theory even stronger. The theories appear to support each other. In Kegan's initial theory, women appeared to have more trouble than men in balancing the interpersonal truce (separating self from relationships). Baxter Magolda (1985) noted, "Kegan's constructive-developmental approach may also help to explain the existence of two distinct gender voices. Gilligan's explanation of sex differences suggested that male socialization encourages separation while female socialization encourages attachment" (p. 126). Baxter Magolda (1985) stated that Kegan's theory provided points in the lifespan where either gender will have difficulty finding balance, men in areas of socialization or integration, and women in areas of individuation.

In his second book, Kegan (1994) dismissed these gender differentiations. I think his dismissal is premature. While an all-encompassing theory of gender difference may be in error, in some traditional settings where gender differences are particular to the culture and are instilled from an early age, such structures may be the norm. For instance, in many conservative or fundamental religious traditions and in the southern part of the United States many are taught a male, head-of-household, societal structure where men are taught to be independent and women are taught to be submissive to male leadership and authority (Cooley, 2006). Many of the collegians with whom I work in Baptist Collegiate Ministries arrive at college with such a framework. Some with whom I work in couple pre-marital counseling voice a desire for such a structure in their future married relationship.

Schweitzer's Postmodern Lifecycle. Schweitzer's (2000, 2004) theory is not a complete developmental perspective, but an attempt to begin a dialogue about holistic human development in this postmodern era (see Table 11). He pointed to the work of

Erikson and Kegan as valuable, yet lacking in key dimensions, including attention to faith and religious practice in a pluralistic society.

Schweitzer (2004) argued that the effects of education are foundational for the formulation of identity. For individuals who receive religious education, the effects can be multiplied and are often developmentally confusing. Education in strict religiosity or fundamentalism, which negates pluralistic possibilities of meaning making, creates a crisis for children, adolescents, and emerging adults who are socialized as postmoderns.

Table 11

Schweitzer's Postmodern Theory of Development

Age	Domains	Description
Pre-school	Childhood	Meaning is one's caregiver.
School age	Pre-adolescence	Meaning is made in negotiating balance between independence and family.
Teens	Adolescence	Meaning and purpose is made in negotiation of self in community. The idea of plural selves is tested.
Late teens–twenties	Post-adolescence	He argues for this new stage of life. Meaning is made through critical thinking, in discovering multiple selves, testing possibilities, developing self-authorship, and becoming independent.
Adulthood	Adulthood	Meaning is made in negotiating multiple crises. Adult development is no longer understood as linear, but is fluid and often chaotic.
Late adulthood	Old age	This *third age* is a time of new possibilities of learning, mentoring, wisdom, and generativity.

The resultant identity crisis offers few options for these religiously educated individuals. They must live with identity confusion while adopting their faith (and abandon society), create multiple selves, or abandon their faith to make meaning in the pluralistic world.

Adulthood is not static for Schweitzer (2004). Development is a lifelong process. Contemporary development is not linear, but is often chaotic and multifaceted. Schweitzer wrote that if one was developing a postmodern developmental perspective from scratch,

> We would draw our lives with several lines simultaneously – different lines or strands that sometimes flow together but more often follow different directions: working life, private life, relationships, possibly memberships, spiritual journeys, and so forth. In sum, adulthood no longer is the time after the great transitional divide of adolescence. Adulthood itself now means transition–many transitions between different segments of a life cycle that no longer has a circular shape. (Schweitzer, 2004, p. 86)

Schweitzer said that modern society offered clear divisions "between church, private religion, public responsibility" (p. 96) and individuals. These divisions no longer fit the needs of people in this postmodern world. The result of such a view in a pluralistic society is that all meaning is internally derived. For Schweitzer, this division has become a societal problem "for the future of democracy and civil society, which is in need of moral and religious support" (p. 96). He argued for beginning a conversation to develop a holistic perspective of personal identity and human development that addresses the whole person living in the midst of pluralism.

Amendments to Existing Psychologistic Theories

Like Schweitzer's proposal for a new developmental stage in the midst of the life cycle, other scholars have offered amendments or adjustment of traditional psychologistic models of development. Psychologist Arnett (1994, 2000) proposed *emerging adulthood*, a stage between adolescence and young adulthood. Researching this same era of life, Baxter Magolda (1992, 1998b) explored the development of self-authorship from the perspective of higher education.

Arnett's Emerging Adulthood. "Emerging adulthood" is a developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood initially proposed by Arnett (1994, 2000). In a literature review supporting his theory, Arnett (2000) noted that emerging adulthood, a period from the late teens through the twenties, is marked by great change and experimentation as emerging adults endeavor to determine what they will be doing in life as well as with whom and where they will be doing it. In this transitional stage, twenty-somethings leave childhood and adolescence and seek to determine who they will be as adults. Most in this developmental stage are involved in educational pursuits in industrialized or first world countries and are seeking a career that fits their individual personality, goals, and needs.

While significant research has been conducted related to adolescents' transitions into college (Aultman, 2005; Bohnert, et al., 2007) and during college (Astin, 1993a; Baxter Magolda, 1992; Lefkowitz, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1968/1999), little research has been done seeking to understand the transition from college to adulthood (Baxter Magolda, 2004). There are only a handful of scholars exploring this formative stage of life (again, see Appendix B for a table summarizing

these studies). While Zinnbauer and Pargament (1998) reported on the ways religious conversion occurs among collegians, to date little research has been published examining how faith influences the transition to adulthood.

There are three processes that mark emerging adulthood: "accepting responsibility for one's self," achieving "financial independence," and "making independent decisions" (Arnett, 2000, p. 473). Arnett's theories built on the work of Erikson (1968) and Levinson, et al. (1978). Young men and women navigating this tumultuous life stage do not want to be called adolescents nor adults (Arnett, 1994). Arnett's (2000) theory has earned acceptance within the fields of psychology, sociology, and religion (Arias & Hernández, 2007; Barry & Nelson, 2005; Labouvie-Vief, 2006; Lefkowitz, Gillen, Shearer, & Boone, 2004; Luyckx, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Goossens, & Berzonsky, 2007; McAdams et al., 2006; Sciaba, 2006). Research done with emerging adults can assist in framing this examination of the influences of religious faith on identity development of college alumni.

Baxter Magolda's Self-Authorship. Baxter Magolda (1999b, 2007), known for her research on adolescents and collegians, expanded her studies to include the years following graduation from college. In her article, *The evolution of epistemology: Refining contextual knowing at twentysomething*, the researcher reported on her work that examined the development of self-authorship in college graduates as they moved into young adulthood (Baxter Magolda, 1999b). Self-authorship is the ability to apply critical thinking skills to one's own life and identity. It is literally the act of authoring one's self by examining the various scripts, beliefs, and practices received from others (parents, religious teachers, peers, culture, etc.) and deciding what to keep and what to discard.

Working with the theories of Erikson, Levinson, and Kegan, Baxter Magolda (1998a) found that the most important developmental task during the college years and beyond was self-authorship, learning to use critical reflection for self-examination. Despite the small number of participants who remained in her study to the end (39 out of 100), her work was instructive because of the diversity of participants and the individual way each achieved self-authorship. However, contrary to the general population, only a few in her study practiced organized religion.

Constructivistic Development

Some scholars challenged the above conventional models of development, arguing from a constructivistic frame. Constructivism "claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Crotty, 2003, p. 43). Social constructivists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) understood "human reality as social constructed reality" (p. 189). Those who espouse a constructivistic epistemology deny the ideations of both objectivism (claiming that objects have innate meaning) and subjectivism (claiming that subjects provide meaning to objects), seeking instead an understanding that meaning is constructed when subjects and objects are in dialogue and relationship. Robert Hill (2005) explained, "Knowledge is exclusively the result of social processes, especially communication, mediation, and negotiation" (p. 572). Bruner (1986) identified two different ways to construct meaning, through scientific or narrative orientations to knowledge. Referring to Bruner's concepts, Rossiter and Clark (2007) explained that all meaning constructs are "mediated by culture" and even "science cannot step outside or stand apart from the deep structures of symbolic systems through which we make meaning of the world" (p. 17). The supposed

objective vision of the scientists who conduct research is tainted by the systems within which they work. There is no knowing outside of one's meaning system. This position is in dynamic opposition to Kohlberg's (1974) advocacy of *Natural Law*, upon which his theory of moral development was based.

Constructivism

Constructivism, also known as social constructivism and constructionism (Hill, 2005), proposes that identity is not predetermined–even self-knowledge and understanding are but constructs of the dialogue between self (subject) and other-than-self (object). Constructivism does not deny the existence of subjects and objects (realism); the theory only negates the idea that meanings can exist independently in subjects and objects. Meaning is constructed from subjects and objects that already exist as they "engage" in the world (Crotty, 2003, p. 45). Meaning is relative to the subject and object within a shared context of meaning making. Any notions of truth are relative. Crotty proclaimed, "What constructionism drives home unambiguously is that there is no true or valid interpretation" (p. 47).

Constructivistic thinking gave birth to Postmodernism. According to Elli Schachter (2005a), postmodernism can be understood in two ways. First, the term delineates our contemporary, historical context, "after modernism." Second, postmodernism is a theory that challenges the modern, industrial, notion of positivism revealed in scientific theory that suggests that one can discover truth if only one has and uses the correct tools for the investigation. Patti Lather (1994) wrote,

> As the code-name for the crisis of confidence in Western conceptual systems,
>
> postmodernism is borne out of the uprising of the marginalized, the revolution in

communication technology, the fissures of a global multinational hyper-

capitalism, and our sense of the limits of Enlightenment rationality, all creating a

conjunction that shifts our sense of who we are and what is possible. (p. 102)

Proponents of postmodernism seek the deconstruction of all declarations and assumptions

of objective truth.

Ebert (1992-93) differentiates philosophical postmodernism, a cognitive

endeavor, from the practical, cultural application of postmodern ideas. She deems

philosophical postmodernism to be *Ludic* postmodernism. Ludic postmodernism is

"marked by the free-floating play (hence the term ludic) of disembodied signifiers and

the heterogeneity of difference as in the works of Derrida, Jardine, Lyotard, Baudrillard,

Suleiman, and Butler" (p. 14). Tisdell (2003) observed that ludic versions of postmodern

scholars "focus almost exclusively on deconstruction and seem to play word games that

are accessible to almost no one except elite academics" (p. 39). She observes, "such

versions would likely have no interest in spirituality," (p. 39) but focus instead on

contextual socialization, power structures, and privilege. Tisdell (2003) identifies another

form of postmodern theory: resistance postmodernism, which focuses on the resistance of

marginalized groups, and is concerned with spirituality.

Horton (2003) proposes a difference between philosophical postmodernism and

cultural postmodernism. The latter is a pluralistic cultural relativization of deconstructive

postmodern ideas represented by the performativity of narrative meaning. Newbigin

(1989) does not mention postmodernism in his explanation of the crisis facing the church;

instead, he attributes it to increasing cultural pluralism. In a more recent examination of

the philosophical and cultural influences brought to bear on the church, Crouch (2003)

suggests that it might be too early to categorize the cultural shifts as intellectual

postmodernity. Perhaps the shifts are the result of poststructuralism, a more complete

realization of modernity, or an "ultramodern" (p. 66) culture where many have deemed to

be postmodern is but a "development within" (p. 71) the modern worldview. Crouch

attributes the rise of postmodernity to be the result of prosperity in the modern realm as

well as "the product of modernity's disappointment with its grandest promises" (p. 72).

Those most affected by the rise of cultural postmodernity, as opposed to

philosophical postmodernity, are the young who have felt disenfranchised by authorities,

rules, and proscriptions of modernity (McLaren, 2003). Within the church, this has given

rise to a group of young leaders who seek a more relevant way of engaging culture with a

faith that is less propositional and more relational, which can adapt to and communicate

with contemporary secular society in "embodied forms of Christian practice" (p. 85). In

an article in the same volume, Horton (2003) agrees with Crouch's (2003) estimation of

cultural postmodernity. Horton states, "Call me dismissive, I cannot get beyond the

notion that postmodernism in the popular sense is little more than the triumph of popular

culture, with its obsessions with technology, mass communications, mass marketing, the

therapeutic orientation and consumption" (p. 108). McClaren (2003) responded to

Horton's (2003) idea noting that differentiation must be made between cultural

postmodernity and philosophical postmodernity. Newbigin's pluralism is but one effect

of the acculturation of select philosophical postmodern ideas of deconstruction combined

with a hyper-consumeristic modernism.

Instead of conceiving of the church as a sanctuary away from the ills of society,

younger generations want to engage culture in a movement that has become known as the

emerging church. It is not surprising that traditional mainline denominations and churches are skeptical and critical of the emerging church movement. McLaren's (2007, 2010) explorations into the nature of the contemporary doctrine of "Christendom" (which includes all major Christian churches and denominations) and his call for a complete reappraisal of doctrine and practice in *Everything Must Change: Jesus, global crises, and a revolution of hope* and *A New Kind of Christian: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith* have been panned and demonized by church leaders and evangelical theologians (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010). In a panel discussion during a weekly chapel service the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Albert Mohler, Jr. argued that the answer to the postmodern problem is not a recasting of contemporary Christianity, but focusing a greater emphasis on doctrinal purity and increased evangelical efforts to proclaim the absolute truths of the Bible.

McLaren, a professor turned pastor, has become one of the leading intellectual spokespersons for the emerging church movement. He seeks to balance the practice nature of doing ministry within a changing culture with attention to philosophical and theological influences and implications. McLaren (2010) continues to identify the societal shifts as postmodern. However, because of the ambiguity between philosophical postmodernity and cultural postmodernity, the perspectives will be differentiated in this dissertation (McLaren, 2003).

Identity is difficult if not impossible to define succinctly in the postmodern frame. Since there is no predefined original or authentic self and no inherent identity, all ideas of self and all identities are understood as being constructed. Traditional concepts of self and identity are nullified, leaving fragmented or multiple selves living in a world with

constructed, power dominated *history* that is not *real*, but formulated to benefit those in

power to protect and further the dominant social system (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001, p.

105). Schweitzer (2004) explained, "Terms like 'plural self' or 'plural identities' are then

suggested in order to include the pluriform experience of the self in adolescence and

beyond" (p. 50). In a postmodern world, identities change and adapt according to context.

A key to postmodern thought is understanding that there is no meaning apart from

language. Judith Butler (1990) built her ideas of performativity on the work of John

Austin's (1962), *How to Do Things with Words*. For Butler, *gender* only has meaning

within the context of language. There is no original idea, role, or traits of gender without

language. Within the context of language use, gender is *performed* and, therefore, defined

(Hall, 2000). Messages in the media serve to provide new structures and meanings

through characters with whom we become familiar and whose identities we seek to

perform in our own lives (Ott, 2003). Ever-changing media messages serve as

commentary and criticisms of our identity performances. Langellier (1999) expounded on

Butler's ideas, "Identity and experience are a symbiosis of performed story and the social

relations in which they are materially embedded: sex, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality,

geography, religion, and so on" (p. 129). Such beliefs about performed story provide the

impetus for a new theory to understand human development.

Narrative Identity Theory

Several scholars have sought a balance between the teleological, psychologistic,

stage theories and the nebulous constructivistic and postmodern conceptions of identity.

Rossiter and Clark (2007) declared that teleological theories are "grounded in the

assumption that development proceeds towards an end that is determined by a grand plan

or master design" (p. 32). While the stage theories were helpful in understanding some processes of human development, they missed key elements of individual lives. Rossiter and Clark concluded, "The assumed direction and endpoint of psychological development is inescapably a question of values shaped by influences of culture, gender, generation, race, and so on" (p. 33). Each individual life develops differently. Most stage theories only address part of the human developmental experience.

McAdams (1993) proposed that contemporary adults understand their identities in terms of a story or a narrative that they compose, re-compose, or edit throughout life (see Table 12). Though involving many of the same concepts, McAdam's theory of narrative

Table 12

McAdam's Narrative Identity Theory

Age	Domains	Description
Childhood	Prenarrative	Herein is the gathering of materials to be later used in the construction of a life-story.
Adolescence – Adulthood	Narrative	This is the period when an individual begins to fashion and refashion his or her life story.
Late adulthood	Postnarrative	Here the older adult reflects on his or her life, now unable to change the life story that has been written.

identity is different from the methodology of narrative inquiry used in this study. In a paper presented at the 2001 Adult Education Research Conference, Brooks and Clark (2001) explained, a narrative conception of identity "includes cognitive, affective, spiritual and somatic dimensions" (p. 3). They continued,

> We write and rewrite our pasts to justify the present and the future. We make
>
> chaotic lives sound rational, an extension of the value of control in U.S.
>
> mainstream culture. These manipulations of our life stories and language require

cognitive skill, and if we are successful, our audience will feel satisfied. (Brooks

& Clarke, 2001, p. 3)

Polkinghorne (1996) identified *narrative knowing* as a way individuals make sense of

their world and experiences. "Just as in a story we do not understand the meaning of any

one action outside the context of the plot," Rossiter and Clark (2007) explained, "in

narrative knowing the emphasis is on the recognition of the significance of a particular

event in relation to or in interaction with other events, and how together they constitute a

whole episode" (p. 18).

This act of self-writing is not the same as cognitive self-authorship. The stories

one composes are not the result of critical thinking, but of narration and often involve

pulling together stories that are often incongruent, juxtaposing and merging them with

other stories to form a coherent whole. This enables a meaningful, simultaneous

combination of multiple concepts of identity.

Marsha Rossiter (1999) wrote about narrative from an adult education

perspective. She confirmed that individual learners understand their development better

than anyone does. Using narratives to navigate change, the "storying" (Rossiter, 1999, p.

84) of life often leads to transformative learning for contemporary adults (Brooks &

Clarke, 2001).

Many explorations of narrative theory have emerged from studies of human

identity among individuals and groups that are disenfranchised by the majority. Some of

these explored narratives in the creation and understanding of sexual identity (Cohler &

Hammack, 2006; Stone, 2008) and feminist identity (Slee, 2004; Sorell & Montgomery,

2001).

The primary function of the life story is to integrate the many aspects of one's life into a coherent whole. McAdam's (1996) elaborated,

> As psychosocial constructions, life stories are based on empirical fact (e.g., 'I was born prematurely on February 7, 1954'), but they also go beyond fact as imaginative renderings of past, present, and future to make one's life-in-time into a meaningful and followable narrative. (p. 307)

He noted that constructed stories are "somewhere between pure fantasy and slavish chronicle" whose purpose is not to create a factual biography, but to "spell out personal truths–narrative explanations for life-in-time that are believable, followable, even compelling" (McAdams, 1996, p. 307). For McAdams, there are six unique qualities of the contemporary self: (a) Self is constructed by the individual; (b) self is constructed in a social environment; (c) self is multilayered and complex (inner and outer life); (d) self development is a process that demands time ("life is like a journey"); (e) self seeks congruence in development; and (f) intimacy is needed for modern selves to connect most deeply.

The narrative theory of identity suggests that there are multiple dimensions of every self. Depending upon the context one is in, one can have multiple, sometimes incongruent, even contradictory selves forming one's sense of identity (James, 1892/1963; McAdams, 1993, 1996; McAdams, Bauer, et al., 2006). McAdams (1993) declared that the problem of such an identity is in the conflict of connecting the dots, of finding "overall unity and purpose in human lives" (p. 306). Since contemporary society does not dictate identity, one must compose one's own story from one's experiences and ideologies (McAdams, 1993; Williams, 2007). In the act of composing the story of one's

identity, one can account for seemingly conflicting elements within the narrative. According to Bruner (2004), we become the narratives we tell about our lives. He explained,

> Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives we "tell about" our lives. (Bruner, 2004, p. 694)

McAdams (1996) suggested that the "I" is the process of identity development, while the "me" is the self. In his theory, narrative identity development begins in adolescence and continues until age 25. He explained that in narrative identity formation each maturing individual provides his or her self with "unity and purpose" (McAdams, 1996, p. 306). He continued,

> They provide the Me with an identity – by constructing more or less coherent, followable, and vivifying stories that integrate the person into society in a productive and generative way and provide the person with a purposeful self-history that explains how the Me of yesterday became the Me of today and will become the anticipated Me of tomorrow. (p. 306)

Identity development, therefore, is an individually constructed process; there is no universal script that is given by society, family, or biology, that is uncritically accepted by all individuals. For McAdams (1996), "A life story is an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future" (p. 307). While an individual's selves do not change dramatically

from day to day, over time self-concepts and identity constructions will often morph

through each recomposition, or retelling, of the stories of one's life (McAdams, 1996).

Personal meaning is made through remembering and telling of one's stories serving to

create a life story and one's composite identity.

Such construction of a narrative identity occurs within a situated context of time

and place (Williams, 2007). Therefore, the stories of an individual's life are not

constructed independently, but are co-authored with others with whom time and place

shared. Williams expounds upon Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981) theory of narrative identity

construction:

> Narrative provides not merely an account of the process of living: it also provides
>
> the basis of *the unity of a life*. A whole life gets its sense from its success in
>
> embodying or presenting a coherent narrative; the idea of coherence appropriate
>
> to a life, in fact, is that of a narrative (Williams, 2007, p. 305).

Williams suggests that such construction benefits the individual by providing narrative

coherence to our lives, experiences, and, thus, our identity. Narrative structure provides

cohesiveness to disconnected stories and selves.

McAdams (1993) identified four components of a life-story. Narrative identity

begins with (a) *nuclear episodes*, (b) incorporates *imagoes*, (c) in an *ideological setting*,

(d) governed by a *generativity script* to create a story that makes meaning out of one's

life. *Nuclear episodes* are events in a person's life that are "memorable or significant"

(Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 44). These may be fond memories (from which imagoes are

developed) or pivotal high or low points in a life story. As with Brookfield's (1990)

critical incidents, Mezirow's (1991) disorienting dilemmas, and Pizzolato's (2003)

provocative experiences, often nuclear episodes serve as anchors or turning points in one's life story.

Imagoes (from the Latin word for image) are characterizations of the self (McAdams, 1985). These multiple ideations are composed of individuals or ideas a person has encountered (in person, in literature, or only in the imagination). However, an imago cannot be isolated to a specific person in a narrator's life, but are constructed amalgams of values, ideals, personalities, etc. that represent ideals which the narrator embodies or wishes to attain. As with other aspects of a life-story, imagoes are the narrator's interpretation of the characters in his or her narrative. The imagoes represent aspects of a self-image for the narrator (Rossiter, 2007). Each imago in the life-story represents features of the self that the narrator desires, much like the construct of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1987; Rossiter, 2007), or aspects of possible selves that the individual abhors and wants to avoid.

For McAdams (1985) the ideological setting refers to the "philosophical terrain of belief" in which each individual lives his or her life (p. 215). Rossiter and Clark (2007) noted that this is similar to Mezirow's concept of meaning perspective. Rossiter and Clark (2007) summarized that the ideological setting is the "framework of beliefs, assumptions, and values that form the backdrop for the life story" (p. 45). Each individual composes his or her ideological setting differently. For instance, in religious belief and practice each person interprets the doctrinal beliefs he or she has been taught according to his or her experiences. However, changing one's ideological setting is not simply a change in beliefs, or a conversion, but is a complete transformation of worldview brought about over time through critical reflection (Rossiter & Clark, 2007).

Differing from Erikson's idea of generativity that only emerges in old age, McAdams' generativity script is a key component of narrative identity development where the need to be productive is melded with one's creativity and passion or "care" (McAdams, 1993; McAdams, Josselson, et al., 2006; Rossiter & Clark, 2007). It is here that an individual discovers how to use his or her passions and talents to fulfill his or her own needs as well as the needs or desires of others.

The life story gives meaning to seemingly disconnected and unrelated experiences, thoughts, conceptions, and contexts. As in Kegan's (1982, 1994) theory, this process is a psychosocial construction and continues throughout life as one seeks to balance new experiences with former conceptions of one's self and former ideations and epistemologies. In agreement with Erikson (1968), McAdams (1993) explained the real work of "selfing," or writing one's narrative, begins during adolescence and continues into adulthood (p. 312). During young adulthood, individuals play various roles (careers, relationships, and practices) in an attempt to discover their desired selves. The narrative approach to development "does not focus on defining a set predictable pattern of life span development, but rather attends to the ways in which persons make meaning of life events" (Rossiter & Clark, 2007, p. 34). Each individual determines the goals of development. Rossiter and Clark (2007) suggested, "In the narrative orientation it is the individual's interpretation that matters. The question is: To what end does an individual *wish or aspire* to develop?" (p. 40, italics in original). Fenwick wrote (2000), "Just as new possibilities for thought and action emerge continually in the ever-expanding dynamic system, so do new identities and possibilities for self-reinvention" (p. 308). Life

stories not only demonstrate the uniqueness of an individual, but also commonalities of the groups in which the individual is involved and to which he or she belongs.

For McAdams (1996) there are six standards of a good life story. First, a story must demonstrate *coherence*, meaning, "the extent to which a given story makes sense on its own terms" (p. 315). Second, a story must also display *openness*. Openness is especially important in postmodern contexts, where the story is pliable; life stories must be open to change and or adjustments "by holding open a number of alternatives for future action and thought." (p. 315). Third, a good life-story must be *credible*. While imagination has a role in the interpretation of life-stories and the creation of imagoes, identities are created from actual events and experiences. Fourth, while complex, one's life-story should also be *differentiated*. As one matures, one's life story should become more complex, and more individualized. This complexity results in multiple aspects of self that are seemingly incongruent and fragmented. Fifth, it is the narrative of a life-story that *reconciles* the various differences in self-stories. Sixth, each life story must also feature *generative integration*. Maturity implies functionality within society, family, and other areas of life. One is able to integrate oneself into various roles and responsibilities called for in life. McAdams (1996) explained, "Mature identity in modern adulthood requires a creative involvement in a social world that is larger and more enduring than the self" (p. 315).

Discussion

I agree with McAdam's (1993) critique that the grand stage theories of personality development "tend to claim too much about all persons in general and say too little about the individual person in cultural context" (p. 316). While helpful for understanding

identity development in general, all of the stage theories are inadequate when applied to individuals. Of all of the stage theories, Kegan's (1980, 1982, 1994) appears to be the least problematic; he addressed many of the weaknesses intrinsic to other theories, particularly those dealing with the effects of socialization and context on identity development. However, his theory is teleological and follows the epigenetic principle, not allowing for digression or differential development that includes various elements across stages.

My area of research is focused on *late adolescents* (Erikson, 1968), *postadolescents* (Schweitzer, 2004), *novice adults* (Levinson, et al., 1978), *young adults* (Levinson, et al., 1978; Parks, 1986), or *emerging adults* (Arnett, 2000). Narrative theory provides the best framework for seeking to understand the various ways these emerging adults experience and negotiate their faith – to listen to their voices and to hear their stories. The theory will also be helpful in seeking to understand how each individual constructs these experiences into a coherent narrative whole.

<p style="text-align:center">Faith Development</p>

Faith is the act of setting one's heart in response to a triadic relationship between self, others, and God. The act of faithing is one of making sense of the experiences of life in light of one's beliefs in specific contexts. Faith includes spirituality, an attention to the mystical commonalities found in all people and in all creation. Faith development refers to the lifelong process of *faithing* through biological, social, and emotional changes.

There have been few attempts to study the development of faith across the lifespan (see Appendix D for a summary of theories of faith development). Stokes (1982) edited an early work that reported on the work of the *Symposium of Faith Development*

and the Adult Life Cycle, a gathering of educators, pastors, counselors and teachers in 1981. The purpose of the *Symposium* was to review and discuss research in the separate fields of faith development and adult development from the perspectives of higher education, adult education, religious education, psychology, sociology, theology, and ministry. Twelve of the 21 hypotheses that emerged from that study as delineated by Bruning and Stokes (1982), are directly related to this research project. The others address experiences and processes of older adulthood. First, faith development occurs naturally as a part of human development. Changes in faith are due to the changing social and cultural milieus of the young adult. Second, young adults are less interested in faith development than are those over 35. This assumption is based on the idea that there are so many unanswered issues in a young adult's life that are more pressing than matters of faith. Third, formal education has a positive effect on faith development. The authors acknowledge that higher education may affect one's traditionally held religious beliefs negatively, while moving young adults to a higher stage of faith maturity. Fourth, "the extent of one's Faith Development in young adulthood has a significant impact on that person's vocational values during young and middle adulthood" (Bruning & Stokes, 1982, p. 53). Morals, ethics, and values are all positively affected by faith. Crises at work that produce moral dilemmas can provide the impetus to deeper maturity and growth to higher faith stages. Fifth, there is a positive correlation between close relationships and level of faith development. Sixth, there is a correlation between a high socio-economic status and a higher stage of faith. Seventh, women are more interested in faith development than men are. Eighth, participation in a faith community helps an individual advance in faith development. Ninth, one's faith development is influenced by the faith

of significant people in one's life. These major influences includes spouses, partners, mentors, and close friends. Tenth, a relationship with a mentor positively influences faith development. Eleventh, faith development only occurs in the context of questioning and reframing religious ideals and values. Twelfth, faith development occurs more during periods of crisis and turmoil. Participants in the *Symposium* sought to prove or disprove these hypothetical assumptions. The compilation of contributors' responses does not provide answers to all of the assumptions mentioned above. This project may provide further data for the conversation.

<p style="text-align:center;">*Psychologistic Faith Development*</p>

James Fowler's (1980, 1981, 1984) *Stages of Faith* continues to be the theory with which all other studies are compared. Fowler's (1984) team interviewed almost 400 participants in an effort to provide a theory of faith development that was holistic in nature. His theory is primarily built on the cognitive approach of Piaget (1926), the ego development model of Erikson (1962, 1968, 1980), the moral model of Kohlberg (1969), and the lifecycle model of Levinson, et al (1978).

For Fowler (1981), identity is best understood in relationship between self, others, and "Ultimate Reality" (p. 33). It is "*covenantal (triadic) in form*" (Fowler, 1981, p. 33). He wrote that faith is not simple, but is a complex system of structuring meaning; "Faith is deeper than belief" (Fowler, 1991a, p. 22). Faith for Fowler (1991a) involves three aspects of understanding: it is (a) a "pattern of personal trust in and loyalty to a center or centers of value" (p. 22), (b) to "images and realities of power" (p. 22), and (c) to "a shared master story or core story" (p. 23) that gives guidance and hope to one's life.

In *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Fowler (2000) stated, "Our very life meanings are at stake in faith stage transitions" (p. 45). Moving between the stages of faith development is not a simple process that occurs on a specific birthday or graduation to a new grade in school. The adjustments from one stage to another are often tumultuous, demand soul searching, and involve emotional turmoil as one leaves behind former ways of thinking and believing that no longer work or make sense for one's life. As one transitions between stages, the focus moves from self to self-for-others. This is even true as one seeks to discover one's vocation in light of faith. Fowler (1984) wrote, "We are called to personhood in relationships. There is no personal fulfillment that is not part of a communal fulfillment. We find ourselves by giving ourselves" (p. 102). For Christians, learning to understand one's self within the context of the community is an essential aspect of growth.

Borrowing from Piaget (1926), Fowler (1984) understood human development to be epigenetic, moving from simple to complex structures of development in hierarchical stages. Like Kegan (1982), Fowler believed development to be evolutionary. Growth occurs when one's cognitive perspective is challenged by new biological possibilities of thought that do not fit with one's former frame. One assimilates new capabilities into one's identity, adapting new biological abilities into new perspectives. In Fowler's framework, faith development may not continue after adolescence. Individuals may become so accommodated to negotiated patterns of identity that they lose the capacity for growth to greater complexity (Erikson, 1968; Fowler, 1981).

In *Faith Development Theory and the Postmodern Challenges*, Fowler (2001) explained the origins of his theories. As a student and then professor, Fowler's area of

research was the interaction of theology, faith, and human development. His developing

theories were influenced by the ethics of H. Richard Niebuhr, the developmental works

of Erikson and Piaget, and theology of Paul Tillich. Encountering Kohlberg's writing

provided direction for Fowler's nascent ideas. He explained, "My initial excitement about

Kohlberg's work provided an impetus to try to operationalize a rich concept of faith and

to begin to look more systematically at faith in a constructive–developmental

perspective" (Fowler, 2001, p. 161). After reading Kohlberg's theory of moral

development, Fowler developed a matrix on which to build a theory of identity and faith

development. This matrix included seven areas, (a) form of logic, (b) perspective taking,

(c) form of moral judgment, (d) bounds of social awareness, (e) locus of authority, (f)

form of world coherence, and (g) symbolic function (Fowler, 2001).

Fowler's Stages of Faith

Fowler's (1984) six stages of faith development begin in early childhood, after

infancy (see Table 13). Babies experience *Primal Faith*, stage zero, where they must rely

on others for their very existence. The first stage is *Intuitive-Projective Faith*, ages 2-6,

which is marked by imaginative and magical thinking. The modeling of care by adults

and parents can affect children's lifelong development. When children begin to think

concretely, the transition to the next stage begins (Courtenay, 1993).

The second stage is *Mythic-Literal Faith* (Fowler, 1991b), which begins around

age six, and can continue into adolescence. This era of faith concerns logical thinking and

learning to appreciate the viewpoints and experiences of others. For those in this stage,

one's faith is adopted from the ideas and instructions of those in authority – parents,

ministers, and teachers. Movement into the next stage begins when one begins to see

contradictions between personal beliefs and the beliefs of others (Courtenay, 1993).

Synthetic-Conventional Faith, Fowler's third stage, begins in adolescence and can

continue for the remainder of an individual's life. Most collegians arrive at college

entrenched in synthetic-conventional ideations, where the social dynamics recognized in

previous stages take root as an individual in this level seeks solidarity and conformity

Table 13

Fowler's Stages of Faith

Age	Domains	Description
Infant	Primal faith	Faith is undifferentiated, but involves the dichotomy of needs and fulfillment.
Early childhood	Intuitive-projective faith	Faith is located in parents, symbols, and mystical imagery.
School age	Mythic-literal faith	Concrete faith is adopted from parents and authorities.
Adolescence and beyond	Synthetic-conventional faith	Faith is a personal attachment to beliefs and values yet is located in commonalities with closest family, peers, and other important adults. Some remain here.
Young adulthood and beyond	Individuative-reflective faith	The attachments made in the previous stage are examined. If successful, a self-authored faith results. Many remain here.
Middle adulthood and beyond	Conjunctive faith	The self-authored adult expands faith to include the acceptance of pluralism in society and view of self (selves). Mysticism through symbols is appreciated.
Adulthood	Universalizing faith	While faith becomes more personal, it broadens to include ideas of universal justice and care. The personal aspect of faith is balanced by a sense of connection with all creation.

with peers, while seeking to incorporate many different images of self into a coherent whole. While a person in this stage may be able to defend his or her faith and epistemological assumptions, he or she does not reflect critically on those assumptions, but almost blindly accepts the ideas of the group to which he or she conforms. Courtney (1993) showed movement to new stages can be initiated by, "clashes and contradictions between valued authorities; changes by leaders that are considered unshakable; and critical reflection that recognizes that beliefs are relative" (p. 158). Fowler (1996) noted that a limit of this stage is the lack of a "third-person perspective taking" (p. 62). When previously accepted contradictory opinions are recognized, a young person may begin to reflect critically on beliefs, often necessitating a new level of faithing. However, as in Erikson's developmental theory, many people avoid the internal conflicts brought on by such a transition and choose to remain embedded in their synthetic-conventional structures. This choice is not always conscious.

As emerging adults develop critical thinking skills and learn to apply them to their own beliefs, they may begin to move to stage four, *Individuative-Reflective Faith* (Fowler, 1991b). A part of this stage is understanding that the social systems of which they are a part are largely determinative of personal ideology. According to Fowler (1996), movement to this stage involves the recognition that the "self, previously constituted and sustained by its roles and relationships, must struggle with the question of identity and worth apart from its previously defining connections" (p. 62). In this stage, young adults begin to understand that they have the personal authority to examine the meaning structures they have been given by others and to personally create or choose a system of making meaning. Relationships previously deemed essential are now

abandoned or pushed to the background as a new individuality and personal authority is discovered and claimed.

This stage involves experimentation of new meaning systems and structures. Fowler suggested that some in this stage–usually men–become overly confident of their own opinions and ideas. He deemed this a "cognitive narcissism" (Fowler, 1996, p. 63). He noted that sometimes individuals become stuck in their development. While they are "confident and authoritative in their professional and occupational domains" (p. 63), they are limited in personal empathy. There is a disparity between their feelings and those of others. As a result, they may be drawn to fundamentalist teachings and authoritarian leaders with whom they identify. Fowler explained, "as spouses, parents, and bosses, such persons are at best insensitive and at worst rigid, authoritarian, and emotionally abusive" (p. 63).

Sometimes the transition to new ideologies begins after a meaningful encounter with another culture. Study abroad programs or international mission trips often offer the diversity necessary for such internal ideological conflicts to ensue. Usually these changes in perspective are micro adjustments. When combined, such small enlightenments may mean a holistic shift in worldview. Movement to Fowler's next stage can begin with feelings of conflict over compromises and a holistic "dissatisfaction with existing perceptions and meanings" (Courtenay, 1993, p. 158).

Conjunctive Faith does not begin before age forty (Fowler, 1981). This fifth stage is marked by "the embrace of polarities in one's life, an alertness to paradox, and the need for multiple interpretations of reality" (Fowler, 1991b, p. 18). As in early childhood, adults in this stage again appreciate myth, mystery, and symbols as referents of truth.

However, here these myths and mysteries are not truth, but represent possible, personal meanings. At this stage of life, symbols become important precisely because of their mysterious or mystical nature. Fowler (1976) observed that transitions to this stage and the next could only be accomplished within the structures of an organized religion (Courtenay, 1993). Movement to stage six, though rare, features the recognition that the world is flawed and that I can make a difference.

In Fowler's (1981) original study, only one participant had reached the pinnacle, stage six, *Universalizing Faith*. However, in *Weaving the New Creation*, he identified historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thomas Merton as embodying the traits found here (Fowler, 1991b). Free from the ideological traits and conflicts of earlier stages, those who attain this pinnacle are free completely to live their faith for others in love, they are selfless and transcendent (Courtenay, 1993).

In recent writings, Fowler (2001) responded to his critics while proposing some new directions for faith development theory in this postmodern era. In response to the critique that his theory left out a concept of "selfhood," Fowler (2001) said that his, "*is a theory (story) of the self through time, as constructing meanings and being constructed, in the matrix of relationships and meanings that faith involves*" (p. 164). He also reminded readers that an individual's faith has two aspects, structure, and content. His theory primarily addressed the structure of faith. He wrote,

> It is important to remember that the structuring operations underlying faith are at best only half of the story of a person's development in faith. The other half has to do with the *contents* of faith—the symbols, narratives, practices, and communities—and the emotional and imaginal responses to life conditions and

experiences that exert powerful existential shaping influences on persons' patterns of interpretation, habit, mind, and action. Any adequate faith biography has to embrace both of these important halves of the story. (Fowler, 2001, p. 164)

While Fowler's (Fowler, Streib, & Keller, 2004) *Manual for Faith Development Research* considered faith content in locating a participant's stage of faith, the consideration is only cursory. Streib (2004, 2005), one of Fowler's partners in research, argued for the development of a more holistic accounting of faith experience that includes content and narrative.

Responding to a criticism from Streib, Fowler (2001) presented four faith types. He noted that these types do not replace his stage theory, because it continues to be "sequential, invariant, and hierarchical" (p. 171). The *totalizing type* is marked by a heavy reliance on authority. Those of this type could be characterized as fundamentalist. Fowler also presented a *rational critical type*. Those located here seek a rational consistency among all ideological areas of life. He surmised that those of this type are from families that discuss matters of faith in an open, dialogical manner. Another type is the *conflicted or oscillating type*. Those with this type of faith spend their life searching for meaning for their sick soul. People who have a fragmented or drifting faith belong to the *diffuse type*. While not replacing his stage theory, Fowler proposed that such a typology may help to give another view of participant's faith within each stage.

Criticisms of Fowler's Theory

There are several general criticisms of Fowler's model of faith development. Like most stage theories of development, Fowler's theory is linear, epigenetic, and hierarchical (Tisdell, 2003). There is no allowance for movement back and forth between stages or

being in multiple stages simultaneously. Gooden (1982), a seminary educated, practicing psychologist who studied with Levinson, suggested that basing a faith development model on "logico-mathematical" models such as Piaget's and Kohlberg's was "inappropriate" (p. 98). He argued, "There is something about faith that is not a rational movement nor simply a cognitive process. Faith moves in the realm of paradox, enigma, mystery, and encounters in the depths" (Gooden, 1982, p. 98). The models that emerged from the *Symposium of Faith Development and the Adult Life Cycle*, which included Fowler's theory, do not significantly allow for this mysterious element.

Kelly Cartwright (2001) suggested that like other current models for spiritual development Fowler's does not offer "explicit, formal mechanizms [*sic*] for spiritual change in adulthood" (p. 216). Fowler's model does not consider specific faith journeys, but focuses on averages that may be generalized to include any adult. Parker (2006) noted that while the *Faith Development Inventory* used by Fowler to ascertain data is statistically accurate, it only successfully measures the cognitive dimensions of faith development. The inventory and interview process does not accurately measure the impact of relationships and context on participants' faith development.

Courtenay (1993) reported that though the sample of participants was equally balanced between males and females, males scored higher in Fowler's stage theory. Fowler did not explain this troubling discrepancy of gender bias. As with other developmental theories that feature the attainment of autonomy and independence as a measure of maturity, many have criticized Fowler for not representing the experiences and voices of women (Slee, 2004) and cultures where independence is not as highly valued (Cartwright, 2001; Tisdell, 1999).

Kiesling (2008) also criticized Fowler's bias towards individuation, albeit from a Christian perspective. He wrote, "Following Jesus posits that the outcome of the developmental journey does not end in autonomy and achievement, but in centeredness, receptivity, surrender, and mission" (Kiesling, 2008, p. 21). Contrary to the implication in Fowler's faith development theory (as influenced by the work of Erikson and Marcia), not all emerging adults break with their families' ideologies in rebellious periods of self-definition. There are those for whom their early ideological choice is never consciously questioned, and who remain an active participant in their community of faith throughout their lives (Tisdell, 2003). For such reasons, Courtenay (1993) cautioned against the application of Fowler's theory to the general population.

Elli Schachter (2005a) suggested that generic stage theories of development inadvertently result in proscriptive models because they establish a language and structure that becomes normative. Gooden (1982) agreed and posited that a danger of such hierarchical, or ladder models is that they unintentionally set up an ideal to be reached. Individuals begin to be judged on maturity and stage attainment instead of personal experience within the context of their individual lives and commitments.

Hauerwas (1980) argued with broad, epistemological definitions of faith such as that espoused by Kohlberg (1974) and later adopted by Fowler (1981). Hauerwas (1980) and Loder (1998) suggested that such a definition, removed from religious practice is not faith, but ideology. Milacci (2006) wrote that such thought is idolatry, not faith. For them faith is inherently a religious term.

Schweitzer (2004) argued that Fowler's theory is not broad enough. Based on the theories of Piaget and thoroughly situated in modernistic thought, Fowler's stages do not

allow for the multiplicity of influences found in the postmodern realities of culture and context. As a result, such theories do not allow for "plural identities" and "plural selves" that are experienced by postmodern adolescents and emerging adults (Schweitzer, 2004, p. 60). Schweitzer suggested that there is no discrepancy between the idea of plural selves and Christianity. He wrote,

> From a Christian point of view, the human self does not have to reach perfect unity but is allowed to remain fragmentary. But *fragmentary* does not mean ultimately *fragmented* in the sense of discontinuity and incoherence only. Relationality requires a fragmentary (imperfect) self because the perfect self does not need relationships. (Schweitzer, 2004, p. 62)

He continued that the experience of a plural self could be liberated through a relationship with God. As a result, there is no need to attempt to conform to a restrictive, singular identity. While all selves should be judged by principled values such as love and compassion, there is freedom to create unique selves in relationship with God and others (Schweitzer, 2004).

Answering his critics, Fowler (2003) acknowledged that there are gaps in his stage theory.

> It is important to remember that the structuring operations underlying faith are, at best, only half of the story of a person's development in faith. The other half has to do with the "contents" of faith, the symbols, narratives, practices, and communities – and the emotional and imaginal responses to life conditions and experiences – that exert powerful existential shaping influences on persons'

patterns of interpretation, habit, mind, and action. Any adequate faith biography

has to embrace both of these important halves of the story. (p. 234)

His theory focuses on the structure, while that of other scholars has focused on the

"dance" (Fowler, 2003, p. 234) or the process of development or the experiences of faith

in the contemporary, increasingly postmodern culture (2001, 2003).

Alternative Psychologistic Theories

Several scholars have presented theistic, or God centered, models of human

development featuring an individual's interaction with God in identity creation, meaning

making, and interaction with the world. Fritz Oser (1980) proposed a cognitive-religious

structure of development from a theistic perspective. Differentiating from Fowler's

theory, Oser deemed his a structural-developmental stage theory of religious judgment

that sought an equal balance between human and divine interaction. His theory is

comprised of six stages: (a) orientation on complete determination, (b) orientation on

reciprocity, (c) orientation on voluntarism, (d) orientation on autonomy and "Divine

Plan," (e) orientation on self-fulfillment in intersubjectivity, and (f) orientation on

universal communication and solidarity. In the early stages, God is viewed as the

Ultimate power that cannot be comprehended by humans. As one matures, the

relationship shifts where the individual becomes more autonomous, choosing when to

defer to God. God becomes more mystical and all pervasive in the latter stages, giving

meaning to life and to all existence. Oser's theory has not received as much attention as

Fowler's work and has been criticized as not being complete (Slee, 2004). The theory is

broad, loosely structured, and offers no explanations for stage transitions (Power &

Kohlberg, 1980).

James Loder (1998) also presented a theistic perspective in *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*. While he posited that individuals grow and develop according to the developmental stages described by Erikson (1968, 1980), he also believed in the *God factor*. In his view, God assists practitioners to grow as they desire to change. As mentioned earlier, Loder (1998) dismissed Fowler's (1984) broad definition of faith as a mere spiritual ideology. He opts for an understanding of faith that is God-centered. In Loder's view, development is dependent upon psychological, social, and religious factors. One matures in faith as one becomes less self-centered and more God and other-centered.

Loder's perspective is widely accepted among Christian Educators because of the balance between self, community, and divine influences on identity development. In popular Christian Education literature this view of growth and development may be termed, *discipleship*, *spiritual formation*, or *faith formation*. The goal of Christian education is to help people find transformative meaning for their lives in relationship with God (Wilhoit, 1991). According to Mulholland (1993), Christian spiritual formation is the "process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others" (p. 15). The process is determined as much by God and the community as it is by the efforts of individuals wishing to grow in their faith and religious practice. It is not a process of independence and self-actualization as much as an act of self-knowledge and humility learned through the practice of the classic spiritual disciplines. Burgess (2001) said of evangelical Christian education,

> The character and quality of the learner's life is the larger end toward which
> knowledge and understanding are contributory. This goal of lived religion is, in

turn, intimately related to contact with the supernatural. This model, then,

assumes that Christian living is rooted in one's reception of the Christian message

and in the resultant work of the Holy Spirit through that message. (p. 164)

In his view, the goal of Christian education is to produce learners who are growing

toward maturity as adults who live in relationship with God. Mulholland (1993) agreed,

"Our Christian pilgrimage is a complex, multifaceted, multilevel ebb and flow of

relationship with God" (p. 80). He presented "stages" of a "classical Christian

pilgrimage" as *Awakening*, *Purgation*, *Illumination*, and *Union* (Mulholland, 1993, p.

81). These stages are not epigenetic or irreversible, but are repeated many times in life as

one grows, develops, or matures.

Others Applying and Extending Fowler's Theory

Numerous researchers have built upon Fowler's model. Several emphasize and

expand the role of mentoring or apprenticing. By incorporating the work of James Loder

(1998), Sharon Daloz Parks (2000) builds on the role of imagination in Fowler's theory

as she explores meaning making and identity development during college. She suggests

that there are five moments in making meaning: (1) conflict, (2) pause, (3) insight that

reimages the conflict, (4) re-patterning marked by release of energy, and (5) interpreting

the experience (Parks, 2000). These concepts are similar to Jack Mezirow's (1991)

transformational learning and William Bridge's (2004) idea of transformation and

change. Adapting Levinson's model, Parks (2000) and Walker (1983) investigate the role

of mentors in assisting in self-discovery through one's dreams of the future.

Parks (1980) was the first to apply Fowler's theories specifically to collegians. As

a student of Fowler at Harvard, Parks wrote her dissertation to examine how collegians

make meaning. Her initial book, *The Critical Years: The Young Adult Search for a Faith to Live By,* Parks (1986) outlined the developmental and cognitive issues that collegians negotiated during their experience as undergraduates. She suggested that many of the typical collegiate activities were explorations into meaning making, or a search for faith. Parks also suggested that all aspects of higher education (academic, social, and spiritual) need to work together to assist students in developing into mature, adult graduates.

Park's (2000) second major work, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, identified mentoring as the key process to assure a successful transition into the adult world. The idea of mentoring in order to assist emerging adults in the development of confidence during the transition into young adulthood has also been reported in career specific studies (Bickel & Brown, 2005) and intergenerational explorations (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Similar results have been addressed in research of Christian mentors being used to foster personal growth, maturation, and job satisfaction of protégés (Wilson, 2001).

Parks (2000) defined mentoring as "an intentional, mutually demanding, and meaningful relationship between two individuals, a young adult and an older, wiser figure who assists the younger person in learning the ways of life" (p. 127). However, she specified that mentoring could also occur when a teacher leads a small group of students in a dialogical learning environment (Parks, 2000). She elaborated, "Mentors are those who are appropriately depended upon for authoritative guidance at the time of the development of critical thought and the formation of an informed, adult, and committed faith" (Parks, 2000, p. 128). Park's also wrote of the "mentoring community" as key in contributing to the development of young adults (Parks, 2000). For some scholars, the

terms discipleship and mentoring are used interchangeably. According to Baugh and Hurst (2003), discipleship is simply the quest to become like Jesus. For the purpose of this study, it should be noted that mentoring encompasses the tasks associated with faith development as well as those related to the discovery of one's identity (passions, strengths, skills, and abilities), the development of social skills, the change in relationship with one's family of origin, and integration of critical thinking skills in all of life.

The benefits of such mentoring can happen through long term, well-established relationships or in a one-time crisis or needs-based encounter (Gribbon, 1993). Church and campus ministries can provide a venue for such relationships. Fowler noted that an important task of generativity in late stage development is learning to assist younger adults in discovering their vocation. This is especially important within faith-based communities. He wrote,

> It can be a highly significant part of the vocations of middle and older adults to come to know, invest in, and support the awakening and forming of vocation in persons in the period from their late teens to their early thirties. This [Christian church] is to be a mentoring and sponsoring community. There is no higher or more sacred privilege. (Fowler, 1984, pp. 144-145)

Baptist Student Union (BSU), like other organizations with similar goals, provides a venue for campus ministers and caring adults to lend their experience and support as mentors to emerging adults involved in BSU programming (Robinson, 1998; Sanford Jr., 1997).

Luanne Cooley (2006) studied a group of women involved in a fundamentalist religious group examining how they learned appropriate identity roles within the

structure of the congregation. Her study explored faith development from Fowler's frame and showed that the women constructed their identities in community through relationships analogous to the apprenticeships of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Cooley's is the only one I have found outside of LGBTQ studies that discussed how power issues within a faith community could influence identity development. Leaders in church groups can affect younger adherents by exerting emotional pressure to conform to church norms or to obey those in leadership. Halkitis et al, (2009) found that such pressures might negatively affect identity, spiritual, and faith experiences, driving some to leave the religious group and others to hide shamefully their sexual identities.

Fowler (1991) commented that further research on his theory of faith development must include examinations into how context and systems affect individual growth and development. Pizzolato's (2003) study of "high risk" college students (those at a greater risk of dropping out or failing to graduate from college) found that new meanings are made in the crucibles of crisis. Development occurs when one is forced or determined to make one's own meaning instead of relying on parents or friends for comfort and consolation found in old patterns of behavior and practice (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Pizzolato (2003) stated that these "provocative experiences" (p. 808), situations that stretch an individual's assumptions, are required for the development of self-authorship. The emerging adult must be willing to engage in stretching events and to think provocatively. Resistance to this process of growth will result in a return to a comfortable mode of thinking. Though she does not mention it, Pizzolato's findings are reminiscent of Mezirow's (1978b, 1991) theory of transformative learning. These ideas

are similar to the work done in Fowler's (2000) fourth stage, *individuative-reflective faith*.

Fowler's theories provide faith-based validity to Arnett's (2000) and Baxter Magolda's (1999b) insights into the development process of emerging adults during and after college. Baxter Magolda's (1999c) secular understanding of self-authorship in emerging adulthood appears to align with Fowler's (1984) work. Fowler notes that one of the tasks of the *individuative-reflective stage* is achieving integration between beliefs and life and between faith and practice.

Streib (2001, 2003, 2004, 2005), a research partner with Fowler and co-author of the latest edition of the *Manual of Faith Development Research* (Fowler, et al., 2004), has written several literature reviews of faith development research. He suggested that just as some research has challenged accepted conceptions of human development, accepted theories of faith development should also be challenged (Streib, 2005). Streib commented that faith development might not proceed in a coherent or invariant manner as Fowler posited. Streib speculated that there might be multiple paths to development that included points of regression, repetition of stages, or the incorporation of previously acquired knowledge or skills.

Faith Development from a Constructivistic Lens

Faith has traditionally been presented from a psychologistic developmental frame and a classical, systematic theology. Provocatively, faith development and theology may also be viewed from the perspective of constructivism, and the sub-theory of postmodernism. Constructivism and postmodernism have influenced theological thought (Hill, 2005). Among progressive, constructivistic theological theories is process theology,

built on a set of assumptions similarly raised by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1959) and

Alfred North Whitehead (1978). Process theology suggests that God is not beyond

creation, but is actively involved in the world, co-creating the future with humanity. God

is always incarnational. In classical Christian theology, the Incarnation refers to God

being uniquely present in the person of Jesus (Küng, 1987). Process theology understands

God to be equally in all aspects and elements of creation (panentheism). In process

thought, reality and identity are dynamic, always becoming, never scripted, and never

static. This conception of the divine is "at odds with the accepted classical view of God's

omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability" (Goggin, 1995, p. 125) of modern

theology. According to Goggin (1995), "Reality is an event, not substance" (p. 125).

Thus, for process theologians, God is not solely determinative of reality. God gives each

person gifts and talents, but each individual determines how to incorporate those into

their conceptions of selfhood. Identity, therefore, is created and defined in partnership

with God and others in the world.

Yew and Walker (1997) seek to discover a constructivistic process of religious

identity formation using Vygotsky's social learning theory. In this frame, identity is the

result of education and socialization. We learn who we are through the acquisition of

knowledge in specific contexts based upon our experiences and in negotiation with

others. There is no inherent self. Thus, religious identity formation is the result of family,

church, community, and culture and is built in and through relationships in social

contexts.

Theistic, or God-centered, theory suggests that constructivism does not exclude

the idea of God as *Being in the World*. While not palatable to some, the notion of God as

an influencer in a spiritual or mysterious context is a possibility for many postmodern

theorists (Anderson, 1998; Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2005). Anderson (1998) relies on

the constructive-developmental work of Kegan (1982) and Mead (1934). Anderson

(1998) posited that all identity is constructed and religious identity is constructed within

"popular cultures of relatedness" (p. 174). A religiously formed self is determined in

relationship with God. The result is a distinctive *theonomous self*, or "a self *in*

relationship to a relational God" (p. 175).

Faith development can best be understood when incorporating the perspectives of

self and self-transcendence (Balswick, et al., 2005). Religious development includes the

cognitive, emotional, social, moral, as well as spiritual perspectives of identity.

Understanding the contextual issues of self, combined with ideas of mystery, may

contribute to a holistic understanding of identity at any point in life.

In a postmodern view of spirituality, growth is not necessary or mandatory as in

psychologistic models. However, change is constant. Change occurs whenever one

encounters a new element that affects the social construction of *I* (Buber, 1970; James,

1982). *I* is only known in relationship to *you*. Identity must be (re)constructed whenever

elements of one's self-concept or social relatedness change.

Schachter (2005a) offered an alternate approach that seeks to bridge the gap

between postmodern ideas of development and Eriksonian stage theories. Though dealing

with identity development, the frame he presented can easily be adapted to faith

development. He posited three components adapted from the two seemingly opposing

perspectives. First, identity creation is jointly constructed by individuals and contexts.

Second, identity construction is an "ongoing attempt to create a reasonably workable

identity configuration" (Schachter, 2005a, p. 391) where an individual's goals form the structure for future development. Third, faith identity configuration is dynamic in nature; as such, it will not, and cannot, conform to a singular, universal model.

The major criticism to Fowler from a postmodern frame is that he has attempted to prescribe structure and meaning to that which is fluid and indefinable. In seeking to provide a universal structured theory of faith development, Fowler has donned the mantle of modernism. Lather (1994) reminded readers of Foucault's belief that any attempt to categorize "is an act of power" (p. 103). Additionally, the lack of flexibility in transitions and between stages is problematic for postmodern critics who see adaptability and consistency of change as hallmarks of the postmodern epistemology (Schachter, 2005b).

Faith Development from a Narrative Identity Lens

"*Identity is a life story,*" declared Dan McAdams (1993, p. 5), who proposed that one begins narrating one's life into a composite story in adolescence corresponding to Erikson's initial period of identity formulation. McAdams' (1985) concern was not solely with one aspect of development, but with the whole person including cognition, biology, and context. McAdams, Josselson, and Lieblich (2006) explained,

> We use the term narrative identity to refer to the stories people construct and tell about themselves to define who they are for themselves and for others. Beginning in adolescence and young adulthood, our narrative identities are the stories we live by. (p. 4)

A life narrative view helps one understand "life as a whole and identities themes, turning points, important characters, key relationships, and key events" (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, p. 152).

Influences from childhood faith practices remain with individuals and influence later spiritual understandings, faith experiences, and religious practices (Tisdell, 2003). As one constructs, edits, or composes a coherent identity, stories from the past are reorganized, reinterpreted, and retold to establish new meaning that fits one's current context. For those educated into faith disciplines and practices as children and adolescents, the stories and experiences of faith can become key elements in emerging adult identity.

Theologian and sociologist Stanley Hauerwas (1980) suggested that a theory is needed that does not focus on stages of development, but on the diverse ways individual Christians seek to merge their life story with the redemptive story of Jesus Christ in the biblical narrative and the stories of other Christians in local communities and throughout Christian history. The use of stories is normative in religious education (Miller, 1987). Christians are taught to incorporate biblical stories into their own experience by composing and sharing their testimony. A testimony is the story of God's redemptive work in one's life. Sandelowski (1991) noted that it is common for individuals to understand and make sense of their lives through such "narrative story-lines" (p. 162). She challenged researchers to use various narrative story models to elicit experiential narratives in the study of lives. Hauerwas' (1980) challenge may be accomplished using narrative theory and techniques where individuals edit and recompose their life stories to incorporate new, emerging meanings and understandings of self, others, and world.

Slee (2004) noted that participants' experiences of faith are often constructed unconsciously and are marked more by not knowing than by knowing. She stated, "what Fowler's account seems to miss is an adequate account of the role of intuitive knowing,

imaginative, metaphoric and concrete forms of thinking, in the movement to owned, responsible and self-consciously chosen faith" (Slee, 2004, p. 165). Such forms of thinking, normative for women in her study, serve to marginalize women in mainstream religious structures and practice.

Slee (2004) offered a theory of women's faith development that both supported and criticized Fowler's (1984) model. Using an open-ended interview format Slee (2004) found that women's experiences do conform to a "patterned" and "orderly" structure. It was possible to locate her participants within various stages of Fowler's theory, but there were also exceptions to the ways that they described their experiences. Slee (2004) identified a common experience of "apophatic" faithing, which features a knowing that is "most aware of what it does not know" (p. 165). This idea emerged from apophatic, or negation theology that discusses what is not known about God. Slee specified that this experience is not the same as Fowler's renewed appreciation of mystery in stage five. It is a faith more aptly described as "fragmented, disconnected, unreal, paralysed [*sic*], broken, alienated, abused or even dead" and is a "major developmental challenge for women in a patriarchal culture" (Slee, 2004, p. 106). Women have no commonly accepted language within institutional faith systems to employ in discussing their experiences. These traditions see such moments as stagnation, backsliding, or losing faith instead of a deep experience of God that is beyond language and can result in a depth of experience and knowledge that is unrecognized in Fowler's (1984) model. Slee (2004) called for studies that seek to combine narrative and stage theories in an effort to offer a more adequate and richer portrait of faith experiences of women and demonstrate the cyclical transformations that often occur in their lives.

Brooks and Clark (2001) suggested that narrative inquiry might provide insight for constructivistic criticisms of psychologistic stage models of development. Slee (2004) criticized Fowler for not offering adequate explanations for the movement between stages, nor the way transformative learning prompts development. Narrative explorations into faith experiences may provide such insight. Brooks and Clark (2001) concluded, "Conceptualizing transformative learning as a narrative process seems to offer promise as a means of increasing our breadth and depth of our understanding. It addresses some of the problems that accrue when transformation is thought of in constructivist terms" (p. 6).

Though Fowler (1984) spoke of narratives and authoring one's own stories, he did so in his early work within the context of vocation. Vocation for Fowler (1984) was "the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership" (p. 95). His understanding was embedded within a constructive-developmental stage theory, not a narrative frame. Though he used the language and cited the authors of narrative theory, within Fowler's (1981) stages of faith one is trapped within the confines of a stage until one moves beyond that stage. According to Fowler's perspective, one cannot simultaneously construct stories from within two different stages. The only way to regress to a previous stage is through mental illness or injury (Fowler, 1981).

Fowler (1996) used the narrative terms of symbol and image as well as biblical and illustrative life-stories to describe the challenges of the contemporary milieu in *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life*. However, he did not take full advantage of using images and stories to explore faith development from a narrative perspective. Streib identified over 100 dissertations that have analyzed,

replicated, and sought to improve upon Fowler's research (Streib, 2003, 2005). Only four

of these were empirical studies seeking to examine depth and variation of experience in

faith development using narrative analysis. Of the narrative studies, only Anderson's

(1988) dissertation addresses the post-adolescent or emerging adult period of life.

Similarly, of the seven that use the qualitative method of content analysis, only Marcato's

(2000) addresses emerging adulthood.

Anderson (1988) researched the religious identities of college women using the

research of Fowler (1981) and Parks (1980, 1986) as a foundation. She suggested that

though narrative is used as a method by both researchers, it is not their epistemological

base. She explained,

> Using narrative as an epistemological stance is not only unusual for higher
>
> education research, but for research in faith development as well. Again, while
>
> Fowler (1981) and Parks (1986a) use narrative accounts as primary sources, they
>
> present a stage based model of faith development. (C. L. Anderson, 1995, p. 45)

Anderson discovered that the faith experiences and the resulting identities presented were

diverse, not fitting neatly into the theories of Fowler or Parks. She summarized her

findings, "The most appropriate way to understand what faith is...is to ask [participants],

and listen to the stories they tell in response" (p. 130). In her view, Fowler's stage theory

is not compatible with a narrative perspective of faith development.

In her dissertation, Marcato (2000) used interviews and participant's portraits of

God to explore, *Experiences of God: The Faith, Spirituality, and Concept of Religion*

Among Generation X Roman Catholics. Participants in her study were born between 1961

and 1981, ranging in age from 18–38. She used the questions from the *Manual of Faith*

Development Research (Fowler, et al., 2004) and Rizzuto's (1979) *God Questionnaire*. However, instead of following the suggested coding for Fowler's research, she used the traditional qualitative methods for coding and categorizing the data. Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), she identified common themes of Roman Catholic faith among this group of emerging and young adults on the cusp of postmodernism. Her themes found a broad spectrum of religious experience that centered on the church, personal experience, and mirrored contemporary practical theology.

Marcato's (2000) findings explored faith, spirituality, religion, and participants images of God. In the arena of faith, a concept specific to Catholic religious belief and practice, she found that all of her participants had faith and belief in God and were able to maintain faith during difficult times. Participants understood there to be an Image of God in all people. They believed that each person has gifts from God to be used in a specific vocation to serve others. Her participants viewed the ultimate proof of God's existence as the common human experience of love. God's love for humanity was understood as a model for how to love others. They also believed that while God has a plan for each human life, individuals could choose to follow or ignore God. Findings were also in the area of spirituality, a more general, mystical construct that included putting faith into action through social justice and service and maintaining a spiritual relationship with God. Marcato also outlined the positive and negative aspects of religion experienced by her participants. The images of God that the participants drew suggested that God was "a loving friend who offers strength, support, and guidance" (Marcato, 2000, p. 89).

Streib's (2005) review did not include Wells (2003) dissertation, *Epiphanies of Faith within the Academy: A Narrative Study of the Dynamics of Faith with*

Undergraduate Students Involved in Intervarsity Christian Fellowship. She explored the faith development of college students involved in a campus Christian club at a Midwestern college using a hermeneutical epistemology and a narrative method. Her study sought to expound and complement the theories of Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000). Wells concluded, "Narrative is appropriate for understanding the phenomenon of faith—a phenomenon ultimately of meaning" (Wells, 2003, p. 243). While Wells suggested that stage theories of faith development are about seeing the broad perspective, her study focused on individuals' experiences. She found that narrative provides a personal view of faith, giving insight and validity to the importance of context in understanding participants' faith development processes and faith transformations. Her study sought to illuminate, not restate Fowler's stage model.

Fowler's (1980, 1981) initial theory, based on the constructive-developmental works of Erikson (1962, 1968, 1980), Kohlberg (1974), Levinson, et al., (1978) and Piaget (1926, 1971), is ready for a continued dialogue with narrative theory. Kegan (1980, 1982, 1994) and Fowler (1996) recognized that the challenges that face individuals and communities today are often too great to master. Perhaps part of the problem is that they are approaching a postmodern (Barna Group Research, 2010), post-structuralist, or narrative world with a developmental perspective and proscriptive birthed in the bygone modern era.

Fowler's later work shows promise as he sought to incorporate some of the ideas presented by Hauerwas (1980). Fowler (1991b, 1996) sought to merge his stage theory with the themes in the classic Christian story; however, he continued to cling to the stage structure, not allowing the story with its possibly twisted, convoluted, and unrelated

subplots (Hauerwas, 1980) to guide interpretation of individual faith development. In the latest version of the *Manual of Faith Development Research* (Fowler, et al., 2004), administrators of the inventory were instructed to have participants complete a chronological faith biography prior to the interview. However, the narrative biography was an optional step and was only used as a guide to conduct a face-to-face interview with the participant. The information obtained in the biography was not analyzed or used in the coding of interview data.

As Tisdell (2003) suggested, contrary to Fowler's view, many young adults transition from having faith to owning faith and identity in a way that is natural, normative, and without major conflicts. Without much criticism of the past, they begin to self-author, not by discarding, but by moving forward. Perhaps examining individual narratives will provide insight into non-normative experiences. Some individuals live comfortably with paradox while others navigate the tensions of spiritual development with much personal turmoil (Tisdell, 2003).

Discussion and Implications for Further Research

There is a paradox between practice and theory in Christian adult education. Story has been a vital aspect of Judeo-Christian religious tradition and faith practice for centuries (Miller, 1987). Much of the Old Testament was passed from generation to generation through memorization and the telling and retelling of the stories of faith experience. It has also been normal for Christian Education literature to advocate the use of stories in educative practice, using pictures, dramas, and the telling of Biblical and personal narratives to illustrate different spiritual truths. Parables and sermonic illustrations are normally used in preaching and teaching. Christian classic novels such as

Pilgrim's Progress (Bunyan, 1960), first published in 1678, and more recently *The Shack* (Young, 2007), have been used to communicate the many challenges of faith as one matures. A common analogy for faith is a journey (Mulholland, 1993). However, in scholarly practice and in practical theoretical discussions Fowler's stages represent the only complete model of faith development that is seriously considered.

Interaction with the stories of others through cross-cultural experiences and experiences of diversity can deepen or change the plot of one's story. The communal history becomes a rich aspect of one's own story as ancient and local stories of faith are shared and new meanings are made/discovered in a community of faith (Miller, 1987). Donald Miller (1987) declared, "The story has not been heard until the hearer also lives within the story" (p. 155). A living faith, as a good story, involves intellectual, emotional, practical, and interpersonal elements. A narrative approach to identity and faith development moves the focus to the individual, not the "average" as in stage theories.

My work emerges from the perspective of Christian faith development, however, some of those with whom I work as students at the University of Georgia either come from another faith or no faith tradition or leave Christianity to move to another form of spirituality. Within this frame, I believe that ideas found in Fowler's psychologistic faith development theory can be used in conjunction with the constructivistic and postmodern ideas of narrative identity theory as expounded by McAdams. The juxtaposition of the seemingly incongruent ideas of Ultimate Reality–or God, an innate longing for the spiritual in every person, the narratively constructed nature of knowledge and possible identities, in the context of culture does not holistically negate Fowler's theories.

However, in this postmodern era, fresh investigations of the experiences of faith should be conducted to provide new and more complex vistas for understanding.

Faith Development and Religious Involvement in Emerging Adulthood

Traditional churches and denominations are in crisis as they are losing members at an alarming rate. Most of those leaving are adolescents and emerging adults. Some believe that these losses are the result of the secularization or postmodernization of American society. Others believe that the decline is due to irrelevant educational methods, stale worship styles, and inflexible doctrine. Perhaps the problem is due to a combination of all of these reasons, located in the faith experiences of postmodern adolescents and emerging adults.

While the majority of Americans say they believe in God, 28 percent of American adults have left the faith of their childhood according to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2008). Sixty-eight percent of emerging adults self-identify as Christians. Forty-two percent of these young Christians have either switched to another faith tradition within their religion, such as from Baptist to Methodist (11 percent), or moved to a new tradition or left faith completely (32 percent).

Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler (2007) analyzed data from the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development*, reporting on a longitudinal, quantitative study of more than fifteen-thousand students from middle through age 25. In an in-depth review of literature, the report challenges many previous studies and assumptions into the reasons most emerging adults leave church. The authors conclude that among the many possible contextual effects on the choices and culture of emerging adult's, "religious involvement is simply not a priority among this generation…" (Uecker, et al., 2007, p. 1686). This

study does not address the reasons many young adults who chose to be involved in leadership of a collegiate Christian organization may leave church upon graduation. The choice of involvement would presuppose some level of importance to matters of faith. Of course, a pre-graduation level of importance could pale in comparison of the many stressors involved in the transition into adulthood after graduation.

A recent survey by the Barna Group Research (2006) has shown that large numbers of young people are leaving churches at major transition points in life. The Barna study reports that while 83 percent of teenagers attended church regularly, over 70 percent of emerging adults say they cannot find a church that meets their needs. Only 33 percent of emerging adults attend church each weekend (Barna Group Research, 2005). While in the past, parents with young children would return to churches, this is no longer the case. Only 30 percent of young parents surveyed are involved in churches. The Pew Forum (2008) research paints a bleaker picture suggesting that the number of those who participate in faith activities is shrinking and that those currently involved switch denominations and religions at a rate of 30 percent. Instructive here is research by Hadaway and Marler (1998) that indicates people tend to skew reporting of actual church attendance and religious involvement in surveys. In depth, dialogical interviews offer a chance for the researcher to delve beneath quick survey answers to understand religious experiences and meanings.

There is a dearth of literature specifically related to the ways religious faith and faith practices contribute to emerging adult development. While many scholars are conducting quantitative studies on emerging or young adult membership and participation in religious organizations, there are not many who are examining the reasons why so few

are involved. There have been at least four relevant studies which will be examined below.

Larry Nelson (2003) conducted a quantitative examination of the transition to adulthood of Mormon emerging adults at Brigham Young University (BYU). His research at this faith-based institution was conducted to discover if the structure and rituals of the church effect adherents' transition to adulthood. The study found that the Mormon students studied experienced a shorter period of emerging adulthood than those in other settings. Participants exhibited less risky behavior, struggled less with issues of personal identity, and accepted the designation of adult sooner that their non-Mormon peers. Barry and Nelson (2005) echoed the differences between Mormon (LDS), Catholic, and other emerging adults: "While emerging adulthood in the United States tends to lack roles and responsibilities, the LDS culture tends to provide a great deal of structure that outlines roles and responsibilities for emerging adults" (p. 253). These findings also support Arnett's (2003) assumption that emerging adulthood is a culturally constructed stage of development. By extension, one might ask if there are similar structures in place in the experiences of collegians who are leaders in BSU to assist them in the transition to adulthood. Perhaps the structure within BSU and traditional Southern Baptist Churches does not fit the experiences of postmodern emerging adults who may feel conflicted between messages found within the church structure and the postmodern world outside the church walls. The tight structure of the LDS church may provide insulation from the influences of postmodern society on identity construction.

Hoge, Johnson, and Luidens (1993) examined the factors of church involvement of Presbyterian young adults. The quantitative study was conducted using telephone

surveys with 500 purposefully sampled young adults who were confirmed in a Presbyterian church and at the time of the survey. They were between the ages of 33 and 42 and from a large variety of churches and locations within the United States. The findings relevant to this study showed that most Presbyterian emerging adults left church (attended less than 6 times a year) at some point just before or during college, yet returned to church involvement before they were 31 years old. Though this research did not examine the involvement of participants in campus religious organizations, the findings informed my study. Hoge, et al. (1993) found that the two most important factors in determining church membership for young adults (beyond 30) were education level and personal beliefs. Those with higher levels of education (or college majors in the humanities or social sciences) reported more liberal theological beliefs and lower levels of church attendance; whereas those with more traditional or conservative theological beliefs tended to view church attendance as more important to their lives. This finding was not supported by other studies examining more diverse populations (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). The other major determinates found by Hoge et al. (1993) were recent life events.

Wesley Black (2008), a Christian Education professor at Southwestern Theological Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention, studied the reasons why some emerging adults remain committed to their Christian faith into college. His study began with a survey of 1362 college students, between the ages of 18 and 20. He conducted 24 group interviews in churches and Baptist Campus Ministry buildings totaling 178 of surveyed participants. Black concluded that college does not have to have a negative effect on religious participation. It seems that "influences of friends, marriage,

cohabitation, and conflicting choices" (Black, 2008, p. 29) affected development more than other factors. Most ministry efforts with adolescents does not create sustained faith through young adulthood. His research suggested that religious practice is inherited from the behaviors of parents. Youth were more likely to remain involved throughout emerging adulthood when the faith and practice of their parent's was consistent and strong. This finding appears to be supported by the recent, more diverse research on early emerging adult religious and spiritual experiences performed by Smith and Snell (2009).

Black (2008) noted that for young adults, the perceived spirituality of teachers, coaches, employers, neighbors, and co-workers appeared to be related to their own continued involvement in church related events. He suggested that it is important to teach young people how to learn and practice their faith on their own (bible reading, prayer, etc). He also noted several important aspects for educative programming for ministry with young adults, including acceptance as individuals, intergenerational programming, and a model of ministry that moves beyond entertainment. Black also found that there was a need for longitudinal studies that examine the transition into young adulthood to define attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding faith after high school. He noted that much of previous theory for emerging adult faith involvement has come from "hunches, perceptions, and anecdotal evidence rather than empirical research" (Black, 2008, p. 45).

A weakness of Black's study was the broad focus brought by his sample and interview methods. Another weakness was in the setting of the interviews. The group interviews were held in Baptist churches or Baptist student centers on college campuses. My assumption as a minister working in a collegiate setting is that only students comfortable in such places would respond affirmatively to an invitation to participate.

More focused studies are needed to compare the narratives of individual students to Black's general, group-based findings. Black's study also did not follow these students throughout their collegiate experience and beyond. Much can happen during the formative years of college life and the years following graduation to stimulate spiritual investigations or to cause emerging adults to question previous beliefs.

While these studies explore faith practice and development during emerging adulthood, they are narrowly focused and examine faith from singular, traditional perspectives. Left out of the research are the experiences of those who are no longer practicing the faith traditions of their adolescence and early emerging adulthood. What are the experiences of those who now attend different denominations, do not attend church, practice different religions, or have left organized religion?

Discussion

Despite contemporary explorations into spirituality and faith development, there is a dearth of research on the experiences of emerging adults. Schweitzer (Schweitzer, 2000) presented the need for such a study, and posited two benefits. First, it would present a more holistic understanding of the lifecycle that does not create a false separation between human development and spirituality or religious faith. Second, such a study would provide information for religious educators who could provide better educational opportunities that actually meet the needs of this diverse, little understood group. As Tisdell (1999) argued, sensitivity to these issues would also assist adult educators, as spirituality and faith can affect the lives and learning of all adults.

Chapter Summary

Human development is multifaceted and complex. In this chapter, I conceptualized constructs, examined change theories, reviewed theories of human development from various perspectives, and examined theories of faith development. This study is an examination of the faith experiences of emerging adults. In the next chapter, I will present the methodology and methods for hearing the voices of this little understood generation.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

"Here's my theory: I am all the ages I've ever been…. So how can I be represented by a snapshot, or any one specific aging age? Isn't the truth that this me is subsumed into all the me's I already have been, and will be?" – Anne Lamott (2007, p 78)

Research that delves into the faith experiences of participants is "holy" work (Mueller, 2006, p. 10). Parks (1980) reminded us that such research seeks

> to give to "theory" a human voice or in this instance – voices. To do so will also
>
> preserve us from falling prey to the 'simplicity on this side of complexity'; for in
>
> relistening to persons, we shall encounter not only confirmation but also the
>
> infinite and intricate mysteries of the ways of the human soul and shall recognize
>
> that even in careful study we know only a part of any human heart. (p. 289)

Therefore, the design and process of a study are important to preserve the voices and meanings of those who have volunteered to be participants in the research project. In this chapter, I present a research design that used a narrative approach to emerging adult faith development. I also describe the methodology and methods that guided the study. Included are discussions of (a) research design, (b) sample selection, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis. Methodologically, this study was a qualitative investigation into the lived experiences of faith for late emerging adults (23-30 years old) who were leaders in Baptist Student Union (BSU) while undergraduates at the University of Georgia. I used two methods to conduct the research: narrative analysis and document analysis.

The purpose of this narrative study was to gain understanding into the experience and expression of faith during late emerging adulthood. The following questions guided the research:

1. How does the faith of Christian emerging adults change after college graduation?

2. How do emerging adults negotiate the relationship between faith and identity?

3. What happens in the experience and expression of faith during emerging adulthood?

Research Design

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), "research is a systematic process by which we know more about something than we did before engaging in the process" (p. 2). Research methodology can be classified in three approaches, quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods (Creswell, 2003). Each tradition begins with epistemological ideals and contains specific practices and techniques for collecting and analyzing data. There are several criteria for choosing the most appropriate methodology for a study. The first criterion for choosing a methodology is located in the *knowledge claim* (Creswell, 2003) or epistemological position of the researcher. Creswell (2003) identified four broad categories of knowledge claims, "postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism" (p. 6). Typically, positivistic or postpositivistic studies, that understand truth and knowledge to be objective, are conducted using quantitative research methods (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Such investigations follow the scientific method of experimentation and seek to prove or disprove existing theory or test hypotheses. Whereas, studies approached from a constructivistic perspective follow qualitative

research practices. Creswell (2003) claimed that studies derived from pragmatic assumptions are open to multiple methods of inquiry and multiple philosophical influences and are best conducted using mixed-method approaches. This study is located within the constructivistic frame, seeking to understand how emerging adults construct meaning in the experiences and development of faith after graduation from college.

The second criterion for selecting a methodology emerges from what the researcher intends to study. An examination of research questions can quickly reveal if a study is best accomplished through quantitative or qualitative research. In brief, quantitative research questions emerge from a positivist or postpositivist frame and seek to measure (Merriam, 1998). However, qualitative studies are generated by a constructivistic perspective and are best employed to understand meaning (Merriam, 1998; Ruona, 2005), understand contexts, generate theory, understand processes, and identify causes (Maxwell, 2005). Because this study sought to understand participants' experiences, it was best approached using a qualitative methodology.

The third reason for choosing a particular methodology is the education and experience of the researcher (Creswell, 2003). Knowledge of and comfort with a particular approach can be critical, though it should not be the sole factor for selecting a research methodology. However, if an investigator's epistemology is engrained to the extent everything is viewed through a constructivist or positivistic lens then the reason is appropriate. As a researcher, I am most comfortable with questions, experiences, and flexibility in meaning. Such a perspective is well suited for a qualitative study.

This section examines the various components of my research design. First, I will discuss my research frame. Second, I will provide an overview of qualitative methodology. Third, I will present the methods that I used to conduct the study.

Constructivistic Frame

Constructivism (also known as "social constructivism" and "constructionism," Hill, 2005) proposes that identity is not predetermined–even self-knowledge and understanding are but constructs of the dialogue between self (*subject*) and other-than-self (*object*). Constructivism does not deny the existence of *subjects* and *objects* (realism); the theory only negates the idea that meanings can exist independently in *subjects* and *objects*. Meaning is constructed from *subjects* and *objects* that already exist as they "engage" (Crotty, 2003, p. 45) in the world. Meaning is relative to the subject and object within a shared context of meaning making. Therefore, any notions of truth are relative. Crotty (2003) proclaims, "What constructionism drives home unambiguously is that there is no true or valid interpretation" (p. 47). Bruner (2004) explains that the central view of constructivistic thought is that "'world making' is the principle function of the mind" (p. 691).

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative studies are epistemologically located in constructivism. The intention of qualitative research is to understand the participant's perspective and the ways in which meaning is made. Also known as naturalistic inquiry, ethnography, fieldwork, and interviewing, qualitative inquiry seeks the phenomenological essence of an experience, meaning, or activity (Crotty, 1996). Preissle (2006) described qualitative research as,

> A web of associated practices, a confederation, at times almost a bramble bush of
>
> research endeavors, each related in some ways but not in other ways to alternative
>
> endeavors. In some cases what we do can be clearly demarcated into such
>
> subcategories as narrative inquiry or ethnography or oral histories but in other
>
> cases features of designs just bleed into one another…. (p. 688)

As such, qualitative methods can be so flexible as to dodge clear definition. Each

academic discipline using qualitative research methods espouses variations in practice

and theory (Preissle, 2006); however, all qualitative research shares some commonalities.

First, the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative inquiry (Merriam,

1998). While methods and tools are used to collect data, they all involve human

subjectivity. Qualitative studies are the study of human researchers studying ourselves

while studying the meaning making of other humans (Preissle, 2006). In light of this, the

researcher must clearly state his or her positionality by declaring epistemological

assumptions and possible biases when presenting research and discussing findings.

Researchers endeavor to bracket their biases and previous assumptions of meaning about

an event in order to allow the data to ascribe meaning (Crotty, 1996, 2003; Kramp, 2004;

Spiegelberg, 1995; van Manen, 1990).

Second, qualitative inquiry usually features fieldwork where "description[s] of

direct experience and meaning" (Preissle, 2006, pp. 686-687) are obtained by researcher

observations or from personal interviews, usually conducted at a location determined by

and most comfortable for the participant. The desire, according to van Manen (1990), is

"to meet human beings–men, women, children–*there* where they are naturally engaged in

their worlds" (p. 18, italics in original). Such work is time consuming and can be

expensive, often requiring travel by the researcher to the research site (Crotty, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Interviews also require time to conduct and transcribe from recorded audio or video tapes.

A third common feature of qualitative research is that the research design is flexible. The amount of flexibility of a particular design is dependent upon sponsoring or funding agencies or, in the case of student academic research, the requirements and expectations of advisory committees (Merriam, 1998). In many studies, questions and processes are adjusted during data collection to ensure a rich and holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied. If an interview question is not eliciting significant data, researchers often change the question or the way it is phrased in order to obtain information that is more helpful to the study (Schweber, 2007). Probes, questions designed to obtain deeper answers, are often used in qualitative interviewing to elicit responses when participants do not address the question as anticipated (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Fourth, as opposed to the deductive nature of quantitative research, qualitative endeavors are inductive. Instead of seeking empirical, generalizable truths, qualitative research seeks to build theory, identify themes, or illustrate multiple modes of constructing meaning (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Qualitative researchers seek truth as it is understood and defined by the participant. Researchers attempt to determine how meanings are made from the limited data obtained in interviews or narratives told by the participants (Riessman, 1993). In this vein, for this study, it was important to have participants be specific about their religious participation. Hadaway and Marler (1998) showed that people tend to over-report levels of church involvement. For instance, asking

specific questions (did you go to church last week?), instead of general questions (are you involved in church?), elicited more accurate responses. Probing beneath quick answers for the detailed experiences of participants was essential for this study.

Finally, findings are expressed using words and images, not numbers. The intention is to glean data that are "rich" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8) descriptions of context, participants, and meanings. If successful, others may be able to read the written description of the study and find empathy with the participant's experiences (van Manen, 1990).

Examining what happens to the faith of emerging adults during the transition from college to adult roles and responsibilities is best explored using qualitative research methods. While there are existing theories of faith development (Fowler, 1981, 2001; Oser, 1980) that address faith and young adulthood (Parks, 1986, 2000) and investigations seeking to understand how religious participation affects emerging adulthood (Barry & Nelson, 2005), none of these studies specifically examine students involved in Baptist Collegiate Ministries. No existing studies address the influence of committed participation in collegiate Christian organizations on identity development after college. Studies that examine emerging or young adult faith or religiosity within the Southern Baptist Convention do so from the local churches' point of view seeking to understand church involvement, not lack of involvement, faith experience, practice, or development (Black, 2008; Lifeway Christian Resources, 2007; Rainer, 2001; Rainer & Rainer, 2008).

My desire is to explore how work done with collegians through campus collegiate Christian organizations affects the transition to adulthood. Seeking to understand what

Christian young adults experience as they transition from college to other venues is a phenomenological question located in meaning construction as practiced in the midst of personal and contextual faith development. It may be a topic of transformational learning (Loder, 1989; Mezirow, 1991) as young adults construct their identities in the midst of lived experiences situated in time, place, and relationships. While I hold a theocentric, or God-centered, Christian faith perspective that assumes divine interaction with and in the world (Dykstra, 1986; Loder, 1998), my primary epistemological assumption of human meaning making is constructivistic. As shown earlier, constructivism is best explored using a qualitative methodology. Therefore, the best methodological approach for my proposed research is qualitative.

Narrative Inquiry

"Why narrative?" asked Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Their answer, inspired by Dewey (1998), was, "because experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Clandinin and Connelly reminded readers that for Dewey, "the study of education is the study of life" (p. xxiv), and meanings in life are an amalgam of layered experiences. The present study is about the faith experiences of emerging adults. The study also seeks to understand the processes of faith development during emerging adulthood.

Narrative inquiry focuses on the participant's experiences. According to Riessman (1993), "the purpose" of narrative inquiry,

> Is to see how respondents in interviews impose order on the flow of experiences to make sense of events and actions in their lives. The methodological approach examines the informant's story and analyzes how it is put together, the linguistic and cultural resources it draws on, and how it persuades a listener of authenticity.

Analysis in narrative studies opens up the forms of telling about experience, not simply the content to which language refers (p. 2).

Interviews do not occur in a vacuum. Narratives are situated within specific contexts. An event in a narrative account loses its intended meaning when removed from the narrative context (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). The data obtained from such stories should not be understood as "the truth." As Ezzy (2002) suggested, "Narrative theory explicitly engages with the complexity of the world and the finite nature of human understanding" (p. 100). According to Langellier (1989), storytelling is a performance. She expounded, "Narratives are keyed both to the events in which they are told, the *narrative event*, and to the events they retell, the *narrated event*" (p. 250). Riessman (2001) reminded readers, "personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse," and are not necessarily concerned with re-creating the past as it actually occurred (p. 705). Polkinghorne (2007) echoes this idea. Narrative research does not produce data "to determine if events actually happened but about the meaning experienced by people whether or not the events are accurately described" (p. 479).

While this research focused on the fourteen participant's and their stories, I was also an active participant, assisting in the construction of the narratives that served as data for this research project (Riessman, 2008). One criticism of qualitative research is that interpretations are difficult to verify as factual (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). In the case of narrative research, the stories presented are co-constructed by the researcher and participant in a specific setting and time. Critical ethnologist Ropers-Huilman (1999) deems her roll to be a "witness" to the lives and events of her research. In a poststructural

world, making meaning of the lives and stories of others has significant ramifications. She explained,

> We, as witnesses, are producing simulations within discourses. We are fabricating worlds, not because we are falsifying data or lying about what we have learned, but because we are constructing truth within a shifting, but always limited, discourse. Our witnessed accounts, then, are valuable only in certain contexts to certain individuals who believe in the value of our stories. Discourses largely circumscribe the possibilities of our constructions. (Ropers-Huilman, 1999, p. 24)

A researchers' relationship with his or her participants will invariably affect the data collected. The researcher and participant co-construct the narratives presented. As a result, the identities presented during an interview will represent this co-construction. Ropers-Huilman (1999) wrote,

> In qualitative research, we ask participants to reveal and construct certain facets of themselves for us to witness. This is a process that undoubtedly forces them to reflect on and make choices about the worth of the constructions from which they might choose. While this process might indeed be transformative, it is also in part dependent on how our participants have constructed us as witnesses. Participants' perspectives on who we are have effects on their choices about how to construct themselves for our knowing…. Lives and processes are changed based on our choices as witnesses. While traditional qualitative research methodology might suggest that we had contaminated our research data in the example above by substantially influencing a research participant's actions, conceptualizing research

as witnessing implies a desire to work for change, at least in meaning, and a realization that neutrality is not an option. (p. 26)

Given these traits, narrative inquiry can be illustrative in education research demonstrating the connections between various disciplines and epistemological frames. Learning in one realm of life can affect other areas. The process of narrative construction may be a learning event for participant and researcher (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). Likewise, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that the experiential stories that emerge from narrative inquiry could be helpful as sources of data for other researchers to use as a research pool of human experience. This pool may inform seemingly unrelated studies; "this use of narrative inquiry extends the educative linking of life, literature, and teaching earlier seen in Cole's *Call of Stories*" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42).

There is a difference between a biographical life-story and stories of one's life. The life-story is a narrative amalgamation of the stories one recalls from one's experiences. Bruner (2004) proposed that there is "no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of narrative" (p. 692). The life-story a participant tells is not composed in a vacuum; narratives are performed for an audience. As a result, an individual's narrative identity is difficult to uncover. As Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann (2000) suggested,

A person's narrative identity will never be exhaustively expressed by any single story. Rather, the totality of narrative identity is to be conceived of as the virtual potential of different stories a person might tell about him- or herself at different times and in different circumstances. (pp. 200-201)

Conducting multiple interviews separated by a time allowed each participant to provide different views and perspectives of his or her narratives.

In this study, I conducted two face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with each participant. Three of the initial interviews were conducted using Skype, an internet video conferencing program. Each interview was recorded digitally. I transcribed each recording as soon as possible after the interview using my laptop computer, a foot pedal, and two software programs: Express Scribe and Microsoft Word. After transcribing the recorded interview, I performed an initial thematic analysis (discussed below). Five of the participants were members of a pilot study (discussed below). Interviews with the pilot participants occurred eleven months before additional participants were added. I conducted a follow-up face-to-face interview at least two weeks after the first. The gap was eleven months for members of the pilot study. In the follow-up, I sought clarifications from the transcripts data, asked for additional stories that were recalled over the interim, and discussed my initial analysis with the each participant.

<center>Pilot Study</center>

I began a pilot study during the summer of 2009. After obtaining approval from my major professor and the institutional review board (IRB) at the University of Georgia, I purposefully selected five participants, mirroring the diversity of the Baptist Student Union (BSU) membership. The organization is now known as Baptist Collegiate Ministries (BCM), after a name change in 2008. The participants graduated from UGA between 2002 and 2006 and were all leaders in BSU while in college. See Table 14 for a summary of pilot study participant demographics. The format for the study was to include two interviews. I conducted the first interview during the summer, using an interview

protocol, seeking to elicit each participant's faith biography. The conversations lasted between one and two hours. After each interview, I reviewed and adjusted the interview protocol and process by modifying questions, adding probes, adjusting the order of questions, and allowing participants to address any question they were expecting or that I should have asked.

I conducted preliminary analysis of the interviews during a summer class. The data obtained from the first interviews were rich. Although I intended to conduct follow-up interviews a few weeks to a month after the first, in consultation with my major professor I decided to delay the second conversations due to uncertainty of how to best

Table 14

Pilot Project Participant Demographics

Name	Anna	Bryson	Chris	Emily	Kate
Age	27	28	30	29	27
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female
Relationship Status	Divorced/ single	Married	Married	Married	Single
Children	n/a	n/a	n/a	1 & pregnant	n/a
College Church Affiliation	Baptist	Baptist	Baptist	Baptist	SBC
Present Church Affiliation	None	Baptist	None	CBF/ None	None
Education Since Graduation	MEd/ Leadership Certificate	Organic Farming Apprentice	Job related	MSW/ MDiv	Tech School
Profession	Teacher	Farmer	Salesperson	Social Worker	Salesperson

analyze the data and conduct the follow-up interviews. After including summaries of the data and prototypical participant profiles in my prospectus, I decided to merge the pilot study participants into the complete study by adding additional alumni.

Sample Selection

In this section, I will present the criteria and methods used to select the additional participants for this study. Because of the depth of data obtained from life narratives, the sample size of this group was relatively small. The sample of fourteen participants was purposefully selected to achieve maximum variation (Merriam, 1998) of participants for experiences, current faith practice, and ideology. Purposeful selection is a process by which potential participants, who present "information rich" (Merriam, 2002b, p. 12) stories, are identified according to criteria identified as important for the study.

I proposed to exceed ten participants, with the final number to be determined during the process of interviewing and simultaneous analysis. *Sufficiency* and *saturation* are two concepts generally used in determining a qualitative sample selection (Seidman, 2006). According to Seidman, sufficiency asks, "Are there sufficient numbers to reflect the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a change to connect to the experiences of those in it?" (p. 55). Data saturation refers to the point at which the interviewer begins to hear information or themes repeated by participants.

I based the selection criteria on my knowledge of their participation on the BSU leadership team while in college and current religious practice and participation. I sought a sample that was representative of graduates, realizing that everyone constructs meaning differently. Participants for this study were selected seeking a balance of (a) males to

females that represented the percentage of undergraduate participation, (b) Baptist to non-Baptist alumni, (c) a range in age from 26 to 31, (d) from a variety of careers, (e) educational levels, (f) faith practice, and (g) relationship status.

I knew all of the participants from their participation with BSU as undergraduates (where I worked as a campus minister). Participants were selected from the alumni database from the BSU at the University of Georgia. Written permission for accessing and using this data was secured from the senior campus minister at the BSU.

Tisdale (2004) offered, "We strive to do good and to do no harm, but being ethical, it turns out, is not as easy as following the guidelines of one's profession or institutional review board (IRB)" (p. 14). It is easy to become so enamored with one's research that one forgets the rights and needs of the individual behind the data and the impact the data may have on the individual and the community. Throughout this project, I endeavored to remember that the data belonged to the participant. In analysis, I attempted to view participants as partners in research and attempted to remain true to the participant's meanings, understandings, and processes.

After receiving approval from my doctoral committee, I submitted an amended IRB application to the Human Subjects Office of the University of Georgia to expand the research study to include more participants. I was granted IRB approval prior to contacting additional participants. A part of the application process was securing approval for the expanded study from my supervisor at BSU and the Collegiate Ministries Specialist of the Georgia Baptist Convention. This approval was vital for my research with collegians in protecting the participant's interests.

The final sample of fourteen alumni participants was not as diverse in current faith practice as I had originally intended. Some alumni who were invited to participate did not answer my request. I was surprised to discover that several of those who had not been attending church when we last had contact were now actively involved. My colleagues at the Baptist Center suggested that the final balance is appropriate for our alumni. A detailed demographic list of the final sample is included in the Appendix (see Appendix E).

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

My theoretic lens was constructivism as informed by narrative theory. An investigation using narrative methods for data collection and analysis offered the best way to hear the voices of participants in this study. Essentially, a narrative perspective understands identity to be constructed and contained in stories narrated by an individual. For McAdams (1996), "a life story is an internalized and evolving narrative of the self that incorporates the reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future" (p. 307). Bruner (2004) concurred, as the title of his article proclaims, *Life is Narrative*.

Streib (2001, 2005) proposed a revision of Fowler's (1981) model of faith development, suggesting that the study of faith experiences needs to be understood also from a narrative frame. Streib (2005) noted that although the *Manual for Faith Development Research* (Fowler, et al., 2004) suggested the use of a "Life Tapestry Exercise" to frame the faith development interview, this was an optional exercise that was not even coded when determining each participant's faith stage. In his review of dissertations that researched faith or spiritual development using narrative methodologies, Streib (2005) only located three that were "of limited use" for his proposal, due to his

desire to integrate Fowler's research methods and resulting constructive-developmental model of faith development with narrative analysis. The most promising study identified by Streib was that of Nahavandi (1999), which sought to combine the research protocol of Fowler, et al. (2004) with the narrative, life-story interviews of McAdams (1993). Despite Streib's argument and the findings of Nahavandi, I contend that the two theories may not be compatible. The marriage of Fowler's and McAdam's models and methods is premature. Further studies on faith experiences across the lifespan using narrative approaches are needed before seeking to combine them with such seemingly incompatible, constructive-developmental, stage theories. The tendency in developing universal stage theories is to incorporate the stories of individuals into averages, as with Fowler's theory, losing each individual's voice. I contend that practitioners and theorists need to spend time with the plethora of different stories in order to grasp the diversity of experience before seeking to structure a theory.

While critical of Fowler's hierarchical, constructive-developmental theory, Dykstra (1986) suggested that the interview protocol used to obtain data for Fowler's theory (Fowler, et al., 2004) could be used to hear the participant's voice. Dykstra (1986) proposed a different method of analysis:

> One would be trying to discern the *narrative* of a person's life and see how the different themes, events, and experiences in it hold together. And one would analyze that narrative in order to discern what patterned orientation or fundamental intentionality is imbedded in it, rather than the structural capacities that can be abstracted from it. The result, rather than stage assignment, would be a

'faith biography' that revealed and represented that person's faith life in its

wholeness and complexity. (p. 61)

Dykstra's (1986) faith biography is comparable to McAdams' (1988) life-story.

However, Dykstra's method is framed from the perspective of Christian religious

experience and practice. Drawing from questions used in Fowler's (1981; Fowler, et al.,

2004) studies and McAdams' (1988) life story protocol, this present study used a protocol

designed to collect data to be used in constructing a faith biography for each participant

that was true to his or her experience.

I used two methods to conduct this research study. First, I employed a narrative

interview protocol to conduct interviews with purposefully selected participants. Second,

I used document and visual analysis on artifacts voluntarily contributed by participants to

support and deepen the information gleaned from the interviews.

Interviews

Data collection in narrative research is generally accomplished through the use of

face-to-face interviews. The biggest challenge for me was to probe in ways that allowed

the participant's voices to be heard. The main intention of this study was to gain a clear

understanding of the participants' experiences and expressions of faith after college. Such

research presented challenges. First, I attempted to bracket my own experiences and

biases in order to hear the voices of the participants. Kramp (2004) suggested using a

"bracketing interview," where the researcher is interviewed by a colleague with the same

protocol used in the study (p. 115). One of my peers in the Adult Education doctoral

program, who is well versed in qualitative interviewing, used my interview protocol to

garner my story. I transcribed the recording verbatim, edited it, added additional

subjective material, and used it to identify and bracket my ideas and experiences while interviewing (see Appendix A).

Second, there are patterns of talk and dialogue in religious communities that hold meanings only within that group. Within Christianity, this is often referred to as *Godtalk*, *Sunday-school answers*, *church-speak,* or *Christianese*. Even if participants did not use *Godtalk* in everyday conversations, the interview questions may have prompted regression into familiar religious patterns of speech. A participant's use of previous speech patterns, terminology, and phrasing could have masked their faith experiences, feelings, and emotions. Finding new language for experiences is no easy task; it is much easier to fall back into the familiar. Because of these factors, the methods for conducting the study and analysis were extremely important in my quest to answer the above research questions.

Narrative analysis begins when selecting participants. As I sought to understand the experiences participants brought to the interview and began the participant selection process, I began constructing data that entered into my interpretations. I kept notes during the process of participant selection. I also kept copies of emails sent to and received from potential participants. I was surprised that many of those I asked to participate did not respond. Unsure of contact details, I sent some alumni multiple requests to participate. None of those contacted multiple times chose to participate in the study.

I occasionally wrote memos to myself in the form of self-addressed emails when I was struggling with a question or needed to remember details from an interview. These served as fieldnotes that I used during transcription and analysis.

Collecting Interview Data

Initial contact with potential participants was via telephone, email, or in person. Initially, I inquired about their interest in and willingness to participate in the project (see Appendix F for a sample invitation). If an alumnus was interested in participating, I emailed an official letter explaining the study and detailing the interview process. I also included a copy of the consent form so that they would not be surprised to see the document at the first meeting (see Appendix G). If a candidate agreed to participate after the second contact, I worked with him or her to arrange a convenient time and suitable place to conduct the initial interview.

Prior to conducting the interview, I presented two copies of the consent form to the participant, explained the study, and answered any questions. The participant and researcher signed both copies of the consent form. The participant kept a copy and the researcher kept the other. The researcher's copy was stored in a locked file box in his home.

After receiving written participant consent, I used a two-part interview protocol (see Appendix H). The first part was a form for the participant to complete. This process changed between the pilot study and the full research project. During the pilot, I asked participants the demographic questions before beginning the narrative interview. I noticed that each participant strained to see the questions and what I was writing on the form. A committee member, Dr. Juanita Johnson-Bailey, suggested that I separate the two parts of the protocol, allowing each participant to complete the demographic form prior to beginning the interview. The demographic form asked for basic biographical data, such as birthplace, hometown, family structure, age, education level, as well as a

history of faith practice and participation. Collecting biographical information allowed me to pursue contextual elements that did not emerge in the course of the telling of their faith story.

The second portion of the interview protocol consisted of semi-structured interview questions designed to explore the participant's faith narratives. The protocol I used in the pilot project consisted of multiple pages of questions and prompts that I found cumbersome to use. Dr. Wendy Ruona suggested that I try to reduce the list to a single page of prompts instead of a list of complete questions. Thus, I reduced the protocol to a graphical list of simple prompts more conducive to use in a narrative interview (see Appendix I).

The questions in the protocol were a combination of Fowler's (Fowler, et al., 2004) *Faith Development Interview* and McAdam's (1988) *Life Story Protocol*. During the interview, I asked follow-up questions and used probes for clarification and to explore information related to faith development and experiences that did not emerge as the participant related his or her story. On occasion, I took notes during the interview to prompt further probes. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) reminded the narrative researcher that the purpose of an interview is to elicit stories of experience and meaning, not answers to the researcher's questions. This could be done by avoiding "why" questions and beginning queries with, "tell me about…" (p. 35).

I recorded the verbal data with two digital voice recorders to allow for accurate transcription following the interview. Each file was transferred onto my laptop computer after the interview for transcription. I also saved the audio files to a flash drive that was stored in a locked file box in my home.

Interview Fieldnotes

After the interviews I reflected on the experience and wrote fieldnotes as needed, recalling details of the setting, initial interpretations, my somatic reactions, and any other information I deemed relevant. I used the descriptive and reflective notes to record written data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Descriptive fieldnotes include those that seek to describe the subjects, setting, activities, as well as my own behavior and feelings. Reflective fieldnotes are the researcher's initial analysis and thoughts about methods, ethical conflicts, and frame of mind.

Before conducting the follow-up, face-to-face interview with each participant, I began a formal process of data analysis. After each interview, I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim using a word processor and a computer. Each line was numbered, with *turn taking* between researcher and participant indicated. Where I deemed it helpful, I parenthetically noted the participants' body postures, coughs, significant pauses, interruptions and other relevant data in the transcription (Seidman, 2006).

I composed a new protocol for each follow-up interview composed of questions that emerged during the initial analysis. Thus, each protocol was unique. The second interview also provided the opportunity to validate my initial findings by discussing emerging themes and threads with each participants.

Faith Artifacts

To assist in the construction of participant's narratives I asked each person to bring a faith artifact or memento to the first interview. The artifact was to be an item representative of his or her faith or faith journey. Most of the participants asked for further information about what to bring. I tried to be as general as possible, suggesting

that the artifact could be a written journal, a photograph, artwork, or anything that carried

faith meaning for the participant. These items provided a comfortable way for the

participant to begin constructing a faith narrative during the initial interview. The objects

also provided a visual, tangible example of their conception of faith as well as an

indicator of their faith experiences.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

Narrative inquiry and analysis is a young practice (Polkinghorne, 2007). While

methods for analyzing narrative research are numerous, all are situated in specific

research studies. As such, the methods are not universally applicable. Much of what is

deemed narrative analysis are simply qualitative methods applied to stories and involves

separating and chunking data into small segments. However, as Ezzy (2002) suggested,

"narrative analysis refers to the whole of a person's account. The parts of the story

become significant only as they are placed within the context of the whole narrative" (p.

95). Hollway and Jefferson (2000) suggested that *Gestalt* is important in narrative

analysis. Borrowed from the field of psychology, *Gestalt* is the hypothesis that "the

whole is greater than the sum of the parts" (p. 68). Thus, dividing an account into small

chunks removes it from the narrative context.

I transcribed the data into a Microsoft Word document using a template I created

for the task. The template separated paragraphs into turns of speech between the

participant and the interviewer. I denoted my turns with my initials (NB) and the

participant's turn with his or her initials. When transcription was complete, I converted

the participants' initials to their chosen pseudonyms. I read each transcription several

times before beginning to code the data.

Dimensions of Narrative Inquiry

In qualitative research, the researcher is the central research instrument (Finlay, 2002). As such, it is helpful to have frameworks to assist in the process of data analysis that help focus the researcher on the data and outside of his or her own perceptions and preferences. Attention to the following frames will help me focus my thoughts and analytical efforts. From Dewey's theory of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed three dimensions of narrative research, interaction, continuity, and situation. They wrote, "This set of terms creates a metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal, and the social along a second dimension, and place along a third" (p. 50). In this study, I examined each narrative from these three dimensions to provide balance to the analysis.

Identifiers of Salience

I also employed Alexander's (1988) nine principle identifiers of salience as a tool for examining what was included or may have been excluded from participant's narratives. The principle identifiers include "primacy, frequency, uniqueness, negation, emphasis, omission, error, isolation, and incompletion" (p. 269). Alexander noted that his list of principles is not comprehensive; however, they can provide helpful criteria for examining data.

The first principle identifier of salience is primacy. It recognizes that often participants' initial comments, opening statements, or early topics are what he or she considers the most important. Alexander (1988) suggested that beginning statements may be "the foundation stone for, or the key to unraveling, what ensues" (p. 270). This is especially true for topics that are "spontaneously produced" by a participant in an

interview or document (p. 270). In this study, the artifact or the participant's explanation of why the artifact was chosen often became the major theme of a participant's faith narrative.

The second indicator is frequency. The number of times a participant mentioned an event, person, or topic was often an indicator of importance. Alexander (1988) wrote, "In listening or reading through material, if one isolates sequential 'units' of material or information in terms of means-end structures, frequent or repetitive sequences will stand out in bold relief" (p. 271). It is essential, however, that such delineations be compared and contrasted with other identifiers of salience. Repetition may indicate a conscious effort on the part of the participant to convince self and other of the importance of the matter presented.

Uniqueness is Alexander's (1988) third indicator of salience. Uniqueness refers to the material presented as well as the methods of presentation. A participant may preface a story or statement with a qualifier of importance or originality. However, differences in speech patterns, verbiage, or topics from the rest of the data may indicate importance of the topic.

The fourth principle indicator of salience is negation. When a participant negates a subject or topic, the researcher should examine that subject or topic for importance. Sometimes negative statements should be read as true. Alexander (1988) referred to Freud's belief that "one can entertain the likelihood of the statement by eliminating its negative component" (p. 272). Alexander (1988) suggested that negatives be flagged for later examination and comparison with the whole of the data. In reviewing an interview

transcript, it often proved insightful to reframe the statement without the negation to allude to a better interpretation of meaning.

As the fifth indicator of salience, emphasis may be seen in multiple ways. Obviously, notice should be taken when a participant indicates the importance of a story or a statement. Alexander (1988b) suggested, "Overemphasis can usually be detected when the hearer or reader begins to wonder why so much attention is focused on something considered to be commonplace" (p. 273). However, the researcher should also note and consider underemphasis, misplaced emphasis, or odd uses of humor when conducting data analysis.

In examining the sixth indicator, omission, the researcher must read between the lines and use logic to ascertain what or who may be missing from the story. Particularly helpful are examinations of data for details indicating the participant's emotions and the affects of his or her behaviors. Sensing gaps in the stories told by participants was important in this research. It provided follow-up questions for the second interview. I wrote emails to two participants asking for clarifications of unclear questions after the second interview. One participant has continued our conversation with me over email since data collection ended.

Error is Alexander's (1988) seventh indicator of salience. It can include "slips and distortions as indicators of important, hidden motives" (p. 275). Since I know my participants there is a chance I will recognize misstatements or distortions in their narrations. However, as Alexander noted, unless given obvious reason to doubt the accounts of a participant, the researcher should assume credibility.

Alexander (1988) suggested that the eighth identifier, isolation, is best noted when the researcher wonders, "Where did that come from?" or "Does that really follow?" (p. 276). Noting statements that seem out of place in a participant's transcribed narrative may provide important clues to meaning. However, making these connections and interpreting meanings is not an easy task without having more of the story. Follow-up interviews may provide the researcher with an opportunity to query the participant about the information contained in the isolated statement. Later answers could be compared with the data surrounding the original statement to see if there was actually a connection to the original thought, or if there are clues to deeper, unspoken meanings.

The final identifier of salience is incompletion. Incompletion is most obvious when a story or line of thought is begun but ends before closure is reached. Incompletion may also occur when a participant, in telling a full story, leaves out key sequential, cause-and- effect elements or "means-end relationships" (Alexander, 1988, p. 277).

These nine identifiers will be helpful in examining the data and organizing my initial thoughts. Alexander (1988) noted his list is not exhaustive. He suggested other indicators may be "recency, conflict, inconsistency, and incongruity" (p. 278). Delving into the interviews to extract salient data was a helpful aspect of analysis.

Initial Theme Analysis

Analysis began with participant selection. There are many different methods and tools for analyzing data in narrative research. In its most basic form, narrative analysis is the search for themes (Riessman, 2008) and threads (Kramp, 2004) in interview research data. Themes emerged in this study from the participant's own words. While reading the transcripts I highlighted key words and phrases. I also made notes in the margins that

were useful in subsequent readings. Kramp (2004) wrote, "The themes that will reveal themselves to you in each narrative are like threads that, when woven together, create a pattern with a plotlike structure" (p. 117). He elaborated that the researcher's task "is to grab on to these themes by lifting appropriate words and phrases of the narrator from the text" (p. 117).

I examined each narrative for internal and external contextuality (Rossiter & Clark, 2007). Internal contextuality refers to the participant's understanding and interpretation of individual events that make up the plot of his or her life story. The faith artifact (discussed below) provided a tangible illustration of each participant's narrative. External contextuality is an examination of how the individual's narrative relates to familial and cultural situations in which the experiences occur. During the second interview, I discussed initial findings with each participant. This allowed participants to correct my erroneous assumptions, to adjust the statement, or to add to the findings.

Following McAdams' (1985) life story model, I also analyzed the interview data for identity clues, including nuclear episodes, imagoes, an ideological setting, and a generativity script. Questions were included in the protocol to highlight each of these areas. Involved in each of these was each participant's process and experience of *faithing* (Fowler, 1981). Initially, I thought about attempting to locate each participant into an appropriate stage of faith using a variety of theories of faith development (Fowler, et al., 2004; Loder, 1998; Parks, 1986, 2000); however, after collecting and analyzing the data I discovered that I did not have enough information to categorize anyone into one of the existing developmental models.

After analyzing each transcript for initial themes, I placed the highlighted narratives into a Microsoft Word table following Ruona's (2005) model for qualitative research analysis. However, instead of dividing the data into small chunks, I included whole narratives or stories within stories when placing the data into the table. Before coding the data, I discussed initial thematic findings with each participant during a second interview. This allowed me to ask follow-up questions, explore initial themes found in other participant's narratives, and to fill in gaps in the stories I collected in the first interview. After the second interview, I transcribed the data, read the document several times, and began highlighting and looking for themes while comparing the themes from each interview and the faith artifact. I placed narratives from the second interview into another table following Ruona's (2005) model. When I had compiled all of the data into separate tables, I merged them into one file. I organized the initial themes into codes and began coding the data in the table, again using the process developed by Ruona. I sorted the table by the coded themes and began to merge or divide themes.

After I arrived at the final themes, I composed a faith biography for each participant by rearranging the interview data and field notes into a coherent narrative. The faith biographies appear in the fourth chapter. The process I used to compose the faith biography or faith narrative will be discussed in detail below. As I analyzed multiple participants' narratives, I looked for common threads across the data. Dr. Johnson-Bailey and Dr. Ruona discussed the themes and threads with me, helping me to narrow them into the findings presented in the fifth chapter.

Document or Artifact Analysis

Each participant was asked to bring an artifact, memento, or document to the interview that was representative of his or her faith experience. During the interview, the participants provided an interpretation of their artifact by explaining its meaning. However, I also conducted document (Hodder, 1994; McCulloch, 2004) and visual analysis (Harper, 1994; Riessman, 2008) to obtain further meanings from the materials contributed (Keats, 2009).

Hodder (1994) delineated the differences between reports and documents. The former are official records (such as marriage licenses, contracts, and medical records) that are created and kept by power bearing authorities, whereas documents are created and maintained by individuals, usually for personal or communicative use. Documents are "closer to speech" and include "diaries, memos, letters, field notes, and so on" (p. 393). As in other forms of analysis, during the research process it was vital to remember that documents do not hold meaning. Citing Derrida, Hodder reminded readers, "meaning does not reside in a text but in the writing and reading of it. As the text is reread in different contexts it is given new meanings, often contradictory and always socially embedded" (Hodder, 1994, p. 394).

The same criteria was used for interpreting artifacts or non-text documents. Participants in my study brought a wide range of artifacts to represent their faith or faith journey. I received several photographs, a drawing, two journals, a passport, and many other mementoes. Harper (1994), writing about the qualitative interpretation of photographs, noted that both the photographer and the viewer construct different

meanings from the same image. He wrote, "The postmodern critique reminds us that the meaning of the photograph changes in different viewing contexts" (p. 408).

The artifacts were useful in developing initial themes or constructs within a participant's narrative, although dialoguing with each participant about his or her interpretation of the artifact was essential. The second interview provided an opportunity to discuss additional hermeneutical themes I identified (Hodder, 1994) in the document or memento with the owner of the artifact. As such, the artifacts also assisted with validity; they served as a method for triangulation, or *methodological pluralism*, of the findings (McCulloch, 2004).

Composing Narratives

Narrative analysis includes the presentation of data in a form that is accessible to readers. Dykstra (1986) proposed that the intention of faith development research should be to set forth each participant's "faith biography," a constructed narrative of a person's life to see "how the different themes, events, and experiences in it hold together" (p. 61).

Seidman (2006) suggested that after interviews are transcribed, a summery profile should be crafted into a narrative that contains a beginning, middle, and end. The process of forming a profile involves multiple steps. First, an initial analysis should be conducted by reading the transcript, marking important passages, labeling the passages for themes and sequence, and arranging the marked and labeled passages into a new, more compact transcript. Second, the new transcript should be read again, underlining compelling passages that will make for a good biographical story. Third, using the first person voice of the participant, arrange the underlined material into a biographical narrative. Where necessary it is permissible for the researcher to add comments or connective language.

However, this material should be identified for the reader as the voice of the narrator, not the participant. This distinction can be accomplished using brackets to set apart the researcher's added comments.

As I constructed each faith biography I re-read all the fieldnotes, interviews, and emails, as well as examined each artifact anew. I manipulated the order of the stories or paragraphs according to chronology or theme. My intent was to allow the participant's voice to be heard while describing each experience. I worked with one narrative at a time. The narratives with only a few themes and simple stories were easier to compose than the ones with complex, enmeshed ideas and relationships.

<center>Trustworthiness of the Study</center>

Researchers must demonstrate that their studies can be "believed and trusted" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 101). Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Raulston, and St. Pierre (2007) presented an analysis of qualitative research practices in order to demonstrate that such methodologies demonstrate the necessary rigor and validity to be considered scientific. They wrote,

> Qualitative researchers have always discussed how to evaluate their science, the quality of their analyses and theoretical interpretations of data. They disagree, however, over the terms used in these discussions: *validity*, *reliability*, *rigor*, and parallel terms such as *trustworthiness*, *credibility*, *transferability*, *verisimilitude*, *relevance*, *plausibility*, and *confirmability*. (2007, p. 26)

Included in this section are discussions of internal validity and external validity.

Internal Validity

According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), "Internal validity asks the question, How congruent are one's findings with reality?" (p. 101). Polkinghorne (2007) proposes that validity is not mechanical, but "is an argumentative practice" (p. 476). Since the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection in a narrative research interview, the researcher is also the primary determinant of the accuracy of the interviewee's story. I used four tactics to ensure internal validity: (a) triangulation, (b) member checks, (c) reflexivity, and (d) peer/supervisor review.

Triangulation is a term borrowed from navigation and surveying where at least two points were used to determine location and distance (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In qualitative research, triangulation refers to the use of more than one technique to obtain data about a subject of investigation. McCulloch (2004) called this *methodological pluralism* (p. 129). I used several methods to triangulate the data. First, I asked each participant to bring an artifact representative of his or her faith. Artifacts brought by participants were illustrative of their faith, the faith journey, or a faith experience. The artifacts supported the narratives constructed by the participants. Discussions with the participants about the artifacts provided further insight into their faith experience. Second, familiarity with the participants also assisted in triangulation. Since I knew all of my participants, I was aware of many of the experiences they presented in their narratives.

The second interview provided an opportunity for member checks to ensure internal validity. After the first interview, I transcribed the recordings and conducted an initial analysis. At the second interview, I asked follow-up questions and discussed my

initial findings with the participant. To ensure that I understood the narratives and the experiences they represented, I discussed my hypothetical findings, dialoguing about faithing, meaning making, and identity. After the interview, I transcribed the data and compared the transcription with my initial analysis. After transcribing the second interview, I analyzed both interviews together.

A researcher can also demonstrate validity through reflexivity or a subjectivity statement (see Appendix A). Researcher bias and prejudices can affect findings (Finlay, 2002). According to Merriam (2002a), the purpose of a reflexivity statement is "to articulate and clarify" the researcher's "assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation to the study" (p. 26). Though complete bracketing of one's bias is impossible, I endeavored to keep my worldview in mind when conducting interviews and analyzing data.

Power dynamics are always involved in relationships. Johnson-Bailey (2004) reminded researchers to be aware of the power dynamics during interviews; "So when narrativists work with stories they must be aware of how power, this hidden companion, shapes views and relations with the world" (p. 129). She expounded,

> Therefore, a research scholar using narrative must remain vigilantly aware of power issues – the balance of voices, competing political agendas, and the societal hierarchies enveloping the process. Each story and the accompanying data collection and analytic process is a balancing act. The forces to be reconciled change as positions shift: a White person studying a person of color, a man researching women and their place in society, a scholar of color doing work within her or his own culture. There is no righteous ground. There are people of

color who can accomplish a synchronously sympathetic and critical examination of their kin, and there are those who bring a jaundiced gaze sponsored by internalized oppression to self-group examination. (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 138)

Since I am a minister who functioned in a supervisory, counseling, or pastoral role with the study participants when they were in college, I had to be attentive to issues of power in the interview setting. Some of my participants are women. Especially in conservative religious groups, there is an imbalance of power and equality among males and females. I was attentive to these issues in data analysis, member checks, and follow-up contacts with my study members, constantly reiterating that they are participants in my research, not merely objects of study.

Another strategy for demonstrating the trustworthiness of research is using others to review the research and findings prior to publication. For her narrative dissertation research, Anderson (1995) adopted the concept of "Peer debriefing" from Lincoln and Guba (1985). A peer debriefer is

Essentially a noninvolved professional peer with whom the inquirer(s) can have a no-holds barred conversation at periodic intervals. The purposes of the debriefing are multiple: to ask the difficult questions that the inquirer might otherwise avoid ('to keep the inquirer honest'), to explore methodological next steps with someone who has no axe to grind, and to provide a sympathetic listening point for personal catharsis. (C. L. Anderson, 1995, p. 41)

In my research, I used peer debriefers with training and experience in qualitative research. I chose another doctoral candidate with experience as a Christian minister to interview me using my narrative interview protocol. The result was a digitally recorded

"bracketing interview" (Kramp, 2004, p. 115). The peer debriefer asked me probing

questions about my answers, particularly focusing on my theological assumptions. After

the interview, I transcribed the interview and used it to construct a reflexive faith

biography. Reflexivity will be discussed below. After reading the long autobiographical

document, my major professor suggested that I compose an abbreviated version to

include in this dissertation (see Appendix A).

While I do not believe it is possible to completely bracket my own subjectivity, as

is suggested by some phenomenological researchers (Crotty, 1996), understanding my

own experiences and my biases enabled me to hear the voices of participants more

clearly. My major professor and doctoral committee also served as supervisory advisors

of the research process and the presentation of findings.

Polkinghorne (2007) reminds readers that narrative research does not seek to

garner historical truths, but narrative truths. Narrative research is phenomenological and

seeks to understand participant's meanings, emotions, and experiences from their

remembered perspectives. He writes, "The storied descriptions people give about the

meaning they attribute to life events is, I believe, the best evidence available to

researchers about the realm of people's experience" (p. 479).

Reliability

Once a researcher demonstrates internal validity, he or she needs to show

reliability. Merriam (2002a) explained that reliability is "the extent to which research

findings can be replicated" (p. 27). However, because narrative research is conducted in

specific contexts with individuals who construct narratives in dialogue with the

researcher, it is difficult, if not impossible to recreate. Merriam and Simpson (2000)

stated, "The more important question for qualitative researchers is *whether the results are consistent with the data collected*" (p. 102). Elsewhere, Merriam (2002a) showed that in qualitative research reliability is better conceived of as dependability or consistency.

As with internal validity, I will use triangulation and peer review to demonstrate reliability of my findings. In addition, I will also use an "audit trail" (Merriam, 2002a, p. 27), comprised of dated transcriptions, emails, letters, recordings, computer files, field notes, and memos to confirm the reliability of my research. Such documentary measures may be reviewed by my peer debriefer and dissertation committee members to trace my research process and procedures.

Reflexivity

Seeking to be true to the meanings of the participant is at times difficult in qualitative research. Because the interviewer asks the questions and guides the conversation, there is a chance that the narratives brought forth are for the benefit of the researcher, and do not reflect the deepest experiences of the participant. Finlay (2002) summarized,

> We accept that the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection and interpretation of data. We recognize that research is co-constituted, a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationship. We understand that meanings are negotiated within particular social contexts so that another researcher will unfold a different story. We no longer seek to eradicate the researcher's presence – instead subjectivity in research is transformed from a problem to an opportunity (Finlay, 2002). In short, researchers no longer question the need for reflexivity: the question is how to do it. (p. 212)

I needed to be aware of how my relationship with the participants affected the narratives they constructed during the interviews. Because of the emotional connections made with the participants in my role as their minister, there could have been the tendency to construct narratives that sought to honor our relationship. Seidman (2006) noted, "The interviewer must nevertheless recognize that the meaning is, to some degree, a function of the participant's interaction with the interviewer" (p. 23). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cautioned,

> We all, novice and experienced researchers alike, come to inquiry with views, attitudes, and ways of thinking about inquiry. These histories, these personal narratives of inquiry, may coincide with or cross a boundary to varying degrees with the actual inquiries that we undertake. (p. 46)

They advised that those conducting narrative research, "need to reconstruct their own narrative of inquiry histories and to be alert to possible tensions between those narrative histories and the narrative research they undertake" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 46). Understanding my own experiences and answers to the interview questions was essential. I was attentive to my bias throughout the research process, from planning the interview, to analyzing the data, to attempting to hear the participant's meanings through the narratives they related.

According to Lindseth and Norberg (2004), "What we put within brackets is our judgements [sic] about the factual, about what is the case, in order to become open to our own experience and to the understandable meaning implicit in this experience" (p. 148). As the primary instrument in narrative research, it is essential that the researcher understand his or her own experiences, perspectives, and bias before going into the field

so that he or she can attempt to hear the narratives of participants more clearly. To assist with self-awareness, I constructed a reflexivity statement (see Appendix A). Periodically reviewing this statement and adding any new revelations during the interview and analysis stages reminded me of my bias as a researcher.

The aforementioned transcript from the peer debriefer interview and reflexivity statement provided me with a written account of my own faith narrative to use as a reference point in conducting interviews and interpreting data. While it was not possible to bracket my own experiences, impressions, and biases completely, being aware of my own subjectivities enabled me to offer a more accurate analysis of each participant's faith experience.

External Validity

Usually considered generalizability, external validity demonstrates how the findings of a research study can be used in similar populations. Common conceptions of generalizability emerge from quantitative research designs. Since qualitative research deals with small, purposefully selected samples, application of the findings to entire populations is not appropriate. According to Merriam (2002a), external validity can be demonstrated in a qualitative study, "If one thinks of what can be learned from an in-depth analysis of a particular situation or incident and how that knowledge can be transferred to another situation" (p. 28). However, Merriam and Simpson (2000) noted, "It is not up to the researcher to speculate how findings can be applied to other settings; it is up to the consumer of the research" (p. 103). The strategy I used to show external validity is by providing a "rich, thick description" (Merriam, 2002a, p. 29). I have

presented the faith biographies (in chapter four) with enough detail and description so that readers may assess generalizability to other situations and studies.

Because the process of qualitative research is complicated, the multiple levels of interpretation involved on the part of participant, interviewer, analyst, and reader can make the findings suspect (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000). According to Clandinin and Connelly,

> A field note is not simply a field note; a photograph is not simply a photograph; an oral history is not simply an oral history. What is told, as well as the meaning of what is told, is shaped by the relationship [between participant, researcher, and document]. The field text created may be more or less collaboratively constructed, may be more or less interpretive, and may be more or less researcher influenced. It depends. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 419)

Chapter Summary

In this study, I exercised purposeful selection to locate participants. I incorporated the five participants from the pilot study into this research project. I recruited seven additional participants, seeking alumni who represented different lifestyles and perspectives on faith and life that I believed were able to enter into a rich dialogue about their experiences. After conducting the follow up interviews with the pilot study participants and initial interviews with the seven new members, I decided to add two additional alumni. Returning to the database list, I recruited a married female with children and a single male to balance the sample.

I recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the data, which was obtained in two face-to-face interviews with each of the fourteen participants. I analyzed the data using the

various procedures and processes outlined above for themes and threads. I also employed member checks to verify the findings within each narrative. Finally, I discovered cross-narrative themes for commonalities in faith development and experience.

The next two chapters present the findings from the research study. Chapter four contains the fourteen faith biographies, the combined narratives of their faith journeys. The research findings are delineated in chapter five. In chapter six, I will present conclusions and discuss implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 4:

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

I am unwritten, can't read my mind, I'm undefined
I'm just beginning, the pen's in my hand, ending unplanned

Staring at the blank page before you
Open up the dirty window
Let the sun illuminate the words that you could not find

Reaching for something in the distance
So close you can almost taste it
Release your inhibitions
Feel the rain on your skin
No one else can feel it for you
Only you can let it in
No one else, no one else
Can speak the words on your lips
Drench yourself in words unspoken
Live your life with arms wide open
Today is where your book begins
The rest is still unwritten
– Natasha Bedingfield (Brisebois, Bedingfield, & Rodrigues, 2004)

"*Identity is a life story,*" declared McAdams (1993, p. 5). Savage and Presnell

(2008) share their perspective, discussing individuals within corporate Christian

education, "We are in a real sense, our stories" (p. 25). Humans know themselves by the

stories they tell about their lives. The following faith biographies (Dykstra, 1986) were

crafted using Seidman's (2006) techniques from data collected in two narrative

interviews with each participant. While composing the biographies, attention was given

to McAdam's (1993) four components of identity stories, including nuclear episodes,

imagoes, ideological settings, and generativity scripts. The span between the two

interviews varied between three and eleven months. Five of the participants were

included in a pilot study with second interviews conducted eleven months later. Both interviews with the remaining nine members occurred in a three-month period. Prior to the initial interview, I asked each participant to select and bring with them an artifact or memento that they felt characterized their faith or faith journey.

<center>Anna's Story: Learning to Love Myself</center>

"Love hasn't really been an issue for me; it's liking someone like me."

Anna Carter is a winsome, energetic, 28-year-old eighth grade teacher who graduated from the University of Georgia in May of 2003. Since graduating, she has furthered her formal education by obtaining a Master's degree in Education and a Leadership certificate, both from Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. A strong extrovert, she enjoys serving as the head of the English department at school. While growing up in a small provincial town in North Georgia, she only associated with those who were like her. She went to school and church with the same people. Anna grew up with her parents and an older sister. She had a strained relationship with her father during her teenage years and into college. Anna said her Christian faith has always been a part of her life. "I can't remember not being a person of faith," she explained, "I always pursued faith, always. It's always been important to me." Faith, for Anna, is a verb. It implies basing her life on religious beliefs and practices.

Though she was extremely successful as a student as well as a leader in her high school youth group and in her college ministry, she constantly struggled with low self-esteem. She recalled, "I was always ridiculously, wildly, insecure about my body…. I was always very confident in whom I was and I knew I was smart and I knew I was a likeable person, but physically I absolutely hated myself."

Anna never strayed from her faith until after her marriage to a seminary student. Prior to their wedding, her fiancé, Steve, celebrated her unconventional, free spirit, passionate lifestyle, and independent personality. However, after they were married, he attempted to force her into the role of a traditional pastor's wife. She explained,

> I struggled a lot with the pressure that he put on me to be a "cookie-cutter" pastor's wife. Before we were married he said, "I love who you are, you dance in the aisles of the grocery store, I love that."

After their wedding, she and her husband moved to Atlanta. Anna enjoyed the adventure of city life and the diversity of people, culture, and lifestyles she encountered there. However, her husband longed for status quo. After becoming the pastor of a small-town country church, he began to put pressure on her to change. Anna rebelled against his efforts to transform her. Relishing the diverse ideas and options offered by living in Atlanta she sought to find balance between being her own person and being married. In a journal entry when her marriage was failing she asked, "What does it mean to be authentic?" In her search for self and her rebellion against her husband, she forsook practicing her once comfortable faith. After seeking relational help from various sources, Anna and her husband divorced after a tumultuous three-year marriage. At the time of the first interview, she had been single for two years.

Since her divorce, Anna is discovering self-confidence and freedom in life and faith. She now lives alone in an area of the city known for being progressive. She told me,

> I think this city opened my eyes to being around homosexuals, being around different races, being around different socio-economic groups. I realized that

throughout my life I had surrounded myself with people who were about the same as I was or who were where I wanted to be. In spite of my recent changes in my life, I never let go of my faith. Though I moved towards the middle, I brought my faith with me, only now as a person who is more tolerant, more open-minded, who has moved my faith towards the middle.

After marrying the only man she ever dated, Anna has enjoyed getting to know many different men since her divorce. She has purposefully dated men who were very different from her father and her ex-husband. Not only has she learned about men while dating, each man also showed her new ways to look at the world. She learned to be more spiritual from a man who claimed no religious attachment. From another man she learned that not all Christians are Republicans, and, as a result, she said she "even voted Democratic" in the last presidential election. She has broken out of her sheltered past and enjoys the nightlife offered by the big city where she lives.

She hopes to marry again someday. She would love being a mother and caring for a family again. "I'm at my best when I'm in a relationship," she explained. I met her at a coffee shop in Atlanta for the second interview. When I arrived, she was saying goodbye to her boyfriend of three months. She was obviously happy to be in a relationship with a "good guy" who is also serious about his Christian faith.

Anna kept her married name for two years after becoming single again fearing the gossip that a mid-year name change would have prompted in the school where she teaches. This summer she went through the legal process of reclaiming her maiden name. The loss of old friends has been almost as tragic for Anna as her divorce. With few exceptions, the friends she had during college have shunned her since they heard the

news. "I was friends with a lot of people and I had a lot of them turn their backs. It's been really, really disappointing," she lamented. During the past two summer vacations Anna has traveled widely, exploring Europe alone and the United States with new groups of friends.

Through the last ten tumultuous years, Anna said she never rebelled in her faith until the last year of her marriage. The first Sunday after she moved out of their house, Anna went to a local church. She is still an active member there. Instead of abandoning her faith when she left her minister-husband, Anna has been able to find support within her faith for causes of justice and diversity. She has also cast aside the narrow teachings of her childhood church that devalued women and girls and has discovered a faith-based confidence to be a strong, independent Christian woman. While she has changed, she continues to practice Christian disciplines of an early morning quiet time, where she prays, reads the Bible, and memorizes scripture that she tries to recall throughout the day. As she related these practices, she recited the scripture from that morning, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer, Psalm 19:14."

During the narrative interview process, Anna discovered similarities between her relationships with her father, her husband, and God. She connected experiences and stories from her past, realizing that though she knew her father, her husband, and God all loved her, she did not believe they liked her. She connected all of those relationships with her battle against low self-esteem. Gaining an understanding of God as someone who not only loves, but also likes her and who "rejoices over me with singing" has been revolutionary for her faith and self-image.

I first interviewed Anna in a comfortable, homey, Sunday school room at Parkway Baptist Church in Duluth, Georgia on a hot June afternoon after she completed a day of teaching summer school. She currently attends a large, non-denominational church in metro Atlanta and is very active in her pursuit of self-knowledge and a deeper relationship with God. She said she works hard at self-understanding and wants her faith to imbue meaning to every aspect of her life. In her journal, an artifact she brought to the first interview as a representation of her faith journey since college, Anna wrote about the changes she has experienced over the past few years. She declared,

> It has been one year and seven months since I decided to leave my husband. One year and five months since I have been living alone. Oh my, how my life has changed. I truly forget that I used to be married, even though I still have his name. Now he is engaged to another girl, and I plan to be Anna Carter again. I just know myself now. I pursue my passions. I am making things happen for myself now. There are so many frustrations that come with my lifestyle: undesired alone time, boring evenings, dateless weekends, dinners for one. But oh, how I am happier. Those are conditional circumstances; they will change one day. But one thing that will not change is me being me. I was so contained before, so squashed. Never ever will I let anyone make me be that way again.

Another participant in the pilot study referred Anna to me as someone I might want to include in my research. He also informed me of her divorce. Prior to this study, I was last in contact with her was prior to her divorce, when she brought her husband to a UGA football game.

Braxton's Story: Fathered by God

"I have a heart for seeing and helping in the development of men."

Tall, slender, and athletic, Braxton is an introverted, yet confident and successful 30 year old account executive with a sports advertising agency. He has become an optimistic leader at work, at church, and at home. Braxton met his wife Kristin in college. At the time of the interview, she cared for their two preschool daughters at home. Braxton's practice of Christianity encompasses every aspect of his life. For him it is essential to believe in God's faithfulness, knowing that God is at work at all times in all circumstances. He explained, "Faith is taking a step or believing even though you don't necessarily see what's on the other side."

Braxton's life was most influenced by his relationships. Prior to college his "surface level relationship" with his parents, his parent's subsequent divorce, and his emotionally and physically distant father gave him a desire for someone to "pour into him." As a result he unconsciously sought out Christian male friends and mentors to help him grow into manhood.

Although he became a Christian as a child while attending a small country church while visiting his father and stepmother, Braxton only began to understand and appropriate his faith in college. He explained,

> That's when it really clicked for me. My four and a half years at BSU [Baptist
> Student Union at the University of Georgia] were the peak of my spiritual growth,
> to kinda kick start my spiritual growth, if you will. It's during that time that I got
> it and that I really began to put it into practice.

Through BSU he met the men who have become his closest friends. One of them asked

Braxton to speak at a youth retreat in a local church. The success of that event caused him

to consider serving as a leader in BSU the following year. As a result, he served as the

intramural coordinator and intramural team leader for the campus ministry during his last

two years of college.

The biggest influences for Braxton in college were his roommates and the men in

his small group Bible study. They provided "accountability" for him. He reflected, prior

to that, "I never had people in my life that were encouraging from a faith standpoint," and

observed that college friends "challenged" me "to grow as a Christian. You know that

whole concept was kinda foreign to me coming into college."

The two most important conceptions of God for Braxton are viewing God as a

father and a comforter. In his marriage to Kristin, Braxton seeks to be a great husband.

He is determined to keep his relationship with her his first priority. He also tries to be "a

perfect father" as modeled by Kristin's dad. Fast friends with his father-in-law, Braxton

seeks to learn from him ways to nurture his own faith while caring for his family.

Making time to nurture strong relationships with other Christian males is a

priority. After reading *Fathered by God,* by John Eldredge (2009), Braxton has become

intentional about three levels of male relationships in his life, with younger boys whom

he can instruct, with peers who can support and encourage him, and with an older

Christian mentor. In addition to working with middle and high school boys at church, he

also scheduled "guy trips" with his friends and mentors. Each summer he returns to

Camp Wilderness, where he went each summer as a child and then worked in high school

and college. His goal has been "to pour into the counselors" there. Many current staffers at Camp Wilderness were campers when Braxton was a counselor.

After presenting and discussing my finding that his first interview transcript "screams dad, father, leader," Braxton agreed. While he knew that having male friends and mentors has always been important for him, he had never examined it as a major force throughout his life. However, he observed, "when you string it all together" I can see that while it was "something I knew, something I know is important for me, it gives a lot more explanation behind why I do try to go on as many guy-trips as I can."

Braxton stated that at the end of his life he wants to look back and see the impact he has had on the world. He concluded,

I want to have a successful career, I want to do the best that I can, I want to do well in the business world, but that's not what I want to be known for. I want to be known as a loving father and husband. As someone who, from an earthly-relationships standpoint, puts his family as a priority, particularly, puts his wife as the number one priority…. I constantly have to remind myself that my relationship with Kristin comes before my relationship with the girls. She was there first. We were a family before the kids came. That's what I want to be known for, as a father who put his wife first and poured into his kid's lives. Looking way down the road, I want to be seen as a guy who was always pouring into those younger than him. You know, right now at this stage in my life, that is middle school boys. Ten or twenty years from now, I hope to be in the situation [with a younger man] that my mentor is in with me. I have a heart for seeing and helping in the development of men.

I asked Braxton to participate in the research study because I knew him to be deeply involved in a church. I see him at least annually when he visits the UGA campus, usually surrounding football games or alumni events.

Bryson's Story: Being Exposed

"I finally realized that my job is to…. love people for who they are just because they are people."

On July 12, 2009, late in the afternoon, my family drove to the organic farm Bryson and his wife, Abby, began three years ago. The farm has become quite successful, allowing the couple to hire two interns to assist with the work, while teaching them about sustainable farming practices. Bryson is 28, slender, and deeply tanned from daily work in the South Georgia sun. We visited a few hours and toured the farm before returning to our hotel. Later that evening Bryson arrived at the hotel for our first interview. We met in a comfortable conference room, complete with notepads and pens at each place. Pulling a topless bobble-head, hula doll (see Appendix J) from his pocket he announced, "Meet Lola Koi!" The doll was a memento acquired during an organic farming internship in Hawaii. Bryson explained that the doll was a metaphor of his faith journey so far. It had been one of "exposure."

Faith for Bryson is "fleshing out what you believe." Faith is the practical side of religious practice, whereas, he understands spirituality to be "that place or the spectrum, the area of your life where your soul feels really alive and excited." It is where "your spirit, your soul, your heart is never satisfied, where you are always questioning, where you are always searching for peace." Bryson grew up in a strict Southern Baptist home as the oldest in a family of four boys. His family was deeply involved in church. He said going off to college was a liminal (Rohr, 2003) event, a threshold to new experiences,

diverse perspectives, and deep relationships. After feeling immediate acceptance in the Baptist Student Union (BSU) "New Dawg" group, Bryson served for two years on the team that coordinated activities and ministries for new students. The people he encountered in the BSU demonstrated that the Christian ideology in which he was raised was not the only valid Christian perspective. His best friend and college roommate asked Bryson deep questions, some that continue to haunt him. During his collegiate experience, he began to see Jesus from a different perspective: not as a judge, but as someone who sought to love everyone and freely distribute grace and offer acceptance to everyone. He continues to explore matters of faith and practice individually and through participation at church.

Five years prior to the interview, I performed Bryson and Abby's wedding behind the farmhouse next door to her parent's farm. Following graduation from UGA Bryson taught and coached in a high school in a community near the family farm. After a year of teaching, he and Abby moved to Hawaii for a five-month internship, working on various organic farms and enjoying the diverse cultures. He continued his education after returning to Georgia, commuting to another internship two days each week for the next year. He and Abby also began their farm that year. They sold their produce at nearby farmer's markets as well at an onsite stand.

I maintain contact with the couple, seeing them a few times each year. Working on the farm is a spiritual experience for Bryson and his wife. The long hours tilling, weeding, and performing the often-mindless chores allows him to listen to inspiring music, to reflect on conversations and books, and to meditate. Because most of farm

work is outside and must occur during daylight, most evenings are free to read or to visit with neighbors, family, and friends.

Bryson thrives on the diverse relationships that he has found in his rural community and small, conservative, church affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He noted that most members live within a three-mile radius of the church. One of Bryson's favorite community events is a monthly potluck dinner, held in the community center. Recalling a character in one of his favorite books, Bryson wants to be known as someone who "had time to pay attention to useless things" (Berry, 2000, p. 231), to cut a neighbor's grass, to care for stray animals, to care for those who need help, and to be a friend to those who are shunned. He hopes to stay at this farm a long time, learning to embody the tolerance and acceptance that marks his expanding worldview of living out a faith marked by grace.

During the interviews, Bryson recalled the many people who have influenced his ideas about faith and life. Conversations with different people have stretched his ideas and opinions. He noted that the older he becomes the more questions he has about things. As a result of interactions with people all over the world and rereading the biblical narratives, Bryson's perspective of the Christian faith has changed since college. "I came to realize at some point, so many stories of Jesus showed him helping the underprivileged, helping the poor, the oppressed, the forgotten, and doing nothing more than just loving people." He reflected, "I finally realized that my job is not to be judgmental and not to be one-sided but to go a little deeper and form relationships and love people for who they are just because they are people." One day he wants to be seen as a sage, who helps others expand their worldview through having deep conversations

and asking probing, stretching questions. As we talked, he realized he has begun to do this with the emerging adults who work and live on their farm in six-month long, sustainable agriculture internships.

I chose Bryson for the pilot study because of our continuous contact and familiarity. I have been to Bryson and Abby's farm on several occasions. They also visit me when they are in Athens. I know him to be a deep thinker and inquisitive learner. He seeks to live his liberal Christian faith in the context of a small farming community in South Georgia, a mix that is not often compatible.

<div align="center">Carl's Story: Becoming "A Vessel of Love"</div>

"I think I'm more Christian than lots of Christians out there, and I'm not a Christian."

"I have a story of faith that has evolved into a story of spirituality," Carl began his narrative. He has been living abroad for so long that returning to the United States brings culture shock, and *inquieto*, a deep restless discontent with the noise presented by the pervasive advertisements and media. Carl is a deep thinker who reads widely. Although an introvert, he enjoys meeting, getting to know, and learning from as many people as possible.

While in college, he served as a Bible study leader at BSU. He was responsible for teaching a prescribed lesson to a small group of his peers each week. As a recovering Christian, now Carl's temple is nature. Music is his muse, his most powerful medium for thought and reflection. His singular gospel is love.

Though he grew up in a large Southern Baptist Church where his parents were volunteer leaders, Carl noted that, "I was always one to think outside the box and to question what my faith-based community was propagating." He saw a disconnection

between his parents' professed Christian beliefs and the stories of Jesus in the New Testament. It was obvious to him that they selectively decided whom they would love and to whom they would minister.

Ironically, it was while a summer missionary in Hawaii working in a Southern Baptist Church that Carl began to doubt seriously whether he wanted to remain a Christian. That summer Carl lived and worked under the supervision of the pastor. He quickly noticed a difference between the pastor's persona at home and at church with his parishioners. In the pulpit the pastor preached a gospel of love that resulted in perfection and holiness in living; however, at home he was angry and demanding of his family and the student missionaries. During this time Carl remembered a Latin quote, given to him by his college Sunday school teacher back home, that he had stuck in his Bible: "*Aut hoc non evangelium, aut hi non evangelici*" ("either this is not the gospel or these are not Christians").

His summer adventures had whetted his appetite to see the world. At school the following year, though he was doing well in his major, preparing to follow his father's example in the world of finance, Carl became determined not to have a traditional career. He wanted to travel. He devised a scheme that would allow him to work odd jobs when he needed to in order to save money for his adventures. During his senior year in college, Carl carefully created a work and travel schedule that allowed him to explore countries in South and Central America while learning Spanish from native speakers in each stop. He became fluent in Spanish and secured a summer job working for a company that provided month long South American tours for wealthy teenagers.

During his travels, Carl learned that he had been living in a bubble that insulated him from the world. His corporate faith had instilled fear of associating with non-believers and of disobeying the long list of steadfast rules. Carl met people and visited places that taught him that all religions are alike and all have the same basic goals. He learned from a young Australian that he could choose his path in life. She introduced him to the writings of Paulo Coelho, which have shaped his understandings of spiritually and living according to his own spiritual path. While working in North Africa and Spain he talked to international travelers and learned about the origins and beliefs of many religions. He saw how deep commitment to one's faith could be a powerful force for good or for evil. Along the way, music was his constant companion and muse.

Currently, he makes a nice living as a tour guide in Europe. For each trip, he assembles a playlist in his iPod that will calm him when nervous as well as inspire him to think deeply. He has consistently been drawn to the work of Michael Franti (2007), who sings, "Life is too short to make just one decision, Music's too large for just one station, Love is too big for just one nation and God is too big for just one religion." Carl carries a journal in addition to his music where he records inspirational quotes he encounters or discovers.

Carl spent the last five years "letting go." Initially, he let go of his corporate Christian identity, preferring to refer to himself as a "Jesus follower." Later, he let go of Christianity. He continues to believe in "some higher power or universal Spirit" that is in all things and connects all things. Though he has left the Christian faith, he continues to hold on to most of the things he learned as a Christian regarding morality and loving and

caring for others. Carl's spirituality is centered on the concept of love. He mused, "I think love is the most powerful force in the universe."

Carl believes he would still be a Christian if he had grown up in a church that practiced the gospel as Jesus did. In his experience, most churches, and many Christians, judge and ostracize outsiders instead of loving them. They prefer to live in their protective Christian bubble with their comfortable rules, comfortable pews, and likeminded church members. As a result, the Southern Baptist Convention and most Christians in America represent the antithesis of Carl's worldview. His goal in life is to be a "vessel of love" – freely and extravagantly giving and receiving love. Abandoning his childhood faith has opened him up to experience new things and to befriend anyone he meets without the guilt that was his constant companion as a Christian. He believes that Jesus' life and teaching was solely about love. As a result, he contends, "I think I'm more Christian than lots of Christians out there, and I'm not a Christian."

Carl and I reconnect on his annual trips back to the United States. Our encounters involve long meals and deep discussions about life, faith, Americans, and love. I conducted Carl's interviews using Skype (for video chat) and Pamela (a computer based digital audio recording program). Though Carl was not a participant in the pilot study for this research, I included him in a smaller qualitative study several years before. Since the two interviews Carl and I have continued to dialogue about these matters using internet chat programs, email, and in person. As he noted, "We have been talking about this stuff for over 10 years."

Chad's Story: Modeling Intelligent Christianity

"I have a shell, but it's a hard candy shell."

I met with Chad at two different restaurants in Athens to collect his narratives. Chad's sarcastic wit and deep intelligence provided for lively interviews. Though he lives nearby, I rarely see him. I supervised his work as the Worship Team Leader in BSU when he was an undergraduate. As an artifact of his faith, Chad brought a copy of a sermon, *10 Shekels and a Shirt*, by Paris Reidhead (1980). He said that the message, advertised online as "the greatest sermon ever preached," has shaped his faith since college more than anything else. Faith is simply trust in God for Chad. Chad surmised that he has listened to the roughly recorded sermon 50 or 60 times, often before he embarks on a mission trip or engages in a ministry project. In the homily, Reidhead teaches that the only valid motivation for being a Christian is to love and honor God because of who God is. Any motivation that includes a reward is not worship, but is idolatry. Chad offers,

> That's an interesting thought, but people don't like to hear that thought, but it's true. If we're simply doing what we do because we think this is going to keep us out of hell or this is going to get us more rewards in heaven, then I feel like we are trying to make a trade with God. That's not right. That's not the way it should be.

"I had a really stable family growing up. We always went to church," Chad recalled. His mother read Bible stories and prayed with him and his brother each night before they went to bed. When he was 11 years old Chad decided to become a Christian because, "I had this real fear of death." Chad's older brother attempted to give him guidance through high school. Chad did not take the advice seriously until college, when his brother suggested "checking out BSU." In the college ministry, Chad joined a small

Bible study group. The men in the group became his closest friends. Marshall, his small group leader, began meeting with Chad individually, asking him pointed questions about his "walk with Christ" and guiding him toward "Christian maturity."

A few days before our second visit he returned from a mission trip to Nepal where his team conducted sports camps. Chad encountered true poverty for the first time on the trip. Growing up in Georgia, he thought he understood the effects of poverty on human life. However, after this trip to Asia, he now appreciates the devastating effects of a lack of resources. "If nothing else it will make me more generous," he concludes. Although he had not fully processed the experience, Chad believed the deep faith presented by those with whom he worked would motivate him to be more satisfied with what he has and to express more joy in difficult times.

Chad considers himself to be more intellectual about matters of faith than his parents. He claims, "I don't feel I'm growing unless I'm learning." He has read Christian classics, like *The Cost of Discipleship* (Bonhoeffer, 1959), *Knowing God* (Packer, 1993), *Mere Christianity* (Lewis, 2001), and *Attributes of God* (Pink, 1975). But he has also read more recent works such as *Desiring God* (Piper, 2003) and *Prodigal God* (Keller, 2008). He is able to summarize what he learned from each book and how he is seeking to apply the lessons to his life and faith.

While in college, Chad was a summer counselor at various Christian camps. While working at Centrifuge in Ridgecrest, North Carolina he led group hikes to the pinnacle of Rattlesnake Mountain twice a week. He considers that mountain to be a holy place,

There is this little place, if you follow the trail around to the side, there is this little place where the rock juts out and you can sit on the ledge. I've spent a lot of time on that little rock up there, yeah for me that's the place I really like to go since then.

After that summer, he vowed to return to the mountain annually for a short personal retreat. He has only missed going one year.

Although the few years after college were "a dark time," Chad says his faith has grown, "relative to the time I spend alone in the Bible pursuing God, and how much time I spend with people who push me to be a better person and a better Christian." He confesses that in the past five years he has "had doubts in every way, shape, or form. I mean, you name it, I've probably had the doubt." His biggest struggle has revolved around, "the many stupid choices he has made" and thinking, "That it's going to be hard for me to get back on the right path." Growing up he assumed that as a Christian life was going to be easy. However, his experience has been that "life is going to punch you in the face." His faith and belief in God's guidance and providence help him to cope with difficult circumstances.

While working with youth at the summer camps Chad learned that he had a gift for teaching. He gleaned skills and techniques for being a successful teacher by observing the camp directors. Chad describes them as "two of the best teachers I have ever seen." He adapted their methods to teach high school science and physics.

After graduating from college, Chad secured a teaching job where he also coached two different sports. Working 70 hours each week did not allow for many other activities. He lamented, "Getting out in the working world is really different." He

continued, "Once I started working I didn't have the support that I was used to, so it was real easy to lay off and not go to church, to not do the things I was supposed to be doing." He explained, "My relationship with God suffered because of that. When you get home at 6:30 or 7 PM you don't want to do anything. I definitely did not want to get up at 5 AM and read the Bible either!"

After three years of that schedule, he says, "I felt like God wanted me to take a step back from coaching." However, Chad did not want to stop. He enjoyed being a coach. Things changed after his school got a new principal. Chad and the principal did not agree on coaching methods. As a result, he was demoted to an assistant coach. Now he has more free time and finds he enjoys the new role. He feels God gave him what he needed for a healthy social life and active faith.

Chad chose to be a teacher because of the influence he can have on children's lives. He explained, "I hope the reason I do what I do is because of my faith. I hope at the end of the day the kids can see a little bit of Jesus in me." He continues,

I hope I do my best to prepare them for college, or to get them out of high school, to make them better people. I feel it's sort of a calling, to help these kids become intellectuals, because I feel like that is something that the church lacks a lot – intellectuals, especially in the realm of science; God forbid that a Christian take a science class!

He enjoys engaging his Christian students in conversations about the compatibility of science and faith; "We can say that God created everything, but there has to be some sort of mechanism for creation." Chad elucidates,

I hope that I will be able to help kids that aren't Christians be successful and I hope that they see Jesus in me in the way I act and the way I treat them. I hope that I will help the kids that are Christians grow up to be intellectuals in their church."

The last person I chose for the research study was Chad. He was on a list of possible participants since the beginning. I passed over him previously because of our previous relationship. Chad can be hard to talk with in-depth about matters about which he has a strong opinion. My fear was that the interviews would be extremely short and would not yield significant data. Obviously, I was mistaken.

<div align="center">Chris's Story: Trusting God</div>

<div align="center">*"I'm a simple guy"*</div>

I met with Chris, a 30 year old, white, male, for lunch at a Subway sandwich shop in metro Atlanta at noon on a sunny June day. After lunch, we moved to a coffee shop in an adjacent Border's bookstore for the interview. Since graduating from the University of Georgia, Chris has struggled to find a balance between having high faith based morals and supporting his family sufficiently as a salesperson. He has learned to trust God for care for the often-stressful details in his life. It took him quite a while to find a job after college. He recalled,

> One thing I can point to where God changed my direction was with that work situation when I didn't have a job offer for six months. When I took a job in Baltimore a couple of days later I got an offer in Atlanta. I was ready to ship off to Baltimore. God was like, "Nope, not going that direction." I had been fighting to find a job locally for over six months, so that was huge.

He feels his morals have cost him raises and promotions at work because he refuses to entertain clients in bars and strip clubs to earn their business. During our first interview, worries about work and selling their home appeared to dominate his life and faith. However, by the second interview he and his wife, Claire, had finally sold their home, bought their dream home, and given birth to a son. His faith appeared to be stronger, giving Chris confidence that God would indeed provide for their needs and direct their paths. He acknowledged, "Having a baby is a great experience and makes you think about things differently." Not wanting his son to make the same mistakes he made, Chris admits to praying more often and taking the disciplines of his faith more seriously now.

Chris's parents are conservative in faith and worldview. They introduced him to church when he was a baby. Typical collegiate partying and a serious love relationship marked his first two years of college life. Breaking up with his girlfriend resulted in a lingering depression. His mother suggested that he read the Bible for comfort and guidance. Taking her advice, Chris returned to being intentional about his Christian faith, reading the Psalms and Proverbs, and praying regularly. During his junior year, he suffered a collapsed lung and spent a week in the hospital. The experience promoted further trust in God:

> It was supposed to be like a two day, quick turnaround where you just had to let your lung heal and you were out the door, it wasn't a big deal and I was in there a week. The day before I was to go home they said, "We are actually going to take you into surgery to fix your lung." It wasn't supposed to be a big deal, but I had been having this problem all week. The next morning when I was supposed to go

to surgery, they checked it and said, "You look fine. We are just going to watch it for the next day and we will let you go home tomorrow if everything is still good." That was God showing me his power that He's there, watching over me.

One aspect of his return to an active faith was becoming more involved in BSU. He served as Missions Fundraising Coordinator during his senior year.

Similar to his parents, Chris does not spend much time questioning his rather traditional, conservative, Christian beliefs. He confesses, "I'm just a simple guy." His faith is an essential part of his life, touching and giving meaning to every relationship, activity, and event. Chris explains that he used to become extremely stressed over job issues,

> Now I am just trying to pray for God to give me peace about it, to pray for him to help me to find another job that I enjoy more, and in the mean time, pray for me to be doing the right things to be in a better light in my boss's eyes, to make my current job a little more manageable right now.

He relies on his deep trust in God to direct his future and every detail of life. He and Claire are active in a large non-denominational church in Metro Atlanta, attending a weekly home-based small group, volunteering on Sundays, and assisting in many other ways.

A quiet introvert, Chris points to his wife as being the biggest influence on his faith journey. He views Claire as a true partner in life, marriage, and faith. The artifact he brought to our meeting was a photograph from their wedding, mounted in a large frame, embossed with words and phrases from I Corinthians, chapter 13, commonly known as the love chapter in the Bible. These include "Hopes," "Rejoices," "Love is patient,"

"Love is kind," and "Love bears all things, believes all things, love never fails." In the photograph, the smiling couple is embracing while looking into each other's eyes. In spite of his work, church involvement, and participation as a competitive tri-athlete, Chris has only a handful of close friends. He only mentioned four people whom he considers heroes. He continues to have a close relationship with three of those.

Of the participants in this study, I have the most frequent contact with Chris. We see one another several times each year, often tailgating together for football games, eating lunch together when he is in town, and enjoying social times in one another's homes. I conducted the wedding ceremony for Chris and Claire, meeting with them for several months prior to the wedding conducting their pre-marital counseling. He was a participant in the pilot study.

<p style="text-align: center">Emily's Story: Balancing the Tension</p>

"Being a person of integrity is being honest that there is a lot of tension in life and faith."

Emily's narrative reads like an Anne Lamott memoir. Her journey is overflowing with tragic, yet humorous experiences that give birth to poignant irony. She arrived on time for our first interview, flustered, out of breath, and still wearing the ID badge from her job as a social worker for two rural north Georgia counties. We met at a small coffee shop nestled in the foothills of the Appalachians for both of her interviews, held almost a year apart. Highly educated, with two master's degrees from seminary and a Baptist college, Emily presents a confident, professional air accompanied by a welcoming smile. Her lyrical laughter punctuated our two long conversations.

She was introduced to Christianity when her mother took Emily and her sister to be baptized and confirmed in an Episcopal church near their home. Members of the

church were affluent, while Emily's family struggled to pay bills. Emily said she always felt like she was eavesdropping on worship in another language. In high school Emily and her sister were asked to go skiing with a local Baptist church. She was impressed that the pastor remembered her by name each time he saw her on the ski slopes. After the trip, Emily began attending the church regularly and was eventually baptized into membership.

While all of her church friends attended Christian colleges, Emily chose to come to UGA. She decided that the experience at a party school would help her decide if she wanted to be a serious Christian or to live a more stereotypical collegiate lifestyle. She became involved in a small campus ministry almost immediately. After two years she left that ministry, feeling she never connected socially, and affiliated with BSU. As a small group leader in BSU she met weekly with Rhonda Abbott, one of the campus ministers. It did not take Emily long to acknowledge, "I think I was called into ministry when I became a Christian at age 17, but I didn't have any models of women in ministry. I didn't know it was an option for me."

She began perusing seminary catalogues and studying doctrinal statements of different denominations in order to make an educated choice about which seminary to attend. Along with two other students from the BSU, Emily chose to attend graduate school at Truett Seminary at Baylor University. She enrolled in a joint program offering two simultaneous degrees. She graduated with two degrees: Master of Divinity and Master of Social Work.

Daily readings from online versions of Episcopal and Presbyterian lectionaries help keep her grounded in her active Christian faith, directing her to reflect on parts of

the Bible to which she would normally not attend. Though she describes herself as a CBF Baptist (Cooperative Baptist Fellowship), she and her husband are members of a non-denominational church in a nearby community. One day Emily hopes to assist in preaching duties in a small church.

Marriage to her husband Ron, the birth of her son Ray, and her experiences as a mom revolutionized the way she understands and conceptualizes God. In the time between the two interviews, Emily gave birth to a daughter. She reflected,

> Breast-feeding is deeply theological for me. For four months of her life, all she consumed was breast milk. So not only did I create and sustain her in my womb, I also created her food and fed her. That is a totally amazing thing to me. I learned a lot about who God is and the way God interacts with us through both pregnancies.

Emily's father died while she was transitioning from college to graduate school. Since Ron's father also died before their children were born, she laments that they will never know the love of a grandfather.

Her parents divorced when Emily was a sophomore in college. "It was a good thing for my mother," she observed. Although never really religious, her mother began attending the same church Emily and her sister attended. Emily taught her how to pray and how to have a quiet time. Meanwhile her father went into a downward spiral of abusive behaviors that led to poor health and eventually his death. Since her parents were estranged, Emily had to make all of the funeral arrangements and care for his estate.

Emily brought a framed print by Eichenberg (1950) to the interview as a metaphor for her faith. She regretted not also being able to bring something

representative of her family. The woodcut depicts a bedraggled Jesus standing in a Chicago breadline with the poor during the depression (see Appendix K). As a seminary student she was inspired by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Her career as a social worker enables her to battle the issues of violence and hunger while satiating her appetite for social interaction. The artwork hangs in her office and provides a daily motivation for her work.

When pregnant with her son, she performed her grandmother's funeral at Arlington. She says the soldier in charge of the cemetery "about fainted" when they told him she was doing the service. "I went to something that I have all kinds of conflicted feelings about." Coupled with a stance of anti-violence and a hatred of guns,

> We were burying my grandmother at a military cemetery. I was a pregnant woman performing a funeral service in a place that is very patriarchal. While there I realized I forgot to take my anxiety medicine on the trip. It turns out I didn't need to take it again for more than eight months.

Emily has learned to keep at bay the "demons" of anxiety and depression that used to paralyze her. Her panic attacks usually occurred when driving and always followed extremely stressful days. She believes that her psychological struggles are "very much a control issue for me." The biggest victory has come with the realization that life is replete with tension. Success has come for her in trusting God without having to have all of the answers to her questions.

My contact with Emily has been limited since she left UGA. However, her husband (whom I see a few times each year) and other alumni have apprised me of her

activities and accomplishments. She was chosen to participate in the pilot study because of her educational background. She is the only seminarian represented in this research.

<div align="center">Heather's Story: Negotiating Faith Solipsistically</div>

<div align="center">*"I'm agnostic with a side of salvation."*</div>

Heather is sarcastic, verging on sardonic, eclectic, unconventional, and irreverent, all mixed with an underlying Southern charm. She describes her personality as manic-depressive. I met with her to conduct the interviews at a tavern and a bar near her apartment in Little 5-Points, an eclectic, avant-garde area of Atlanta that fits her persona. Heather grew up going to a Methodist church with her family; yet, she noted, "I hated having to go to church. Not because I hated God…it was boring! I remember pleading with my father to let me bring a book! When he wouldn't, that's when I would read the Bible." She particularly enjoyed reading the salacious parts of the Old Testament and any story that featured a woman as the main character.

"When I think of faith, I always think of 'quiet faith,'" Heather explained, "a quiet confidence that you believe what you believe for a reason and there's a certain power and strength in that. You are not searching and flailing about trying to figure out the answers." Even though she has cast aside many of the tenets of traditional Christianity, Heather continues to refer to her spiritual beliefs as Christian. For her, faith is deeply personal; therefore, she is uncomfortable with any type of proselytizing. However, the central component of faith and spirituality for Heather is treating everyone with kindness and respect. "I just want to help other people feel good about themselves, feel connected to each other, and feel like they are capable of creating change. I want everyone in the world to live in a happy sense of community." She summarized, "I just

think it would be really cool if people who didn't all like each other because they went to church together, liked each other and treated each other that same way."

"I went through a period of teenage angst," she said of her high school years, "my poor parents." Intolerance became a "crusading issue" for Heather after her parents refused to let her attend prom as "friends" with an African American classmate. They took her out of town that weekend, fearing what other people would think if she went.

She became involved in an area Baptist megachurch after a family friend invited her to youth activities there. Eventually she worked in the church's' summer camp program, but became annoyed with the slick productions and activities. The combination of contemporary Christian music, smoke machines, "worship as theater," legalism, excess, and tokenism of the few ethnic members finally drove her away.

During her sophomore year of college, Douglas, a friend from her home church, convinced Heather to audition with him for a BSU dinner theater musical production. Though she had grown skeptical of Baptist institutions, she complied and landed the lead in the show. Douglas quit a few weeks into rehearsals. Although Heather felt out of place because she "was socially awkward," she continued with the show. Several of the cast members befriended her and the relationships continue today. One day Heather went to the BSU prayer room to pray about her rising stress level. She discovered her name written on the wall of "prayer requests." She immediately assumed it was "up there because like they know I'm a lost soul and they think I need their prayers."

Heather's involvement in Dinner Theater introduced her to campus ministers and Christian students who were nonjudgmental with an intellectual side to their faith. One of the campus ministers is depicted in the artifact she brought to the first interview. It was a

funeral-style fan with Franklin Scott's face on it, a token from his 50th birthday

celebration (see Appendix L). The fan "reminds me of a time in my life that was really

positive. It reminds me of the friends that I made, of going to John's house, and meeting

with Franklin. That time was filled with positive experiences." She explained that

initially she "was super wary of the BSU, because I had grown up Methodist and went to

a Baptist megachurch at home for a couple of years. All the ministers at BSU were so

cool, liberal, kind, and nonjudgmental." She reminisced, "That made me want to stick

around." A small cadre of student leaders at BSU pulled her into their group.

Appreciative of her quick wit and unexpected comments, Heather was assigned the

responsibility for giving announcements in the weekly worship gathering. The following

year, the journalism major employed her humor and writing skills by editing the weekly

BSU newsletter. One of those leaders was Laura, who she describes as "someone who is

wicked-smart, but also wicked-faithful:"

> I think Laura was probably one of the first people that were like super intelligent,
>
> who approached the philosophy of Christianity as well as the rote theology of it. I
>
> had never really met anyone like that. I think she is going to constantly be God's
>
> arm in the world. She has got a direct link. I don't see her as much because she is
>
> working at two churches now, and she's married and she works outside of the
>
> city. That stuff happens. Every time I catch up with her, I am blown away by the
>
> things she is doing in her life. I love that when she went to Duke, there began to
>
> be a political aspect to her faith and she started going to protests. She is able to
>
> take her faith and not just sit and believe it, but roll with it and do stuff with it.

Often it is stuff like her more conservative parents may not like or agree with. I just think she is remarkable.

Laura is a pastor in the Atlanta area. They talk infrequently, but the experience is always encouraging for Heather.

After graduating, Heather remained in Athens, writing and editing for a community magazine while sharing a house with a group of "stinky boys" who were all members of bands in the eclectic local music scene. The three years following graduation were a low point for her in life and faith. She says,

I was just lonely and miserable that summer after I graduated. BSU had been such a way for me to be social. In college, I was also involved with other organizations. I was really busy with activities. When I graduated I obviously couldn't do school stuff anymore. I think some of that loneliness was assuaged when I started doing plays with a community theater. When I look back, I could have volunteered more; that would have been a great way to get involved, that's something that I do here in Atlanta. You can't wait for community to come to you. I was just sitting down wondering, "Why aren't these terrific experiences coming my way?" My dad's got a phrase for it, we need to pray, but then we also need to put feet to our prayers or, as Gandhi, that bald, Indian, hungry-dude said, "be the change you want to be in the world." I think that is true of anything that you want, whether it's community or anything else.

She eventually moved to metro Atlanta, working as a copy editor for a small newspaper in one of the area townships.

Heather acknowledged that her reactions to others' faith experiences were "rather solipsistic." Solipsism is disbelief in or skepticism towards anything one does not or cannot experience for oneself. Heather is highly skeptical of, yet perhaps jealous of the emotional religious experiences of her friends and family members. She longs for her faith to be "more." On a trip to visit Laura in seminary, Heather recalled how she could not bow her head in prayer during a worship service she attended with her friend. She watched other worshipers, longing to experience God and faith as they did. "Maybe it's just more elusive for some people than for others," and then, "I don't just want my faith to be some superficial thing." She said,

> I've seen the comfort that other people's faith has brought them, and I've seen
> lives changed because of faith, you know? I want to feel good and I want my life
> changed in ways that are positive. I mean it's sort of a selfish desire, but that's
> definitely part of it I think.

Heather wondered, "If it was so easy to fall out of the practice of faith, why was I ever even doing it? Was I doing it because it was social for me, something that made me feel good every once in a while?" While she has often expected her faith experience to be a bit more like that of her peers, Heather has not found a way to practice Christianity in a manner that is comfortable for her.

Her mother's recent diagnosis of cancer, subsequent mastectomy, and pending chemotherapy has given Heather pause. "You better believe the morning of my mama's surgery I was on my knees." The day before surgery, she accompanied her family to church. "We had to go to the contemporary service. I hate contemporary services so much. They make my skin crawl. I can't do it." "I also realized these are very shallow,

surface things," She observed, "but it feels disingenuous to me. What feels disingenuous to one person feels wonderful to someone else. It's just not my thing." Instead of attending church with them she offered,

> I would much rather have them go to church and while I stayed home and made lunch or cleaned their house, and showed them love in other ways, in ways that are easier and less stressful for me. I'm trying to do this dance of being a good daughter while making sure that I am comfortable with everything. I'm sure it gets easier when I get older right?

While in the waiting room during her mother's surgery, Heather's father "preached at" her regarding her lack of church involvement. He told her that she needed Christians from a church surrounding her because of the love they can provide. Heather told him she had found similar love and support from an atheist. She related how a mentor and friend in Athens had provided motherly comfort and advice to her at one point, even though the woman was dying of cancer. "Dad, I hope you would just look at my actions, that I was trying to live a Christ-like life," she countered, "and not how often I talk about certain books of the Bible, or talk about the Holy Spirit, or whatever. For whatever reason, I'm just not completely comfortable verbalizing that kind of stuff."

Heather has frequent mystical experiences. She longs for moments of communal connection. Recalling one such event in college, she said, "We were just floating down the river with everyone else on the ministry team at midnight. That was such a beautiful moment for me and for my faith." She has found similar experiences of spiritual connection on stage with theater companies with whom she has worked.

A lifelong goal for Heather is to help build community everywhere she goes through kindness and caring. Volunteering in Atlanta as a tutor in the inner city and working with the Beltline Project brings her fulfillment. She feels that God encourages her to care for others; "a voice tells me to try to be there for that person." When that occurs, "that's Christ talking to me, that's not me because I'm impatient, easily annoyed." Heather feels she is able to exemplify her faith best "when I'm able to connect with someone that brings comfort to the other person."

Despite the urging of her parents and sister to "find a church home," she has yet to try to locate "some good liberal church" in Atlanta in which she is comfortable. "I don't have anything against that idea, in fact I think it could be really good," She speculated, "I don't know why I haven't, maybe I am just lazy?"

Prior to meeting for the two interviews, I had only seen Heather on serendipitous occasions in downtown Athens since her graduation. Conversations with mutual friends and our previous interactions led me to believe she would be an excellent study participant. When I asked her to participate in the study she readily accepted, thinking it might be an opportunity to verbalize her conflicted ideas about faith.

<div align="center">

Jennifer's Story: Giving Birth to Self

"I realized through this that I am a child of God"

</div>

Jennifer, a pleasant, soft-spoken, 28 year old "housewife and mom" invited me to have dinner with her family in their home as a prelude to her first interview. Her husband David, the chief surgical resident at a local hospital, was working most of the evening and was not at dinner. While Jennifer, pregnant with their third child, finished preparing the meal, Joseph and Aaron, her two boys, entertained me. After dinner, she settled the

boys into bed while I prepared recording equipment and notes in the den for the interview. "I was raised in a Christian home," she began, and, "I accepted Christ when I was four with my mom." She reflected that her mother said Jennifer, "had a pretty good grasp of salvation, heaven, and hell" at that early age. They were members of a Pentecostal "crazy church" until her parents became disgruntled with church politics. After a few years of not attending anywhere, her mother acquired a secretarial position at a very large Southern Baptist Church in their hometown. Since they were not involved anywhere else, the whole family began attending there. Jennifer attended the Mark Rutland Christian Camp at Norman Park in South Georgia for ten summers. Those annual events were "mountain top experiences," which helped form her mystical and emotional faith.

Jennifer refers to her mother and grandmother as her heroes. While they modeled Christian motherhood for her, she admits that her practice of faith is quite different from theirs. Her mother attributes the dissimilarity to opportunities available for Jennifer to attend Bible study groups for women that were not available in most Pentecostal churches.

"Our world was turned upside down," her senior year in college, Jennifer explained. Engaged to David, who was attending medical school two hours away, she discovered she was pregnant after a visit to the university health center, "I was very scared. I was even too scared to take a pregnancy test, because I was in denial. I thought there was something the matter with me and that's why I hadn't had a cycle." She said of the news, "it wasn't a bad thing, it was just the closest thing I've come to a crisis. It was the first time where I really trusted God."

"I really haven't told many people this," she volunteered before detailing the experience. "I was just crying, I was crying, crying." The nurses told her that since she was 10 weeks pregnant that was the last possible day to have an abortion. She said, "I would never do it, but I understood why people would." A counselor at the health center told her, "You need to go tell David right now. Today. Don't put it off." Even though he was in first year finals at medical school that week, she drove the two hours to tell him they were going to have a child, "We were scared." Her fear was more to do with what other people would think than with having a baby. "What really bothered us was the shame that our families would have to go through," she admitted. Until that point, she and David had not discussed much about their faith. However, after they discovered they were pregnant, they moved up their wedding and "we started talking more about things…the pregnancy definitely brought how we viewed things out into the open."

Through that experience she concluded, "That God is going to let things happen to me because he loves me so much, because that's what he needed to bring me closer to him." For Jennifer, "faith is a part of who you are, so…it's always there in the back of my mind." Going to church is an important activity for Jennifer, but more important is the five to thirty minutes she spends in bed each morning before getting up, reading, praying, and planning the day.

The hardest part of the unplanned pregnancy was the reaction of her future in-law's. Seeking to protect their son, they began to question Jennifer's character and even asked David to have a paternity test. "This happened from the time we found out that we were pregnant, which was the month before we got married, and then the scrutiny that transferred to our marriage." They continued to be critical of the way she kept house,

cleaned, cooked, and cared for David and baby Joseph during the early years of their marriage. This was such a painful experience that Jennifer consciously began to shut off her emotions. The decision even affected her approach to worship. Raised Pentecostal, emotional worship was normal and comfortable. Over the past few years, however, she has been trying to have a "more mature," subdued, quiet "adult" approach to God.

During the second interview, Jennifer elucidated the changes in her life over the past decade.

> I left college, very independent, thinking I knew who I was, because all my life people have told me, "You are destined for great things"; all the things you probably tell your kids. As a teenager you think, "I'm going to do great things." When I left college, David and I were going to be married in May, but ended up getting married in January. God used that in such a wonderful way, but being pregnant threw me for a loop. I won't say my world came tumbling down, because I did have my faith and I never doubted that it was God's plan…. I knew exactly why it happened, and that was OK with me. But it was still such a change from being that person, to being this person. I was the same person, but was in different situations. [I was] a stay-at-home mom, 22 years old, my husband was in school, we were not making any money, we had loans, and we were not looking to make money, and were just getting by.

When Joseph was two Jennifer went on a mission trip to Peru with David as part of a medical team. Her job was to care for village children while their parents sought medical treatment. The trip was terribly difficult for her; she was miserable. Her lowest point came when she realized, "I had given up my identity." She went on the trip

attempting to reclaim a bit of her independent spirit, because "I wanted an adventure." By the end of the trip,

> I realized my whole identity, was that I am a mom to Joseph and I am David's wife, because that's all I had. It was my fault. I had put myself there. Joseph wasn't with me [on the trip] and all I wanted to do was to get home to him.

On the last day of the project, Jennifer prayed for God to "use her." She let go of her homesickness and engaged with one of the young mothers in the village. Surprisingly, they were able to communicate although they spoke different languages; "it was such a sweet, sweet time." As the team left the village, a group of mothers presented her and David with a hand-carved canoe, oar, and vase. She presented these items at the first interview as her faith artifact (see Appendix M).

Jennifer spent time reflecting about the journey after returning home. While having the roles of mother and wife, "I realized that's not who I am. I realized through this that I am a child of God. That is who I am. Other than that, everything else is just my jobs." She asserted, "A big part of my spiritual journey has been figuring out who I am aside from the identities that I put on myself." Though on the mission trip she recognized she had become enmeshed in her roles of wife and mother, she has not been able to completely overcome the hold those responsibilities have on her self-concept. In both interviews, Jennifer answered many personal questions with "we," referring to opinions or ideas she and David share. "I know I talk about him too much," she apologized, "but I love him so much."

She says she is her own worst critic. Instead of looking at others in a negative light, she says,

I don't place blame on other people for any type of troubles I've had and whatever error may consist in my life, I always feel like it's my fault. I would be my own villain in that way. I feel like when anything that goes wrong, it is needless to get mad at anyone. Ultimately, it's up to me how I deal with it or I'm the one who caused it and so….I can't point fingers at people.

"I think God loves every single person on this earth," Jennifer observes. She tries to approach other people as God does, but finds it easy to become judgmental, believing, "We are all going to Hell in a hand basket, but I still think, 'He's got the whole world in his hands,' and 'For God so loved the world he came to give his only begotten son.'" She tries to identify her emotions with Gods' perspective: "He gets angry, but I think his heart is just breaking. He sees how beautiful and wonderful the world is."

I was hesitant to accept her invitation for dinner in their home because of the many distractions present; however, the experience provided an exceptional opportunity to contextualize her narrative. Jennifer and David's home is representative of her story. Family photographs and children's artwork coat the walls, tables, mantle, and most vertical surfaces. While she has sought to contain her husband's research materials in one place, neat stacks of papers and books remain in the den. She has transformed the porch into a playroom, art room, and storage room for the two boys' vast assortment of Legos, toy trains, and other playthings.

Kate's Story: No Faking It

"I'm just trying to figure out this relationship."

Kate, a management trainee and salesperson for a rental car company, arrived a bit late for the first interview on a mild June evening at the Borders bookstore coffee shop

in Midtown Atlanta. By our second interview, almost a year later, she was enrolled in college again in order to the obtain prerequisites to enter an MBA in accounting degree program. Plain-spoken and forthright, Kate was looking forward to the attempt to voice her recently renewed interest in matters of faith, though several times in the first interview she murmured how uncomfortable she was. In the second interview, she defined faith as "understanding, believing, and knowing something without necessarily having proof or anything on paper to say why you should." However, she said, "Spirituality is being in touch. I think it's a connection with yourself or with God. Sometimes it's a feeling and it's moving and it can translate into emotions."

Kate experienced a turning point in her faith in High School. Prior to that time she had only attended church because "that's what we did as a family, we went to church." She remembered,

> it was 9th grade, I continued to go to church because I was choosing to. I found a group of friends and got close to them. I changed churches on my own, without my parents. They were totally fine with it. They were just happy that we were happy. My brother ended up following me a few months later. And so I had this new group of friends, they were our youth group friends, were in the band with them, school with them. It was a really tight-knit group, with lots of accountability, so my faith really grew. My dad still talks about our influence on him and the way he saw God in us. He would ask us things like, "So how does God talk to you?" I think in my dad's eyes we were experts. He thought we were totally there. And that was the way my faith was all through high school. I remember I was just happy.

Although she was very active in church during High School, "as college came around I never felt as fulfilled, never found that group to plug-in with that I loved and felt connected with."

In BSU Kate held leadership positions for two years. She was a Bible study leader and then the designer for "The Vision," a monthly newsletter. Even so, early in her junior year she began to disengage from all of her Christian friends and from BSU. This followed a summer where she felt closer to God than at any other time in her life. Her boyfriend broke up with her just before summer break, "A heartbroken little girl is what I was that summer. I dug into faith, praying to grow myself and to get my mind off him." She recalled,

> I remember spending the summer in the backyard of my parent's house going
>
> through *Sharing His Secret* (Banks, 2002). I took copious notes. It was all about
>
> these women in the Bible and how Jesus had touched their lives. And this is six
>
> years, seven years ago and I still have it and all of the notes.

Things began to change once she returned to Athens in the fall.

She first noticed her discomfort with religion at church. She enjoyed attending a small church near her apartment with her brother. After two years of attending there, the church experienced substantial growth due to increasing numbers of collegians attending. For Kate faith had become an intimate, personal experience. She did not want to socialize before or after the services. She only wanted to worship and go home. This was compounded by changes in the services. With more students attending, worship had become more contemporary and "showy."

Employed as a server at a local restaurant, Kate asked to work on Sunday mornings to avoid attending church. Another student working at the restaurant challenged her long held assumptions about God and religion. For the first time Kate began to think critically about her own ideas and the practices of Christians. While waiting tables on Sundays, she noticed the poor attitudes of the "church crowd." In reaction, Kate slowly began to abandon her former beliefs and practices, donning the mantle of "agnostic." Through work, she finally found a group of college peers with whom she could identify. She enjoyed a newfound freedom from the structures and bonds of her former strict, rule-based, Christian worldview. She remembered, "I felt like, 'I just don't want to do this anymore, I don't want to be told that I'm wrong all the time,' so I started ignoring my convictions and stuff like that."

The feeling of emancipation she has enjoyed over the past several years seems well suited to her laidback, "chill" demeanor. After graduating with a degree in advertising from UGA, Kate went to cosmetology school. Even though she was thrilled to have been hired at the top salon in Athens, she quit after only one year; "I was just over it." She has intentionally separated herself from past friends unless those relationships were deeper than school, church, or any other single group affiliation. Kate enjoys social times with a small cadre of friends, but also likes living alone with her two cats.

Kate described the artifact she brought to the interview as a "broken candle" – a melted candle ensconced in a small, broken, jagged-edged jar, whose darkened, useless wick was buried in the remaining wax (see Appendix N). She keeps it because, "it smells

good." Even though she indicated that she wants to explore her beliefs, she also voiced

trepidation.

> I'm a little timid. I'm afraid to get into all of this again, but I'm more open to it.
>
> But because I haven't been to church for a while I'm afraid to go back. I don't
>
> know, I don't know. It's a totally new place than I've ever been. I don't like
>
> talking about it. It makes me really uncomfortable.

> After several years of "rebelling" from her traditional values and religious

convictions, Kate says she is at a different place now.

> Obviously, I believe there is a God. I'm trying to know him in a different way
>
> now. I'm trying to find a relationship that works for me now. I realize I'm a little
>
> turned off by the church, so that's the thing. I also realize that God is bearing with
>
> me in all of that. I'm trying to figure out how to be normal and just have a faith, to
>
> start with, and then I might go to church one day. I'm being a little dramatic, but
>
> at this point I don't even know where I would go.

Regarding her image of God, Kate says,

> It's a little spooky, but I think God is very versatile, he is different things to
>
> different people. He's also very understanding. For me right now, I think he's the
>
> friend that's sitting back, waiting on me, and thinking, "She'll figure this out." I
>
> don't know why bad things happen and the Bible still baffles me. Right now, it's
>
> just me and God. I'm just trying to figure out this relationship. I'll worry about
>
> those other things later.

She is searching for an authentic faith where she does not have to pretend or succumb to

legalistic rules and expectations of friends and church leaders. Tired of pretending, Kate

wants a "mature" faith that she is comfortable sharing with close friends and family. However, she is not actively pursuing finding a church or any practicing spiritual activities. "I just have different priorities right now," she explained, "I have this focus on school, I get up on Sunday mornings and I read chapters, study, and then I take a break and a nap. I don't know. I just don't have enough desire at this point." When she does decide to find a church, it will have to be one that is "authentic" and "relevant."

Before she graduated from UGA, I asked a mutual friend to have Kate call me. Her response was, "Tell Nathan I'm not who he thinks I am anymore." Thus, I have not seen Kate for several years. I selected her for this study because I had not seen or heard from Kate since she graduated. I had no information about her current faith practice. I obtained her new contact information from her brother by means of Facebook. We were both frustrated at times during the first interview because I could not find the proper way to phrase my questions and she could not readily formulate answers to my queries and probes. The second interview, conducted via Skype, was a more natural conversation. Currently in a long-term romantic relationship, Kate was much more comfortable talking about her beliefs. She acknowledged that there was probably a connection between having a boyfriend and experiencing renewed comfort with her spirituality.

Lucy's Story: Living the Movie

"I get these feelings of needing to connect with something else, connecting with something that's not getting in my car every day, going to work, and doing what I'm supposed to do to make a living, trying to have a 401-K, going to the all-white church that's really big and has lots of money, and only going to help some people on a few weekends."

"I don't know any way to tell my story other than from the beginning, I was raised in a Christian home," Lucy began her narrative. Because her father was in the

military, her family relocated often. Moving the summer before her senior year was traumatic. Outgoing, dramatic, and extremely social, Lucy was very popular at her old school. She was a star in musical productions and served on student council. Lucy told me about the first day at her new school:

> I was devastated to be leaving my high school…. You know I was a senior, but I felt like a freshman going to a new school. It was kind of a big deal. I remember the first day of school; I was changing classes between homeroom and first period and was feeling overwhelmed. I went to the bathroom and I shut the bathroom door. I remember leaning against the door, broken-hearted, and praying, "Please help me through this day; I don't know what to do." I got myself together, exited that bathroom, and never had to go back.

That "instant change," she explained, "turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened for me." Attending high school in Georgia for one year qualified her for the Hope Scholarship, which enabled her to attend UGA. For Lucy, "there was no other college, there was just BSU!" In the campus ministry, she met her lifelong friends, performed in the drama ministries, and directed Dinner Theater. She discovered a love for acting, directing, and producing dramas through those experiences, "it has shaped my life ever since then because I got my foundation in college, I learned who I was in college and grew there…. That's what set me up for the rest of my faith journey and even my career." Lucy, now 30 years old, works as a video producer in the music industry.

Lucy defines faith as "believing in something you can't see." For instance, "I have a faith that God is working in everything. I feel faith is a movement in my life that something greater than me is constantly putting my life on a path." However,

"Spirituality usually means something opposite of what I believe (God and Jesus). The word has become desensitized in this environment. Where I work a lot of people say, 'Well I'm spiritual,' or 'I believe in spiritual things.'" Since she is working in the movie industry, Lucy says she has to demonstrate her faith through showing love, kindness, and respect instead of talking about it and telling people what she believes. She said people look at her strangely when she has told them "I have faith that God directs my life."

Her worldview has expanded since college because of personal and professional experiences. She said she used to have "a much more black and white" perspective on right and wrong. However, between conversations with friends and family members who use drugs and working with a diverse group of people in the entertainment industry, she is not as critical of other's experiences. Different "lifestyle choices….can't affect my relationships or how I view those people or affect my love for them." She says, "The statement, 'love others' is huge….for me it's being a little calmer, it's being a little more understanding of people in those situations." Lucy says her faith, "gives me the love vibe." In encountering new ideas, Lucy realizes,

> It's time to open up. Because in the end, nothing I think matters. If a friend chooses a different lifestyle, do I stop being his friend? I think you have to know the boundaries of what you do, but God doesn't ever stop loving anybody for being a prostitute, or a tax collector, or somebody who put him on the cross, like so why should I? He's going to deal with it.

Lucy never planned to marry. As a single professional she "idolized women who were in their 30's and 40's and were not married and were comfortable with that." After moving to a new city with a college friend, she found employment as a producer for a

weekly television show and began a career in video media. She recalled, "I took pride in being able to own my home, do my own finances, deal with the car, and know who to call when the bay window on my town house leaked." However, when she met Nat while volunteering with a church-based young adult ministry,

> he just kinda jacked the whole thing up! Falling in love and getting married to Nat was a big deal. So, my wedding ring is my spiritual artifact, because I had to go through a lot of personal struggle, finding out who I was in the role of being a fiancée and then being a wife. That was never anything that I made a goal or was looking for. It was just placed into my life at the right time.

Now that she is married, "there is that struggle that I have to be a good wife and be a good daughter-in-law and try to tend to these relationships no matter what my pull is from my independent side."

   Lucy connects with God best in dramatic and emotional ways. Seeing God at work in the lives of the members of the small bible study group Lucy and Nat lead has been encouraging for her. Watching her little sister struggle maintain a joyful attitude in the face of chronic illnesses has inspired Lucy, reminding her of God's patience and enduring love in all circumstances. Her grandparents have also provided Lucy with an example of God's unconditional love. Although some of the grandchildren take advantage of their generosity, these faithful icons of love continue to provide financial assistance whenever they are asked.

   In the midst of "normal, mundane" activities, Lucy often forgets to look to God for guidance. However, she has surprise spiritual connections that usually occur around

water. "I love canoeing and kayaking and swimming and boating and the whole thing, there is just something about the power of that element" for her. Sometimes,

> The way the sun set, in that particular moment, with those colors was enough for
> me to have a connection with God. I think "this is heaven; this is what heaven
> looks like." Just to have a peaceful moment like that where I feel, "Oh my God,
> He's actually going to let me snuggle with Him today," just to have that
> connection is important for me.

"What comes after 30 for me?" Lucy asked during the interview. Her feelings of unrest were peaked after the city was flooded in spring storms. During the clean up, she had to board a plane to go film a music video. She secretly wished her house had been damaged so she could stay home and help others. When she begins to think about her life now, she admits,

> Frankly, there are these moments when I want to go into the bathroom again and
> shut the door. It has been a little harder to give up control this time. I remember
> that day and I know the pressure that was on my life, but there is a fear of opening
> the door and exiting this bathroom stall. When I open the door where am I going
> to exit to? I think God and I are working on that [laughed]. It has been a challenge
> from the beginning until now, but it seems very logical, everything has worked in
> a path to get me to this point. Now I'm ready to go through the next hump. But
> what's next? How do I grow now? At this point I definitely feel that there is no
> growth. So how do I get there?

Thinking about these questions has given Lucy an idea for a "made for TV, Lifetime television movie."

It's very parallel to what I'm feeling right now, the whole idea was that this girl, for whatever circumstance has to pick up and leave where she is. The only place she knows to go is from this picture of an island, a place that her parents went. So she goes. While there she connects spiritually with a simpler way of living and with her faith in unbiased circumstances, she connects in this non-middle class setting. I get these feelings of needing to connect with something else, connecting with something that's not getting in my car every day, going to work, and doing what I'm supposed to do to make a living, trying to have a 401-K, going to the all-white church that's really big and has lots of money, and only going to help some people on a few weekends. I'm selfish with my free-time because I want to go do something on the weekend. I identify with where this character needs to get away from her stuff, from the idea that we have to have money and have things. I really feel like I'm in the place to say, "Oh well I have to have the house and the kids and the dog," and it's even beyond that. It's more like, "What is it doing for me and for God and for the world to put someone's picture on TV because they need to sell a record." Is there somewhere I can still use my gifts, where I can connect somewhere else…? I feel like the girl in this movie in my head is at the same place. There are people out there that don't have anything, how do I connect with that? How do I connect with an environment where people feed off God's undying love in the midst of that scene?

I interviewed Lucy from her office using Skype. A poster of Lucille Ball, her comedic idol, and inspiration for her pseudonym, and her black lab posed a backdrop for our video conversation. My contact with Lucy has been limited since she graduated from

college. I have only seen her on the occasions her cadre of friends returned to attend dinner theater productions or football games in Athens. I asked her to participate in this study because I remembered her to be passionate about her faith and to be comfortable discussing her opinions openly.

Rebekah's Story: Fighting for Equality

I expect to pass through this world but once;
Any good thing therefore that I can do,
Or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature,
Let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it,
For I shall not pass this way again ~ Ettiene De Grellet

Rebekah is a 27 year-old attorney who was born in Alabama, raised in South Carolina, educated in Georgia and North Carolina, and is living and practicing Law in Manhattan. She describes herself as "laid back, but somehow simultaneously a perfectionist. I have a creative need that I fulfill doing my hobbies. I have a quiet side too: boring, pensive." She dreams of living in France for a year to study baking. Afterward, she plans to be a partner in the law firm, have a pie shop in Brooklyn, or own a bed and breakfast chateau in the south of France. Rebekah's boyfriend of a year works as an engineer for an oil company. He alternates months at sea on a ship and months home in New York. The rotating schedule helps Rebekah balance her need for independence with her love for hospitality and desire for companionship.

Although she is an introvert who enjoys time alone thinking, reading, and cooking, relationships have been a vital part of Rebekah's faith experiences. She enjoys hosting dinner parties for friends and giving away baked goods. Her college peers helped to shape both her faith and her emerging expressions of self. The girls in a small group Bible study she led called her their "liberal friend."

She says Christianity, "comes down to love, it seems like that is the prominent theme of the New Testament." Church involvement is about meeting the needs of others as a community, it is not at place "to pat each other on the back and be happy about how holy you are." Her "open" Christian faith finds voice through the work her firm performs on behalf of civil rights. As an advocate of GLBT rights, she has been active in recent court battles fighting the amendment seeking to affirm traditional marriage. She does not understand why anyone is prejudiced towards another person. Her faith also affects her attitude at work. She explains,

> I have an additional reason to be more respectful towards other people and care about them other than the fact that they are my boss and they are in charge of my paycheck. It really makes me do my work a little more carefully, because I feel like this is what I'm supposed to be doing instead of just doing a job. I don't know what it's going to lead to, but for right now this is all I am doing, so I think I have to give it a good go.

When Rebekah could not identify a specific event that influenced her ideas about equal rights, she asked her mother. Mom "told me about how she thought she was a little bit more open-minded than the typical person born in Selma, Alabama. When she was younger, my grandmother was divorced, and apparently, they were shunned from the church when she got divorced." Though she does not remember ever talking with them about it, Rebekah adopted the accepting worldview of her mother and grandmother. Rebekah said when she meets new people, they "just assume that because I'm from the South that I am a hater. I get asked about it a lot, even by my friends…. I'm definitely one of the least judgmental people I know."

Traveling feeds Rebekah's soul and provides her with idea expanding experiences. The artifact she presented during the first interview is her frequently used passport. Visiting natural and manmade vistas while traveling in Canada, Thailand, Greece, and Europe have taught her about the mystical grandeur of God. Encounters with different people and cultures while studying abroad facilitated her enjoyment of diverse people. With her voice breaking, she recounted experiences of learning new things followed by the shock of returning home to church. When "I returned to the community that was such a big part of my life, I realized there was this huge disconnect that I had to try to make sense of." Her disappointment "was in realizing that there were huge limitations to the scope of love that was being offered there."

Rebekah spent a lot of time alone when she was studying abroad and in Law school when she could not find a comfortable church to attend. In lieu of having a church while she worked on her legal degree, she developed hobbies of cooking and baking which gave her time to think deeply about her faith. After such periods of introspection and transformation of ideas, she would talk with others about what she was learning. Fearful that she was alone in her ideas, "when I finally found a group that I connected with it was affirming of the things that I had already been thinking, especially when I found out that I was the not the only person who thought this way." She ponders, "Looking back on it now I see it as one big, continuous process, but for a while it seemed so irreconcilable that it might even be something that I couldn't be a part of, at least in the way that I always had been."

After moving to New York for a job with a law firm, Rebekah went back to a church she had attended while completing her internship. She was asked to assist with

leading music by playing her guitar in the band for a small contemporary worship service. Noticing her thoughtful intelligence, an older woman in the church asked the young lawyer to serve on the church council. Rebekah has enjoyed experiencing adult faith responsibilities, including planning the future direction of the church and attending the annual statewide denominational convention.

Rebekah is both similar to and different from her parents. Like her mother, she is an independent and perfectionistic professional. Like her father, her Christian faith provides impetus for expecting and enjoying diversity at church. However, unlike her dad, Rebekah does not practice the strict, "more fundamental," daily rituals of Bible study and "praying for everything" as she did in former years. Even though they are still married, Rebekah's parents live in different states and rarely visit one another. In contrast, Rebekah and her boyfriend made friends with an older couple while traveling recently in Canada. She observed, "They had the kind of life and relationship that I would like to have, having adventures together, going to new places, and also being really open to new people."

A few weeks before receiving IRB approval for this research I was in New York City on a mission trip with a group of students from UGA. Since I had not seen Rebekah since she graduated, I met her one morning for breakfast. After visiting with her and learning of her experiences, I determined that she would be an excellent participant for this study. I emailed her and asked her to be a member of the sample after receiving IRB approval. She readily agreed to participate.

Stephanie's Story: Being Home

I thought if I could touch this place or feel it
this brokenness inside me might start healing.
Out here it's like I'm someone else,
I thought that maybe I could find myself....
Won't take nothing but a memory
from the house that built me
– Miranda Lambert (Douglas & Shamblin, 2009)

Stephanie is a confident, well-spoken fundraising executive for a medical nonprofit in Atlanta. As the surprise baby in a family of four, her parents were 42 when she was born. Her two older sisters were more like additional mothers for her and her brother like a second dad. She was born the year before her oldest sister left for college. As a result, she noted, "I had siblings, but was really an only child."

An extreme extrovert, Stephanie brought a plethora of photographs, BSU brochures (see Appendix O), tickets, and programs with her to illustrate "the people around me" as the most important factor influencing her faith development. "Combined, all of these people are a part of my spiritual journey and all had some major impact on my continued spiritual growth."

Her parents provided a solid foundation for her faith. The family home place, nestled in a small mountain town in north Georgia, continues to be a refuge. The mountains are still "home." She explained, it is not one house or building, "it's the whole community, the village." The area continues to provide her with a deep spiritual connection,

Recently I have not been able to stop listening to *The House that Built Me* (Douglas & Shamblin, 2009), by Miranda Lambert. I know that no matter where I

am in life home is home to me. In my cell phone, home is not my house; home is

my parent's house.

It was there that her father read and discussed chapters of the Bible with her each night

before she went to sleep. Each evening her family would eat dinner together around the

comfortable kitchen table. Always encouraging critical thinking, her dad would never

accept a flippant comment about beliefs or practices, but always forced Stephanie to think

critically and defend her statements, ideas, and values. Her parents have been intentional

about introducing mentors and others who could be helpful encouragers. "They definitely

saw that it took a village and they encouraged that in my life." At each transition in her

life, Stephanie can point to a specific mentor who was there to offer counsel or support.

Other than her family, the largest influence on her faith and young adult life was

BSU at the University of Georgia. Because her family is so renowned at church and in

the community, she always lived under their shadow. Thus, moving to Athens provided

Stephanie with her first opportunity to try new roles and identities. In her experience,

"College is where you grow up and find out who you are and become the person you are

going to be." She chose to attend BSU and volunteer for the leadership team. "No one

expected me to; I did it because I wanted to." She observes,

> That's why it was the highpoint. It was a time for me, by myself, nobody else, a
>
> time of being able to ask questions and talk to campus ministers, adults that were
>
> very excepting and not judgmental. There was a lot of growing at that point in my
>
> life.

A natural leader, Stephanie served three years on the BSU leadership team. She was elected president of the organization her senior year. "I ended up becoming similar to probably what I always was, but I knew that it was because it was my choice."

The transition after college was a "weird place" for Stephanie spiritually. Like many of her peers, she moved home with her parents until she obtained a job. However, her parents were no longer members of her childhood church. She felt out of place. When she obtained a job she moved to Atlanta. Although she attended several different churches and worship experiences during that time, she did not join a faith community for two years. She reflects, "Maybe I needed that time to just go and blend into things."

After marrying Charles, a childhood friend, they immediately joined a church of his choosing and began working with the youth. Charles harbored a lot of anger towards the church in high school and college. His family was asked to leave the small "backwoods" church of his youth when his single mother remarried. Though usually very opinionated about her ideas, Stephanie allowed Charles to determine where they would be involved as a family. "I didn't want to nag him or push him," but she did "definitely steer him with some suggestions." They joined a Presbyterian church where one of his college friends was on staff, "I feel like we've found our place." Together they work with the youth and she directs the contemporary worship service. Growing in faith as a couple has been a wonderful experience for Stephanie. "Whether we're at this church for the rest of our lives or not, we've found our connection to God."

Stephanie has enjoyed her diverse roles at church. Working "behind the scenes" with worship has been a welcomed change since typically she is the one in the spotlight. Loving people as Jesus taught through working with the youth has given her the most

satisfaction. She acknowledged that "while attending church and personal devotional times are important for her," she admits, "I find my worth in the things that I am involved in."

"I can't point back to something and say my faith has really wavered…. I've always had a very strong, underlying faith in God that doesn't change." Her primary image for God is "a loving, patient father." As the youngest child in her family, caretakers have always surrounded her, insulating her from any personal crisis. "I've had a very protected life," she admits. "I don't know that I can look back on my faith and say that I had a dark time or a low time." For her faith is "literally what it is I believe." Beyond being a theological system, her faith is also integral to her identity:

It's who I am. I had a good foundation; I started figuring out why I'm a person of faith and why I believe it very early on. I don't think I could separate it. There is not a part of me my faith does not touch.

I met with Stephanie for the interviews at two different restaurants near her office, with two months between meetings. We have seen each other frequently over the past two years as she has come to Athens to plan fundraising events for work. When she asked me about my research during one such visit, I asked her to be a participant.

Thomas's Story: Losing It

"I lost the key; figuratively and literally, I lost the key…and I left my faith."

"I was kind of a Vanna, showing clients our products" in exotic locations around the world, Thomas, tall with rugged good looks and strawberry blond hair, explained. While in Monaco on a business trip with his boss, Thomas was encouraged to sleep with the administrative assistant of a desired client to secure a meeting with the company's

president. Thomas argued with his boss, explaining that he was a virgin and was planning to save sex for marriage. "Everything just hit me like a ton of bricks," he remembered. "What am I doing here? I love the travel, but I don't love this. I don't love what I'm doing at all." He wondered, "How on Earth is somebody going to be better tomorrow for what I'm doing." As a result, he quit the lucrative job and moved back home with his parents. After much soul searching, Thomas went back to school to be an anesthesiologist. He explained that he changed his major in college from pre-med to business on the advice of friends who told him he could make a lot of money quickly with a career in sales.

His mentor at church in the high school youth group gave him a small platinum purity key (see Appendix P). Challenging Thomas to abstain from sexual temptations, he instructed, "put it on your key ring as a reminder that this is your key. This is what is going to lock you down." The key, emblazoned with a cross and an ichthus, remained in his pocket through college and into young adulthood. However, on a business trip "in Denver, Colorado, my computer bag and all my belongings, including my car keys and this key with it, were stolen." Soon afterwards, he was back in school working on prerequisites for medical school. Because he was older than his classmates, he did not feel comfortable in a collegiate ministry. His schedule did not allow him to be involved in a church. As a result, he was lonely. "I ended up with this girl and I lost my virginity before I was married," he confessed, "I lost the key, figuratively and literally, I lost the key." He wonders, "How could someone make a choice that he knew was so wrong" if he truly loved God? Since then recurring feelings of guilt combined with increasing intellectual doubts have kept him from actively practicing his faith.

Thomas grew up attending a United Church of Christ fellowship with his family. His family hosted a big party in his honor the day of his confirmation. By the middle of the afternoon, he recalled, "I got in a fight with my brother, my dad found me crying in the corner of my room." His father inquired what the matter was. Thomas explained that after his confirmation, "I thought things were going to be different for me and apparently they are not."

When he was a teenager, his father lost his job. The family financial situation became so difficult that, under the guise of a vacation they went to visit his maternal grandparents. He overheard his father asking his grandfather for money. Then while driving home, Thomas overheard his parents' whispered conversation. Through tears, his father disclosed, "I don't know if we can make it." Thomas began to beg God to intervene. He said, "God if you will help my dad I will give my life completely to you." God answered his prayer just a few days later. The telecommunications company reemployed his father and gave him a promotion to a position in Atlanta.

When they moved to Georgia, the family joined a Methodist congregation where Thomas found great encouragement from his mentor and his peers. In college, at the University of Georgia, he was involved in the leadership of a social fraternity as well as in BSU. He served as a Bible Study leader for BSU.

Thomas was not as close to his paternal grandfather due to a ten-year long disagreement. He explained,

Something happened between my grandparents and my mother. My father didn't feel they were treating her fairly, so he walked away from them. He said, "I love

my wife and you are treating her wrong. So we are not going to come see you on

Thanksgiving or any of the other holidays." So we didn't have any contact.

During the hiatus, his grandfather, an executive with a telecommunications company,

battled Leukemia. When Thomas was in college, his father and grandfather encountered

each other while attending a family funeral. Afterwards they began to repair their

relationship.

"A couple of years later, in 2004, my grandfather called me. I was doing

something and I really didn't have time to talk," he lamented.

If somebody like that calls, you are going to want to spend 15–20 minutes on the

phone. I only had a couple of minutes, but I didn't have enough time to talk, so I

didn't answer the phone. Three days later, I found out that he had shot himself.

Again, Thomas prayed fervently for his grieving father. He resolved after that event, to

take time for his family and friends. He surmised, "Life is about people." Thomas

frequently scrolls through the contacts in his phone, calling those he has not spoken to

recently.

He defines faith as belief in God, while spirituality is the fervor of belief,

demonstrated by disciplines (prayer and bible study) and practices (loving and serving

others). Thomas indicated that when his fervor is strongest, usually during or after crises,

he journals, prays, and reads his bible consistently. He wants to be remembered as

someone who lived with no regrets who is an inspiration to others. Referencing his

maternal grandfather who helped him pay for school, Thomas wants to be successful so

he can live a generous life.

Thomas describes himself as a lifetime intellectual. For most of his life, he has been in school. He identified three phases to his spiritual journey. In the first phase, when Thomas was a child and at the beginning of high school, he was "completely afraid" believing that "God was so terrifying. God is just so much bigger than me and I better not screw up!" He moved into the second phase in high school and college, where he began to examine his beliefs critically, seeking to understand God's intentions and actions.

> That manifested into wondering, "What if God was only acting through people?" My impression of God was no longer an invisible figment to fear, but maybe God was within all of us. Maybe the hands of God truly were the people that we encounter each day.

A turning point came with the loss of the key and subsequent loss of his virginity. Along with those treasures, he grieved, "I left my faith." As he has studied science and biology at medical school, observed the death of a friends' mother, and suffered with his father's recent diagnosis of cancer, new doubts have arisen. Now in the third phase of faith, Thomas knows that he does not understand God, declaring, "Well I just must not get it!"

I had lunch with Thomas when he was back on campus to acquire the prerequisite science classes. After he recounted his experiences in Monaco to me, I asked him to speak to a group of graduating seniors at our ministry center about the unexpected struggles they might encounter after graduation. My recollection of that story prompted an invitation to participate in this research project. We met for the first interview at a restaurant in the city where he is attending medical school, a five-hour drive from Athens. I conducted the second interview using Skype.

Chapter Summary

Faith is a verb, according to Stokes (1989). James Fowler (1981) agrees, deeming the active work of finding spiritual meaning "faithing." The faith biographies in this chapter provide a glimpse into the meaning-making processes of 14 emerging adults. The following chapter will delve into the findings derived from careful analysis of the interviews and artifacts from which these profiles were constructed.

CHAPTER 5:

FINDINGS

*"Telling a story is like reaching into a granary full of wheat and drawing out a handful.
There is always more to tell than can be told" – Wendell Berry (2000, p. 29).*

The purpose of this narrative study is to gain understanding into faith development during emerging adulthood. Three research questions guided the construction of the interview protocol, the interview process, and the subsequent analysis of data. First, how does the faith of Christian emerging adults change after college graduation? Second, how do emerging adults negotiate the relationship between faith and identity? Third, what happens in the experience and expression of faith during emerging adulthood?

All fourteen participants in this study were involved in leadership of Baptist Student Union (BSU) while undergraduates at the University of Georgia. They graduated between May of 2001 and May of 2005. Each had been out of college for at least five years at the time of their first interview. The participant ages varied from 27 to 30.

In the process of data collection, I conducted two narrative interviews with each participant. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. The second interview occurred after an initial analysis of data, and allowed me to ask clarifying questions, as well as inquire into missing details. Each participant was also asked to bring an artifact representative of his or her faith experience to the first interview. This artifact served to frame the initial conversation and in many cases provided a plot, or thread, for each participant's narrative.

Although most of the fourteen participants in this research study were immersed in conservative Southern Baptist culture since childhood, they narrated very different journeys of faith. Despite dissimilarities of content and experience, five definitive themes emerged during analysis (see Table 16). The two sections of this chapter are definitions and themes.

Table 16

Themes that emerged in the study

Theme	Subthemes	Description
1. Faith is Influenced by Human Relationships	• Family of origin • Significant others and children • Peers • Mentors • Affinity Groups	Relationships with others provided the most significant influence on faith development and spirituality during emerging adulthood.
2. Faith is Influenced by "The *Bubble*"	• Diversity promotes change • Resisting movement out of the *bubble*	The juxtaposition of ideas and experiences outside of one's sense of normal promoted ideological change, validated existing ideology, resulted in paralysis, or was met with resistance.
3. Significance of Faith is Indicated and Influenced by Activities	• Answering a vocation • Attending a church • Operationalizing one's faith • Pursuing meditative practices	Participation in faith-based activities was both indicative of and influenced by the value of faith and spirituality for those in this study.
4. Faith is Influenced by Mystical Experiences	• Experiencing holy places • Experiencing the Other • Trusting and living with intuitive knowing	Participants' faith was influenced by perceived encounters with "Other," visiting holy places, and experiencing intuitive knowing.
5. Faith is Influenced and Motivated by Hopes and Dreams		Plans for the future and hopes for leaving a legacy were influenced by participants' faith.

Participant Definitions

There are diverse understandings of faith and spirituality in the literature as demonstrated in chapter two. In order to understand fully the themes that emerged in addressing the research questions guiding this study, it is necessary to delineate how each participant applied terminology when describing their faith or their religious and spiritual experiences. The pervasive culture of Southern Baptist Christianity in the Southern United States was evidenced in the terminology used by participants. Sometimes deemed *Christianese*, *Godtalk*, *Church-speak*, or *Churchy* language, many of the words and phrases used by participants require explanation for those unfamiliar with the culture. Two methods were used to discover the participant's meanings. First, I asked each participant to define faith and spirituality. If a participant mentioned or discussed another term during the interview such as "religion" or "path," I usually asked for a definition. Second, I examined the interview transcripts, seeking different uses of faith, spiritual, religion, path, et cetera in context.

Definitions of Faith

In this study, participants employed faith as a noun, a participle, or a verb (see Table 17). Jennifer used faith as a noun, "Faith is your belief," and to classify her belief system, "For instance, I am a Christian." She also said because of her deep belief, her faith is her identity; "it's everything I believe and who I am because of that." "Faith is literally what I believe," Stephanie declared. Chris echoed that idea, "Faith is what you put your beliefs in." Faith is belief and "a quiet confidence" for Heather. She also observed, "There is power and strength in that belief." Rebekah mused, "Faith is like

Table 17

Participants' Definitions of Faith

Anna	Faith is basing your life on beliefs. Faith is religious in nature: there has to be a God for there to be faith.
Brock	Faith is taking a step to believe even though you do not necessarily see what is on the other side. Faith always brings spirituality back to Christianity to me.
Bryson	Faith is fleshing out what you believe
Carl	In a religious/spiritual context I think faith is believing something that you cannot prove; basically, it is something that you cannot touch, something that you cannot see, believing in something that you cannot prove.
Chad	I think faith is a good synonym for trust. I trust that God is there. I trust that he will take care of me. I trust that he will lead me in the right direction.
Chris	Faith is what you put your beliefs in.
Emily	Faith is believing in things unseen. That is a good Bible answer.
Heather	Faith is believing in something you can't see. For me it is a quiet faith – a quiet confidence that you believe what you believe for a reason and that there is power and strength in that belief. Faith needs to be lived.
Jennifer	1) Faith is your beliefs, like my faith, for instance I am a Christian, that is my faith. 2) But then, I also have faith in something, faith in God. I believe that he will do what he says. 3) I am also defined by my faith. It's everything I believe and who I am because of that.
Kate	Faith is understanding, believing, and knowing something without necessarily having proof or anything on paper to say why you should.
Lucy	Faith is believing in something you can't see. I have faith that God is working in everything. I feel faith is a movement in my life that something that is greater than me that is constantly putting my life on a path. I think faith is honesty. I think God appreciates honesty.
Rebekah	Faith is like belief, only it is like at a higher level. It is something you do not have empirical data to support it, but you are sure you know it.
Stephanie	Faith is literally what it is I believe; for instance, I believe this, this, this, and this. It is not scientific or answerable, but it is the basis for my beliefs.
Thomas	Faith is belief in God. The second part of faith is believing that God is trustworthy, that he will do what he says he will do.

belief but at a higher level. It is something you do not have empirical data to support, but you are sure you know it."

Anna and Thomas specified that faith must have an object. Anna explained, "Faith is religious in nature; there has to be a god for there to be faith. For Thomas, "Faith is belief in God." Likewise, Braxton said, "Faith always brings spirituality back to Christianity for me." Carl, who is no longer a Christian, agreed that faith is a religious term. As a result, he practices spirituality not faith.

Some participants also defined faith with a present participle. "Faith is believing in things unseen," Emily explained. "That is a good Bible answer!" Her understanding of faith, learned as a child in church, is expressive of that voiced by all of the other participants, denoting that faith cannot be proven, but is an intuitive, mystical conviction. Kate used three participles to define her faith, "Faith is understanding, believing, and knowing something without necessarily having proof or anything on paper to say why you should." Carl stated, "Faith is believing in something you cannot prove, basically, it is something you cannot touch, something you cannot see."

Furthermore, some participants defined faith as active. Six participants used the term as a verb. According to Bryson, "Faith is fleshing out what you believe." Lucy, the video producer, elucidated, "I feel faith is a movement in my life, something greater than me that is constantly putting my life on a path." Emily described her faith as a river that runs through her whole life connecting everything while providing unseen guidance and direction.

Anna suggested, "Faith implies basing your life on religious beliefs." Toward the end of her interview, she clarified her perception, "I see my faith as a relationship."

"Faith is a good synonym for trust," Chad simply stated; "I trust that God is there. I trust that he will take care of me. I trust that he will lead me in the right direction." Thomas concurred. "The second part of faith is believing that God is trustworthy, that he will do what he says he will do." Lucy also discussed her faith in relational terms, "Faith is honesty. I think God appreciates honesty."

Definitions of Spirituality

While for most in this study, faith implied religious practice, spirituality was a more open, mystical phenomenon or experience (see Table 18). "The problem with the spiritual is there are two ways to go about it," Carl began to describe his perspective,

> You can look within yourself and come up with your own spiritual journey or you can go to a religion, or pop culture, or a shaman, or a million other places. They all seem like good options, but none of them seems like the one world truth, or whatever you want to call it. My spiritual journey has been a little of this and a little of that. It's basically been the letting go of faith and opening myself up to new ideas, new practices, new ways of thinking, and new ways of looking at things. So my spiritual journey has been letting things go and taking hold of things that I think are productive for my life.

As a result, Carl has chosen to be a spiritual person who seeks his own meaning and interprets his own experiences instead of following a prescription of faith dictated by an outside entity. He concluded, "I would call myself a deeply spiritual non-believer."

Four of the participants expressed negative feelings about the term spirituality. Lucy complained that for her the word is "desensitized" because of the environment in which she works: "It starts to lose meaning outside of my faith because it is so

Table 18

Participants' Definitions of Spirituality

Anna	Spirituality is a connection with everything outside of self, it could be God, but could also be an idol, other people, nature, etc.
Brock	Spirituality is vague to me. The word spirituality could be applied to other religions or personal beliefs. It is not really a word I use.
Bryson	Spirituality is the place or the spectrum, the area of your life where your soul feels alive and excited, where your spirit, your soul, your heart is never satisfied, where you are always questioning, where you are always searching for peace.
Carl	I think spirituality is your personal connection to a greater being or a higher being, whether it is a monotheistic god, hundreds of gods, or energy. It is trying to come into contact and have community or a relationship with a deity.
Chad	Broadly, I think spirituality would be a focus or a concentration on the immaterial. For me, that would be a focus on God as the Holy Spirit.
Chris	Spirituality is how you carry out those beliefs in everyday life.
Emily	Spirituality would be ways that you practice or demonstrate your faith. It involves reading, talking with others and it can even be things that make you think more about it. Relationships are a huge part of my spirituality I think and just by interacting with people, I learn more about what I believe about God.
Heather	Spirituality as lost its meaning. It means so many different things that it means nothing.
Jennifer	I do not like the term spirituality. It's not right or wrong. I think of spirituality as something that people would measure. I do not like measuring. I know that Jesus says things like "ye of little faith," or "faith that can move a mountain," but I do not think anybody can measure your faith. It's very mystical.
Kate	To me spirituality is being in touch. I think it is a connection with yourself or with God. Sometimes it's a feeling and it's moving and it can translate into emotions.
Lucy	Spirituality usually means something opposite of what I believe. The word has become desensitized in this environment. Where I work a lot of people say, "Well I'm spiritual," or "I believe in spiritual things." It starts to lose meaning outside of my faith because it is so generalized and does not have a connection to God anymore.
Rebekah	It sounds paranormal, but I think spirituality is the facet of life that is connected to the unseen things behind everything. It is the relationship people have with whatever they perceive to be the higher meaning of things beyond this tangible life.
Stephanie	The things you do because of your faith.
Thomas	Spirituality is the fervor of your faith.

generalized and does not have a connection to God anymore." Heather agreed that the term has lost meaning because of overuse. Braxton said the word is vague to him. Jennifer stated that she does not like the term. Nevertheless, most participants also used the terms spiritual or spirituality when answering questions or narrating their faith journeys.

Some participants described spirituality as a connection. "It sounds paranormal, but I think spirituality is the facet of your life that is connected to the unseen things behind everything," Rebecca said. Carl articulated,

I think spirituality is your personal connection to a greater being or a higher being, whether it is a monotheistic god, hundreds of gods, or energy. It is trying to come into contact and have community or a relationship with a deity.

Over the past ten years, Carl has, "let faith go of faith" and has "taken hold of spirituality." He began to be "more spiritual" when he was in college and still a Christian. Kate's understanding of spirituality is consistent with Carl's ideas: "It is the relationship people have with whatever they perceive to be the higher meaning of things beyond this tangible life." Kate noted, "Spirituality is being in touch. I think it is a connection with yourself or with God." "It's a connection with everything outside of yourself," Anna told me, "It could be God, but it could also be an idol, other people, nature, etc."

Some participants defined spirituality as an action or activity. Whereas for Chris faith is the object of his beliefs, "Spirituality is how you carry out those beliefs in everyday life." Emily's ideas are similar,

Spirituality would be ways that you practice or demonstrate your faith. It involves reading, talking with others and it can even be things that make you think more

about it. Relationships are a huge part of my spirituality I think and just by

interacting with people, I learn more about what I believe about God.

Stephanie said that spirituality is "the things you do because of your faith."

Bryson captured the mystical and experiential nature of spirituality in his definition. He

said it was the soul's search for peace:

Spirituality is the place, spectrum, or area of your life where your soul feels alive,

excited, where your spirit, soul, insides, heart. It is the area where you are never

satisfied, where you are always questioning, the place that you are always trying

to find.

For Chad, spirituality is a key aspect of his Christian faith. It is "a focus or a

concentration on the immaterial. For me, that would be a focus on God as the Holy

Spirit."

Jennifer does not like the term spirituality because it implies measurement. She

said, "I do not like measuring. I know that Jesus says things like 'ye of little faith' or

'faith that can move a mountain,' but I do not think anybody can measure your faith."

Similarly, Thomas simply stated spirituality is the "fervor of your faith" that can be

measured by one's activities. For instance, one who is "on fire" in faith will likely read

the Bible, pray, and attend church consistently.

Kate also described the mysterious qualities of spirituality, "Sometimes it's a

feeling and it's moving and it can translate into emotions." While the mystical nature of

spirituality may be attractive to Carl and Kate, its illusiveness is frustrating for others.

Jennifer decried the spirituality of Madonna: "It's very mystical." Heather chose to pour

her energies into work instead of exploring the deeper mysteries of life that have meant

so much to many of her friends. When "a spiritual question comes, sometimes if you hit

your head enough and you still don't get answers, you tend to maybe just ignore the

question," she reflected about her own experience.

Definitions of Religion and Path

Not all participants provided a definition of religion (see Table 19). Anna said,

"Religion is the practice of faith." For Stephanie, religion is not a positive word; it is "the

fluff of faith and spirituality." "Religion is the organization of spirituality," explained

Carl, an admitted agnostic who left his Christian faith primarily because of the failure of

Christians to live the teachings of Jesus. He continued, "As my quote on Facebook says,

'Religion is man trying to put God in a box so he can understand him.'" Likewise,

Heather defines a religious person as, "a bible thumper who doesn't really question or

consider why they believe what they believe, they just believe it."

Table 19

Participants' Definitions of Religion or Religious

Anna	Religion is the practice of faith
Carl	Religion is the organization of spirituality. As my quote on Facebook says, "Religion is man trying to put God in a box so that he can understand him."
Heather	Someone who is religious is a bible thumper who doesn't really question or consider why they believe what they believe, they just believe it.
Stephanie	The fluff of faith and spirituality [not usually a positive word].

I asked Carl to define "path" because of his frequent use of the term. He believes

one's path is the chosen or planned direction in life manifested in several ways. First, it

can be one's religion, spirituality, or the result of following one's religion. Carl said,

"I've always had a path. I've always been on a path and I've been on a journey. I like to

reflect on where I go on the journey and how I've gotten to where I am." In the past he planned his path, but now he is intentional about "letting go," taking each day and experience as it is presented. In Carl's view, one's religion can be a path, but only if it provides guidance and direction for living.

Lucy used the term as a manifestation of her faith when describing her experience on the first day of her senior year in high school after moving to Georgia. After homeroom, she went into the bathroom because of the emotional crisis she had after moving to a new school as a senior. She remembered,

> I got myself together, exited that bathroom, and never had to go back. It turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened for me. It was what set me on the path to get the Hope Scholarship and to go to UGA.

For her, this path was the result of gaining strength from her faith in God through prayer. The path for Lucy is a way to describe an inexplicable, mystical movement of God on her life. She observed, "From the beginning until now has been a challenge and it seems all very logical and everything has worked in a path to get me to this point and now I'm ready to go through the next hump." When Jennifer was in Peru on a mission trip, she asked God to use her on the last day. After telling me about befriending a young Peruvian mother, Jennifer recalled, "I remember God put this sweet girl in my path that day."

Like many of the participants, Chad used the term to describe his chosen way of life. For instance, when practicing his faith with vigor, he referred to being "on the path." However, when referring to a time when his faith grew cold, he said he was, "so far off the path." Similarly, Jennifer referred to lifestyle choices made by some of her Christian

friends as "the wrong path." Chris told me that judging another Christian as "going down the wrong path" is generally not appropriate, "unless they are doing totally stupid stuff."

Second, Carl explained that path could also be a non-religious spiritual way of life. He differentiated one's chosen path as being different from "the culture that you surround yourself with." However, "I think a lot of people have no path. They just take life as it comes and they take life one day at a time. I think for them that works." For such people the word path has no significance. "I think a lot of people just live life." Without consciously choosing a path, they follow "the direction they were given. They were just given a set of directions from their culture, or from their parents, or from their friends, or from their wife, or from whomever." While Carl's sense of path serves as a spiritual guide for his life, he also indicated that he has "conflicted interests" and is not a "singular person." While he views his life as moving along a chosen path, Carl said he must navigate while balancing his "multiple identities in lots of things in life." He would like living in a big city, enjoying "good expensive food and wine, the high culture, and the music and opera, but on the other hand" he feels like he needs to give away all of his possessions "to help someone who needs it and then live like a pauper." Carl's sense of path has helped him maintain a balance between the conflicting desires for personal comfort and helping others.

Summary of Definitions

All participants defined faith as a system of beliefs. It is also belief without tangible, scientific, supporting evidence. However, more than mere intellectual acknowledgement, faith implies a sense of trust in God to provide meaning and guidance for one's life. In this study, faith is religious in nature, implying a divine object. For some

faith was also a verb, meaning to place trust in God. Spirituality is more generic than faith, implying a mystical connection between all things. For some spirituality was the way to measure faith by intensity or emotional connection. For others the term implied the activities one conducts as an adherent of a particular ideology. Religion was defined as the framework for the practice of faith and spirituality. The path was defined as a divinely purposed or self-chosen direction for one's life.

Even though the participants provided specific definitions of faith and spirituality, it often appeared they were using the terms synonymously when discussing experiences. For instance, when describing her desired future, Anna said she expected to "be living a life where faith is an integral part" and then, that she would be "content with my spirituality." Although Carl made a strong distinction between the time when he practiced faith and his current practice of spirituality, he often used the terms interchangeably during the interview. There were times while conducting the narrative interviews that I would refer to a participant's definition of faith or spirituality to clarify intended meanings or experiences. I will delineate such occasions in the following discussion of themes.

<div align="center">Five Themes</div>

Five themes were identified in the interview data when analyzing from the perceptive of the three research questions. Each theme was located in all of the participants' narratives. In addition to the broad themes, subthemes were also recognized, detailing the variations of experience and expression of emerging adult faith and spirituality.

Theme One: Emerging Adult Faith and Spirituality is Influenced by Human Relationships

All fourteen participants told me that relationships with others was the primary factor in their faith development and current practice in emerging adulthood (18-30 years old). Stephanie could not narrow the vital relationships in her life down to one. She brought a Ziploc bag overflowing with artifacts representing "all of the people that were a part of my spiritual journey. All had some major impact on my spiritual journey. So that would be my memento, the people around me." Heather also acknowledged that relationships are an essential aspect of her spirituality, "I'm a big believer in social ecosystems and interconnections. Social ecosystems are sort of a biological connectedness, but it's on an emotional level."

"God has spoiled me by allowing me to have relationships with other people," Emily observed; "Relationships are a huge part of my spirituality. Just by interacting with people I learn more about what I believe about God." Similarly, Thomas volunteered, "I feel for some reason, for me life is about people. I feel that everything we do is just stupid if we don't do it for people. What's the point? For me, everything revolves around people." Jennifer said that during her unplanned pregnancy many people demonstrated God's love to her. She said, "It's neat to think back about how God used those people to be heroes, just for a moment." After analyzing Anna's first transcript, I asked her about the impact of people on her practice of faith. She acknowledged that her relationships not only affect, but also determine her involvement and practice of faith.

This theme, emerging adult faith and spirituality is influenced by human relationships, includes families of origin, significant others, peers, mentors/mentees,

groups, and constructed archetypes. Each of these areas will be explored in the following sections.

Influence of Family of Origin

All of the participants in this study were introduced to Christianity by the influence of their parents, mostly due to attending church together. Most began telling their spiritual story in reference to their family of origin. Lucy pointed to the faith of her parents and maternal grandparents as having the most notable influence on her current practice. Chad began, "I had a stable family growing up. We always went to church." Bryson recalled, "My family is real close and basically when the church doors were open, we were there." Anna noted, "I can't remember not being a person of faith. My family is a very conservative Southern Baptist family and we were always immersed in faith-based conversations, church experiences, and that kind of thing." Nevertheless, the extent of parental involvement and influence varies greatly. Jennifer said she was "led to Christ" by her mother. Stephanie's father read the Bible with her every night before bed while she lived at home. In contrast, Emily's mother only took her to an Episcopal church for christening and later confirmation because "that's what her mother did with her." Emily and her sister began attending a Baptist church on their own as teenagers. They joined the church and were baptized into membership. When they told their mother of their decision and invited her to the service, she refused to attend; "her feelings were hurt."

The participants' current faith practice can be examined in light of the positive foundation their parents provided or the reaction parental practice provoked. However, most participants are similar to Carl, who observed, "Well, in my case my parents have had a strong influence, but they have had both a positive influence on me towards

Christianity and a negative influence towards Christianity, so it's been on both sides of the spectrum."

In the following three sections, I present the ways parental faith has influenced the fourteen emerging adults' current beliefs and practices. All participants voiced that their parents' influence was foundational for their current perspectives, whereas nine said that what they currently believe and the way they practice faith is dissimilar from that of their family of origin. Five participants have reciprocated by influencing the faith of their parents or siblings.

Influence is Foundational. Like all of those in this study, Chris noted that his parents had been the principal influence on his faith. They introduced him to church and sought to practice a Christian worldview in their home. They also had the most profound influence on his return to faith after taking a hiatus his first two years in college. When he was battling depression after a serious dating relationship ended, his mother suggested he read the Bible and pray. He began reading Psalms and Proverbs and his emotions improved. However, he also acknowledged differences in his parents' practice of faith and the way he currently observes Christianity.

Likewise, Jennifer pointed to her parents as providing a firm foundation for her Christian faith. "I love my parents and they were not perfect, but you know what? I am OK. There were things that were hard for me, and things that they were not perfect in, but they were doing the best," she reflected; "There are certain things that are harder to get over, to break out of that mold that we were taught, but there is a time when you have to accept your own responsibility for your actions and choices."

Bryson's family also provided the basis for his religious beliefs. He explained that his close-knit family revolved around church:

> We were there Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. I really got
>
> involved with the youth. Basically, I believed whatever I was taught at church and
>
> whatever my parents thought; I figured that was truth, absolute truth, and that's all
>
> I knew. From birth to 18, I heard the same things and I assumed everyone thought
>
> that way.

Bryson did not begin to question those foundational perceptions until midway through college.

As she opened a bag containing a large number of photographs and other memorabilia, Stephanie explained, "My story revolved around the stories of the people who have influenced my life. I think one of the great things about my parents was that they definitely saw that it took a village" to raise a child. She continued, "as long as I can remember I was in church. I was not just going, but was involved in things, whether it was children's choir, youth handbell group, or youth mission trips; we didn't just go, we were involved." Her father began reading Bible stories to her before bed each night when she was a small child. As she got older, they began reading the Bible through, one chapter at a time. Her father was the one who taught her the theological basics of Christianity as well. Stephanie remembered the evening she decided to become a Christian:

> I remember it like it was yesterday. I can tell you where I was. I can tell you
>
> where my dad was sitting. I just remember it. It all clicked for me – what Heaven

was what Hell was, why Jesus came, and why God sent him. It was a very distinct

moment in my life.

When she was a teenager, Stephanie's father began helping her to think critically

about matters of faith. Even though her parents were very conservative, they encouraged

her to ask questions, think deeply, and be able to defend her ideas. She said, "If we

believed something, we needed to know why we believed it." Such discussions were

"acceptable family conversation." "I had a good foundation," Stephanie concluded; "I

started figuring out why I'm a person of faith and why I believed it very early on. I don't

think I could separate it. There is not a part of me that my faith does not touch."

The experiences of the remainder of participants in this study were similar. All of

them point to their family of origin as providing an introduction to Christian doctrines,

religious practices, and church attendance. However, as emerging adults, most

participants readily identify differences between the foundation their family provided and

their current practices of faith or spirituality.

Influence is Reactionary. Nine of the fourteen participants noted that they express

or practice their faith in ways that are different from their parents or siblings. Heather and

Anna both said they do not like attending church with their parents. While Heather deems

herself a Christian, she does not agree with her parents' evangelical Christian doctrine

including the divinity of Jesus, the activity of the Holy Spirit, or the need to "have a local

church home." While in town for her mother's surgery, Heather went to church with her

parents, but found it a very uncomfortable experience. She explained, "I'm trying to do

this dance with being a good daughter while making sure that I am comfortable with

everything. I'm sure it gets easier when I get older, right?" In lieu of attending worship

with them, she would rather demonstrate her love for her parents and for God by staying home and preparing lunch. All of the Christian church services she has attended recently seemed to be mostly performance and show. She cannot find any need for such experiences in her life. She explained,

> My family is very evangelical. I see the comfort it brings them and even though I don't necessarily believe some parts of what they believe, I'm happy they believe it, because especially in times like this [during her mother's mastectomy] it brings them so much comfort. But it has become like a sore spot. When the actual surgery was happening, my mom and dad's entire Sunday School class was in the waiting room. And it was great. They brought like jugs of sweet tea and mounds of pimento cheese. It was just like an awesome stereotype. We all had this really great day. It was an awful day, but a great day. Afterwards, my dad, my sister, and I were sitting in Mom's hospital room waiting for them to wheel her in, and my dad said something like, "You know, everyone being here today, that was really the Holy Spirit in action, and those good-time friends of yours wouldn't have done that." I was like, "Well, I disagree!" To me I always saw faith as about forming positive relationships with people and caring, loving relationships with people, and not necessarily having those relationships falling within a very specific category."

Heather contended, "Maybe I just play my faith a little closer to my vest than my parents do. Maybe that's good and maybe that's bad. I don't know." After the above conversation, she confronted her father about the differences in the way they verbalize and practice their faith:

I said, "Dad I hope you would just look at my actions, that I am trying to live a Christ-like life, and not how often I talk about certain books of the Bible, or talk about the Holy Spirit or whatever, because for whatever reason I'm just not completely comfortable verbalizing that kind of stuff. I don't know why. I mean it's kind of stupid, but there you go."

She concluded, "That's something that I've realized going through this, the way we express our faith is different." Later she said, "I think that's what bugs me about when I talk about faith with my dad, he's just so heavy-handed with it. You could just spread it with a knife it is so thick." As a result, when Heather hears friends or family members using words that are overly Christian, "Christianese," or "church-speak," she stops listening. She explained, "Aesthetically it does not appeal to me. I don't think it's a spiritual thing, I think it's an aesthetic or a sensibility thing. I just hear it and am not interested." While Heather has attended a church near her apartment in Atlanta, "on the biggies, like Christmas and Easter," she does not go there regularly. She does not have the time or the interest in getting involved with anything else right now. Her focus so far in her post collegiate experience has been her career. She noted that she has poured all of her creative energy into work. Heather agreed that finding a "good liberal church" in Atlanta might be a good idea, but she does not want to take the time to look for one.

Anna's perspective has also changed from what she knew as a child. Like Heather, she does not like attending church with her parents. She lamented,

It is sad I guess to say, but my parents are the 'anti' of what I want my faith to look like. They don't like gays, they don't like blacks…and they use those words, and that just, just horrifies me! Then they are in church every time the doors are

opened. They have Bibles all over the house, Bible verses in frames all over the house, and all that kind of stuff, but they don't live a life of tolerance and acceptance of other people."

She wondered, "I don't know how you're a strong Christian and not also a warm and loving person, I don't separate those two."

Anna confessed having a poor relationship with her father as a teenager and collegian, "There was a time when I hated him, when if something had happened to him I would not have cared." In the past few years, she has worked hard at repairing their relationship. She recalled, "I know he loves me. I know he does. I don't think that he likes me. And that's so hard. Because I think I'm a pretty likeable girl, I just don't think he likes me." During the first interview, she used the same phrase in describing her husband. She wondered,

I had a husband who loved me, but didn't like me. It's hard to reconcile. How did I marry that? How did I commit to marry someone that was so much like my dad who I couldn't stand for years?

Anna first noticed a connection between the way she viewed both God and her husband in therapy after her divorce; "they were both duties, not relationships." In the second interview, I asked her about a possible connection between her faith, father, husband, and battles with a poor self-image. She confirmed that there has been a connection for her between men, God, and self-esteem. As a child, she learned to view God as the father-in-heaven who felt towards her the way her father did, who loved, but did not like her. For most of her life, she felt she needed to try to change herself to be acceptable to both her earthly and heavenly fathers.

Changes for Anna have come with time, therapy, deep introspection, and a new understanding of God's love. "You have to work to know yourself and learn things about yourself, and I don't think my parents know themselves very well at all. I don't want to be that way. I want to understand myself," Anna declared: "I want to understand my reactions to things, so I pursue it. I read books, I pursue it biblically, and I listen to podcasts to try to figure out what I like and what I do not like."

When I asked Rebekah about antiheroes, the imagoes or constructed archetypes of Christians she does not want to be like, she tearfully related the following story.

The first thing that comes to my mind for villains, unfortunately, is several members of my extended family. I would say they are a lot more traditional in the way that they think, that men and women should lead their lives. They have made it clear that I have chosen the wrong path. There are a lot of people in my family that are members of Rhema, an Oklahoma based church. I have several cousins that have gone to Bible school there, one is a preacher, and both of my cousins met their spouses there. It's really unfair. I went to both of their weddings last summer. They did headship vows, where the wife vows to provide a peaceful home and the husband vows to be the spiritual leader and to provide for his family. I'd say that a big part of that side of my family sees that as the correct way to go. Not only do I like have nothing to do with that church, but I'm a part of this liberal church and have made a different career choice. I live by myself in New York City and am not planning to get married anytime soon. There's just a disconnect. Part of it represents where I came from and am living, but everything was fine with all of these people up until my college years, when people start

making choices about what they are going to do with their lives. The family

divided when people began deciding what they were going to do in college, what

they were going to major in, what they're doing in grad school, or private school,

or whether they get married. I'm not the only person that is on my side of the

split. My parents and my brother support where I am, even my grandmother is

pretty independent. That is where my mom and me get it from so, there are a few

strong, independent women in there. So I'm not the only one.

The deep pain she experienced because of her extended family was obvious as she

talked through her tears, having to pause to get water at one point. She is unwilling to

compromise her current worldview and lifestyle to appease her extended family, yet the

ideological divide continues to evoke a deep emotional response. Crying, Rebekah

reflected,

Looking back on it now, I see it as one big, continuous process, but for a while, it

seemed so irreconcilable that it might even be something that I couldn't be a part

of, at least in the way that I always had been. I realized later that instead of having

to throw everything out of the window it's just another way of thinking about it.

[crying] It's very vague.

Although Bryson recognized the foundation his parents' faith provided him, he

differs greatly in his current beliefs and expression of Christianity. In college, he began to

read the stories of Jesus differently. Instead of viewing God as angry and the church as a

"very judgmental place" that was based on "a lot of laws" where "you have to do this,

this, and this" in order "for God to love you," Bryson began to understand Jesus as the

distributor of unconditional love for all people in all places. He said, "I finally realized at

some point, that my job is not to be one-sided, but to go a little deeper and form relationships and love people for who they are just because they are people." Now he tries to model universal acceptance and unconditional love and grace to everyone he meets. He has grown to enjoy diversity and to seek relationships with those who appear different. He sees value in all people and tries to focus on what he can learn from everyone he encounters.

While most of the participants noted some differences between their faith and that of their parents, Carl is the only one to have completely abandoned Christianity. He reflected, "I'm glad that I was raised Christian in a lot of senses. But I can see a lot of damage that it did along the way as well." Like Bryson, he believed the faith of his parents to be exclusive. "They are very good about loving certain parts of the population of the world," Carl explained, "but there are other populations of the world that they don't love at all." The faith practiced by his parents seemed to him contradictory. A quote he received from a mentor at church seemed to capture his ideas about his parents' version of Christianity: "*Aut hoc non evangelium, aut hi non evangelici,*" which translated means, "either this is not the gospel or these are not Christians."

After suffering from incapacitating migraine headaches, Carl sought help from medicine and therapy. He finally determined that the core of his problem was the result of guilt-induced stress, emanating from his legalistic religious worldview. When he "let go" of the rules expressed by his traditional Christian faith, the headaches subsided.

Carl has spent the past five years rebuilding his spirituality, keeping the values and beliefs that he finds comforting and helpful, and abandoning those he finds restrictive and damaging to his psyche and health. He observed that much of the New Testament

provides the foundation for his morality and values. Carl said, "I've always based my life around some sort of faith, spirituality, moral leaning, or moral guidelines." In our conversation, Carl noted that Jesus continued to be a model for his life. He said,

> I think if I would have gone to a Jesus-based church or had been brought up in a Jesus-based faith, I would still be a Christian, because there is so much good about it. There are so many amazing things about it, and I don't think I would have a valid reason to turn away. But, I don't see that in the Southern Baptist church, in most Catholic churches, or in most Christian churches. I guess they are not New Testament, Jesus-based.

For Carl, Christianity based on Jesus in the New Testament would be solely focused on love. "I think that love binds the world together," he explained. He has found similar teachings in other world religions he has studied. Spiritually, "one of the overriding guidelines of my life" is to be "a more loving person." He said he attempts "to be a vessel of love, to give love and to receive love from others." He contrasted his perspective with that of his father "who has never been good at receiving love."

Braxton reacted against his parent's compartmentalized faith. As a result, he told me, "I am very aware and very proactive of weaving faith into all areas of my life, marriage, work." I asked him if there were any areas of his life not affected by his faith. He said,

> Let's see, work, definitely touches there; family, work, friendships, finances, even working-out or training, but that's probably the biggest stretch. It goes back to my love of nature; if I am on a bike or running, I feel some connection there. I can't think of any areas that my faith doesn't touch.

Braxton defined spiritual maturity as having a faith that is integrated into all areas of life. Spiritual growth occurs in the attempt to have that assimilation.

Influence is Reciprocal. Five participants told about occasions of influencing the faith of their parents or siblings. When she was still actively practicing Christianity, Kate gave her father a Bible. He often asked her questions about how she experienced and expressed her faith. Braxton, Bryson, and Thomas sought to teach their younger brothers about faith. Stephanie told the story of when her oldest sister was contemplating moving back to their hometown after her husband was offered a job there. Her sister called her and complained,

> "I can't do this Stephanie, I can't live at home. I can't do this; I haven't been back in 20 years." I said, "Have you ever thought that about the fact that God obviously wants you back home?" She's like, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Your husband looked in the entire country and the only job he got was one where you can move home? You can't tell me that that was not God." She responded, "OK, I guess I need to call you for perspective from now on."

Stephanie showed her sister, a seminary trained agnostic, that it was obvious God was orchestrating every detail to make the move possible.

Although Emily's mother provided the foundation for Emily's faith by taking her to an Episcopal church for christening as an infant and for confirmation classes as a child, as an emerging adult, Emily taught her mother how to practice Christianity. She explained,

> My sister and I baptized my mom at her church. I taught my mom how to pray when she was 45 years old. We had long conversations about what prayer was

like and she was nervous to pray aloud in front of me. It was backwards parenting much earlier than I thought that would ever happen.

The families of origin of the emerging adults in this study introduced them to Christianity. However, each participant responded to that foundation differently. While most continue to practice faith in ways similar to their families of origin, some have chosen a different ideology or have adapted their parent's faith to their own experiences. Additionally, a minority influenced the faith and practice of their parents or siblings.

Influence of Significant Others and Children

While the families of origin provided a foundation for faith, the fourteen emerging adults in this study indicated their wives, husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, and children have a greater influence on their current ideology and practice. Artifacts brought by six participants were representative of relationships. Stephanie & Lucy provided photographs of their wedding rings. Chris brought a photograph of him and his wife embracing at their wedding ceremony. Anna brought a journal that documented her feelings during a turbulent time in her failing marriage. Jennifer offered an object symbolizing the moment she realized her identity had become enmeshed with husband and son. Stephanie displayed a baggie full of photographs representing the people in her life, several of which were of her husband (one was their wedding rings in a wine goblet).

Although Emily's artifact did not address her family, as she presented it to me she questioned how she could bring the woodcut illustrative of her career and not bring something representative of her husband or her child, "because Ron certainly knows more about my faith journey over the past six or seven years than anyone else does. He's physically been in it for the last five, so that's the majority of time since college." Ron

was with her while she completed graduate school and seminary, during which time, they remodeled a home, lost their fathers, struggled with her depression, had two children, moved to his hometown, and both started new careers. When talking about the plethora of concerns marriage and children bring she surmised, "I think all of that is certainly all wrapped up, enmeshed, in our faith development." Being a wife and mother has taught her about being selfless, "I didn't have to compromise on anything in college," but now, she talks about everything with Ron. They decided where to go to church together, which was not a big issue for Ron. However, the church matters a great deal to Emily. Several times in the interview she stated, "A seminary education makes it hard." She expressed how difficult it was to find friends in the conservative, rural, mountain town where they live. Thus, she wanted to attend church somewhere that honors and supports women in ministry and working mothers. Being a mother has also prompted Emily to modify her theology, "I can't imagine how somebody would miss the opportunity to learn more about how God cares about us than any other life experience I have had." The experience has taught her how much "God desires for us to love other people." She nursed both children for 6 months, literally providing all that they needed for sustenance. That experience provided Emily a picture of how much God desires to care for and nurture his followers.

For Braxton, getting married was "a real highpoint, from a spiritual standpoint." He contrasted his former faith practice with the present; "Doing this as a couple is a whole different story. One of the things that I knew I was going to struggle with going into marriage was being a spiritual leader for Kristen and for our family." I asked him to explain the term spiritual leader. He said it involved,

Taking the responsibility to make sure that I'm growing daily. If I'm not growing, if I'm not filling up, then what kind of leader am I going to be spiritually? It's being encouraging. It's being selfless, putting Kristen's needs and the kid's needs before mine. It's being patient, being kind, living out all of the fruits of the spirit in my marriage with Kristen and in my parenting of Lisa and Allie. It's leading in a way where I'm not just making decisions to make decisions, but where we are actually involving God in those decisions, especially the big ones. It's not making a career move on a whim or for more money, or deciding to move to a new house just because we want a bigger house. It's bringing God into all of those decisions and putting the responsibility on myself to lead our family in all of those decisions and to commit to the prayer that is involved in those decisions and the discernment that goes into that as well.

His father did not provide the example of spiritual leadership that Braxton felt was needed in their home. Thus, Braxton has sought mentors and authors who would educate him on how to practice what he considers to be an essential discipline for Christian manhood. "It's something that I constantly am praying about and praying for, that God will build me into this spiritual leader for our family that he wants me to be," he reiterated.

Kate's narrative demonstrated that when she has been involved in a serious romantic relationship she has felt more positive about faith and spirituality. In the second interview, we discussed two different relationships that seemed to have affected her faith. In college, her long-term boyfriend ended their relationship. Initially, she turned to God to find comfort and meaning. However, when she returned to college the following

semester, she began to separate from people and activities associated with her faith. Three years later, she received an unexpected email from the old boyfriend and then she met him while taking a car to be serviced. When telling of both of these situations, her reaction bordered on repulsion and seemed extreme. The artifact she presented was a "broken candle," with the wick buried beneath the wax and the jar broken and jagged. She said she kept it because,

> I like the way it smells. because you can't even burn it [holds candle, sniffs it and says] so cheesy, because it's like me now [running her fingers across the broken rim], kind of rough around the edges, it used to burn big and bright, and now it's a little more reserved. It's confused. I don't know what it is really.

The candle was illustrative of her faith and her relational romantic identity. Kate entered a serious romantic relationship between the first and second interviews. She had simultaneously begun to pray and think about spiritual matters again. When I inquired about it, she said she did not know if there was a connection between her faith and the old boyfriend. Later in the course of the conversation, we discussed her current boyfriend. When examining the relationships in light of her faith practices she acknowledged that having a boyfriend affected her faith positively for no apparent reason. Her current boyfriend did not seem to be interested in faith and they rarely discussed it. She said being in a relationship again has made her more attentive to the needs of others and it is affecting her spiritually to be more open and to investigate matters of faith. In the second interview, I asked Kate if she would have brought the broken candle to symbolize her current faith experiences. She said she would have brought something different, which symbolized more openness to exploration.

Chris brought a photograph from his wedding as his faith artifact. "I think faith is really developed by events in your life," he told me; "Our wedding was a beginning that led to all of the things we've gone through together." An introvert, Chris found that Claire's extroverted personality helped him to be more outgoing and open to others. He does not have many close friends. Claire is usually the only person with whom he discusses matters of faith or spirituality. He explained, "A lot of the conversations Claire and I have come after church when we are driving home. But we both initiate it; we can tell when something's not right with the other." They read a Christian devotional book together when they were dating. The practice was such an important aspect for growing their relationship that even after five years of marriage they continue to study the Bible together.

Lucy's artifact was her wedding ring. She explained that she had not planned to get married and actually idolized professional women in their thirties and forties who were not married. She met her husband while working in a collegiate ministry after college. They were friends for five years before they ever began dating. She said, "Falling in love and getting married to him was a big deal." Marriage has caused her to reevaluate her priorities, sense of identity, and dreams of the future. For Lucy, letting go of her independence was a "spiritual struggle."

Anna and I had an in-depth discussion about the juxtaposition of her need for significant relationships and the seeming incongruence of her narcissistic tendencies that historically resulted in poor self-esteem. It seems that when her relationships have not gone well, or when she has not felt important, or when she perceived that others did not like her, she turned the negative energy inward, blaming herself for the state of the

relationships. She usually thought, "There must be something wrong with me" if a relationship failed. As a result, her attention to issues of faith waned.

Anna married immediately after graduation from college. Her husband, a ministerial student, was the only man she ever dated. She told me about their relationship:

Before we were married, he told me, 'I love who you are, you dance in the aisles of the grocery store, and I love that!' He told this story at our rehearsal dinner. He got up and spoke; it was one of the most amazing speeches I've ever heard. It was absolutely dripping with love for me. Everybody said, "Oh my gosh, I've never heard a guy be so open with his emotions." All of it was directed towards me. It was beautiful. He told the story about how we met at the BSU at Mercer. There was some praise and worship song on, I was dancing and singing, and that is when we first saw each other. He said that he knew he had to have that girl who could dance in the aisles. Forward ahead after we were married, we would be in the grocery store, some song would come on, and he'd say, 'Stop, stop, stop!" Everything changed after we were married, everything changed. He admitted right at the end, he finally said it aloud. I already knew it was true; he had been trying to change me all along. I felt betrayed. I felt like he manipulated that situation. I think if maybe I had known him better I would have seen it, but I let myself marry him without knowing him better.

Anna, an eighth grade English teacher, brought one of her journals to the first interview as her faith artifact. She opened it from the back and began to read to me, "My first entry was 'Who is that girl who wrote the entries at the other end of this notebook, because I just don't know her anymore.'" Flipping the book over to the front, she

observed, "It's interesting to look back and see…this is the date before my birthday, the first one, I remember I was sitting at Barnes and Noble, we'd gotten in this huge fight, it was a Sunday." She related the story about that morning at church, Steve was teaching the small young adult class in the rural church where he was the pastor. While teaching he joked to the class that Anna did not read her Bible. Anna was devastated. They fought while driving home after the worship service. Anna immediately left home and went to a bookstore where she bought a journal and began to organize her thoughts. She wrote,

I cannot separate myself from what I am feeling. Although I have tried, I cannot distract myself, either. After four hours, I finally decided to embrace it and write it down. I feel degraded. Judged. Defeated. Crushed. Betrayed. There it is – BETRAYED. The kind of pain that betrayal brings is someone else's fault. That's when it is hardest for me to deal with. Not only do I have to come to terms with what he did to me, but I also know that to make it better I have to let it go and forgive. What happens if I don't want to? Why should I have to break down my pride and say that I am going to let go of the pain he caused and forgive him? There is some sort of strange comfort in holding onto pain.

I trusted him. The intimacies in marriage are meant to be just that – intimate. Not aired out to anyone else. I was humiliated; I could not believe what I was hearing come out of his mouth. That was private. I already judge myself for that. I did not need for him to cast stones at me too.

Part of me wants to crumble because what he said was true. I am so far away from God right now. I can't even remember what it was like to be close to him. I am consumed with my life right now – work, marriage, graduate school,

trying to maintain friendships and make new ones. No, I haven't opened my Bible very much this year. I wouldn't even know where to start. I think I've been pulling away for a long time. I'm not sure why. The feeling is sort of like rebellion. I'm not doing it because people expect me to and I'm supposed to not only do it, but be really good at it because of who I married. I think that is what I feel – rebellion. Also, I have gone so far away that I don't know where to start going back. Why does God even want me to return to him? What good am I to him? I perfected the game for so long that I don't know how to turn the dial from phony motions to legitimate feelings that produce actions. I am washed over in blame. It is not his fault, as he said. I don't need him to lead me; I need him to walk with me. I need him to challenge me. To guide me when I feel lost. To share with me. To pray with me and for me. But not to judge me. Embarrass me. Betray me. I know I have to let this go, but it is so hard to think of being vulnerable with him again. A husband and wife should never have to feel that way about each other. I need to believe in him. I know he's sorry. I know I have to go back home and forgive him. But I also know that it is not going to go away there. Deeper issues have to be handled. I can't get my head around it – overwhelmed. But I still need to go home.

The first time Anna ever rebelled in her faith was when she was married to Steve. In the interview, she told me that when married she "was unfortunately equating being a wife with God." Prior to their wedding, she hoped their marriage would be one of mutuality, especially in matters of faith. Since he was in seminary, she expected Christianity to provide the foundation for their marriage and often be a topic of

discussion between them. However, she noted, "Our faith-based problems were huge, [him] not pouring into me like he poured into people at his church, not wanting to grow with me, not even talking about faith, besides in a very academic way." Once her marriage ended, she realized,

> Life is going to go a lot different than I thought. I never ever, ever, ever pictured being divorced. I was 25 and I was divorced. I felt like I was going to walk around with a big scarlet D on my chest.

Because faith had been such an important aspect of her life in the past, the first Sunday after leaving Steve, "I just picked up and went to church that first Sunday after I was in an apartment by myself….I went to Buckhead Church because I heard that's where young people go in Atlanta." She concluded, "I'm not advocating divorce, but it is definitely what needed to happen in my life."

Since her divorce, Anna has been on dates with different men. She found that her participation and focus on faith depended on whom she dated. Aware of that tendency, in the first interview she told me that she desired to have a strong personal relationship with God before she pursued the next serious dating relationship. Before the second interview, a year later, Anna introduced me to Matthew, her current boyfriend whose "hunger for God" inspires her and makes her want to be more committed to practicing her Christian faith.

After Jennifer and her husband David discovered she was pregnant, six months prior to their planned wedding date, the crisis drew them together. Since then they have approached life and faith primarily as a couple. Jennifer explained,

David and I have both had individual journeys, but we have also been in this life

and faith together, even in our separate things. I know I talk about David a lot. I

think my family and my friends get tired of me talking about him.

Though she told me her identity is in God, not in her husband and family, she could not

avoid bringing up David or one of her children when talking about any topic of faith or

spirituality.

Families of origin and significant others were both important factors in the faith

development of the emerging adults in this study. However, relationships with peers in

college and after graduation have also notably influenced each participants' faith and

spirituality.

Influence of Peers

Carl arrived in Athens to attend UGA already beginning to question his parents'

Christian practice. His roommate all through college was Bryson. Carl told me, "Bryson

is someone who has influenced me because we've had a lot of these kinds of

conversations. We don't always agree, we don't always have the same ideas, but we have

a lot of mutual respect for each other's ideas." Carl has had significant faith based

conversations "with thousands of people" while traveling the world. On his first trip to

Europe after graduation from college, he met an Australian girl who convinced him that

he could be whomever he chose to be, that he did not have to follow any prescribed rules

or path. She also introduced him to the writings of Paulo Coelho, the author whose work

has had the greatest influence on Carl's spiritual development.

Braxton's life has been shaped by relationships. A number of men in his path

have encouraged, challenged, taught, and modeled "Christian maturity." When he came

to college Daniel, an older Christian student asked him to join him traveling to all away

football games. Braxton's three college roommates were also strong Christians. They

introduced the idea of "Christian accountability" to Braxton by asking if he was

conducting a daily prayer and bible study. Jim, one of his roommates invited him to help

lead a retreat for a church. Braxton reflected, "If he had not challenged me, or if this

weekend had not have happened, I might be well behind in my spiritual maturity where I

am now and where I was in college and coming out of college." Working at the church

over that weekend gave Braxton the encouragement he needed to apply for BSU

leadership a few weeks later. Combined, four of his college friends, "very heavily

influenced my life…to this day."

When Braxton and his new bride moved to Atlanta and began to get involved in a

church, an old friend continued the process of offering opportunities that furthered his

spiritual growth. He said,

> Going back to themes, the guy that brought us into the first small group [at
>
> church], his name is Mitch, I worked with him at summer camp so he knew my
>
> passion for kids. He had been serving in the middle school ministry at church and
>
> they were about to move back to Jacksonville. He said, "Hey, I'm moving and
>
> you should probably consider doing this!" And you know, that's probably been
>
> better than my camp experience. I loved camp. I loved working with the kids and
>
> hanging out with them, but this added the spiritual layer on top of just hanging out
>
> with the kids.

Braxton said that he needs "guy time" several times each year where he goes camping or

skiing with friends. He also regularly schedules breakfasts with men in his small group.

Stephanie also discussed the importance of college roommates in helping her solidify her emerging identity. Everyone in the apartment alternated cooking responsibilities. They ate dinner together every weeknight for three years. "We always prayed together and then we had dinner. I think a lot of it was the support." Even though three of them are married now, the roommates continue to go on trips together each year. In discussing the changes in faith practice she says, "They've been there every step of the way."

As mentioned earlier, co-workers at the restaurant influenced Kate's faith. She remembered,

> When I started working at the restaurant, I had all these non-Christian influences. I got busy and starting working all the time. In a way, I rebelled. I started rebelling in my own mind. I felt like I just didn't want to do this anymore. I didn't want to be told that I was wrong all the time. I just started ignoring convictions. I just quit tuning into it.

After a while she thought, "I wonder if I even believe in God?"

Anna sought out likeminded friends when she went to college. Among her group, "we all had this meshing of ideals and beliefs and it just kinda helped fuel that fire." When I asked her who influenced her current faith practice more, her parents or friends, she said, "It would definitely be more of what I learned about faith in college and from my peers than it would have been from my parents." She told me that Athens was a time of significant personal change in her perspective. As she talked with friends, her commitment to God grew. She spent,

A lot of time across the table with a cup of coffee; [My roommate] and I used to sit and just pour into one another. I just have sweet, sweet memories of that, of meeting for Wednesday lunches and Tuesday nights, I just have a lot of habitual memories of things that were spiritual and that made me grow. There were little places like that all over Athens.

While Anna maintains a few deep friendships from college, she did not mention how peers have influenced her faith or spirituality since graduation.

An older student invited Bryson and Carl to play softball on his championship team. Bryson recalled, "He only knew me for maybe a couple of weeks, he had no idea if I was any good at softball, he had no idea of who I really was, yet he invited me to play on his softball team." For Bryson, "that was a spiritual high, just being accepted like that by someone I highly respected."

Bryson also said that Carl, his college roommate, has been a big influence on his faith. "He's always been a little ahead of me in his thinking and he always seems to have an opinion about everything. His opinions always seemed to be very thoughtful and very well organized. I really respect that about him." Bryson said that Carl questioned everything. Being around Carl and other friends prompted Bryson to begin to change his worldview. He said, "Somewhere around my sophomore or junior year I started to realize that there were other aspects to my faith."

Heather met Laura during dinner theater rehearsals at BSU. She observed, "Laura is the first sort of intellectual Christian I ever met, someone who is wicked smart, but also wicked faithful." They continue to talk on the phone often. Heather finds that Laura is a reminder of the type of Christianity she would be comfortable practicing; "she lives her

life with such grace and she seems to have such poise and assurance that I feel is derived from her faith. I just find that inspirational." In contrast, Heather also met some peers during dinner theater who reflected a negative view of Christianity to her. She was to be the lead in the show, but a few days before the premiere she lost her voice:

When I started to get sick and I couldn't sing, and I thought, "Oh shit! I'm going to have to help someone do this part!" I knew it was going to be a tough few days after that, so I went to the prayer room to pray. I saw my name written on the prayer wall. I saw it and thought I was up there because like they knew I was a lost soul and they thought I needed their prayers. That definitely reminded me that as much as there are like wonderful people from the BSU with whom I kind of like really meshed, not just friendship wise, but ideologically and otherwise, there are also people I was never going to connect with.

Heather limited her relationships within the ministry to those with whom she shared a common liberal ideology, and ignored those she deemed judgmental. Though in hindsight she understood that her name might have been on the prayer wall because her friends knew she was nervous about the performance.

Influence of Mentors

While peers have been a significant influence on emerging adult faith development and practice, older adults who served as mentors also helped some participants grow. In conservative Christianity, ministers and other leaders often mentor or "disciple" younger adherents in integrating their beliefs and doctrines into all areas of life. Words and phrases such as "pour into," encourage, sharpen, challenge, or "hold me accountable" are often used to describe the mentoring practices among the emerging

adults in this pervasive Southern Baptist culture. In BSU all of the student leaders are mentored by a campus minister.

All participants found mentoring through personal relationships with individuals and through reading several books by a specific author. As noted above, Stephanie was surrounded by a "village" of mentors her whole life. Her "Granny," a family friend, helped raise her. Though Granny passed away many years ago, Stephanie continues to remember with fondness the lessons for living a joyful Christian life she learned from the older woman. In high school and college Stephanie began to be challenged and encouraged specifically by male mentors, who continue to call or email on occasion to offer encouragement and advice.

Mentors have influenced Thomas positively and negatively. An employer encouraged Thomas to have sex with a client's secretary to increase the chances of making a sale. The employer had been mentoring Thomas in business. Thomas quit the job after he realized that he would be expected to compromise his faith-based values to stay in the job. Thomas told me of another mentor who had a positive influence on his life. He took an interest in Thomas and began to teach him how to practice his faith in all areas of life. He was an "amazing, Christian man." He told Thomas about a life-threatening incident when he was serving as a JAG officer in Iraq. After telling the story, the mentor advised, "'Thomas, if there is one thing I could take away from that,' he said, 'find a sense of urgency about your life!'" Now in medical school, Thomas remembered,

> That's one of the things that motivated me to approach school the way that I think
> I am approaching school, and that is what's the point if I'm just going to loaf

through it; the path of least resistance, is that what I really want? I use him as an influence to take on some of my bigger challenges.

Two other people influenced Thomas significantly. One was the mentor from his home church who gave him "The Key," a small platinum keychain embellished with the Christian symbols of a cross and an ichthus, which was to serve as a reminder for Thomas to remain chaste until he got married. The other was a mentor working in Athens who also had waited to have sex until after marriage. After the mentor got married, Thomas asked him about his first sexual encounter. The older man "said, 'You know, I wish I hadn't waited.' I said, 'Really?' he said, 'Yeah, I put sex up on a pedestal and made it more than it was cracked up to be. I wish I hadn't waited.'" Thomas recalled, "I look back and unfortunately, that was one of the key things in my life that broke my foundation. It caused me to say, 'Why should I wait? He didn't wait.'" Thomas realized the decision was his own, but the older friend provided the excuse he had been seeking.

Braxton, a thirty year-old advertising account manager, recently sought out a mentor. Their relationship was formalized in the past year and is perhaps the result of Braxton transitioning into young adulthood and out of emerging adulthood. His mentor told him, "I think every guy needs a Paul, a Jonathan, and a Timothy. Every guy needs someone who's pouring into him, a group of guys who are on his level, and then someone that he is pouring into." Paul, Jonathan, and Timothy are characters from biblical stories. Paul, who composed much of the New Testament, was a mentor to Timothy and many other early Christian leaders. Jonathan was a close friend of King David in the Old Testament.

Braxton has had additional mentors, including his father-in-law. When Braxton selected his pseudonym, he chose his wife's maiden name. After noticing the importance of Christian men for Braxton, I asked him if the choice of his father-in-law's name was symbolic. He thoughtfully responded, "Yeah, possibly; Yeah." This finding necessitated providing Braxton with a different pseudonym.

Several times in our interviews, Braxton noted a lifelong disappointment with his relationship with his father. He said,

> Kristen's parents, particularly her dad, have been a big influence in my life the last six or seven years. I grew up with divorce and a real dad who was surface level. You know, I knew he loved me, but my relationship with him was not very deep at all. It was distant. It was every other weekend. Then I had a step dad who, I think honestly, it probably was that I was not giving him much of a chance….But it was still very surface level.

He continued,

> Kristen's dad kinda filled that void for me, I didn't realize it at the time, but I had been missing father conversation, deep father love. Less than a year after we got married, he took me out to Jackson Hole on a father/son retreat. For him even to do that to begin with is enough of a gesture, but the time that we got to spend out there together as father and son was just what I needed.

Just as he has been intentional about learning from others, Braxton also seeks opportunities to "pour into" younger men and boys. In college, he did this through camp. Moreover, each summer he returns to camp to carry on relationships with the current counselors, many of whom were campers when Braxton was a counselor. Braxton also

works with middle school boys at church. Referring to the mentee of the Apostle Paul, he observed, "They have been my Timothy for the last five or six years."

John Eldredge, who writes Christian books for men, has also influenced Braxton's development significantly. Braxton detailed the influence three of Eldridge's (2001, 2006, 2009) books have had on his identity and faith journey. The most profound has been *Wild at Heart* (Eldredge, 2001); "I've read it at four or five different stages of my life." As a result, Braxton wants to be an older mentor to younger men, "influencing others for Christ and hopefully planting seeds along the way and winning a few lives here and there through my day to day life."

Emily identified numerous mentors who have influenced her in life, work, and faith. The faith artifact Emily brought to the first interview was a graduation gift from a UGA professor. She continues to communicate frequently with him. Rhonda Abbott was a campus minister at BSU when Emily was a student. Rhonda served as the first example Emily had ever seen of a woman in ministry. She recalled, "Rhonda made it possible to believe that going to seminary could actually happen." She did not know anyone when she went to seminary in Texas. Needing a friend nearby, Emily "called Rhonda. Amy, one of her very best friends, was in Grapevine." Emily met and built a lasting relationship with Amy, who helped her figure out how to reconcile a desire to do ministry with a passion for social justice. Amy recommended a career in social work. Recalling her many mentors, Emily said she has learned more about God from mentors and other people who have loved her than any other way.

The incident that Anna identified as the most important evening of her life occurred because her mentor cared enough to initiate a difficult conversation. As a

second year collegian, Anna chaperoned a beach retreat for the youth group from her

home church. She recalled the event for me.

That summer I had a major life changing experience, facilitated by Cindy. I was

always ridiculously, wildly insecure about my body. It was very much a physical

insecurity. I was always very confident in who I was. I knew I was smart and I

knew I was a likeable person, but physically I absolutely hated myself. I grew up

crying on the bathroom floor every morning, with my poor mother trying to

convince me to go to school. Adolescence hit me hard and I did not get out of it

for a long time. That summer I had gone with Cindy and the kids to camp to St.

Simons Island. All of the kids were in bed one night and she and I went walking. I

liked to sit at Cindy's feet. I was like, "I just want to sit at your feet and listen!" I

had a hard day. She could always see it on my face when I'd get insecure. I'd shut

down. I'd completely shut down. I wouldn't talk. I wouldn't interact. I would

want to bail out of every situation. As soon as I could drive I always took my own

car everywhere I went, because when that would happen I had to bail, I had to get

out. I did the same thing in college. I had to have a way out. I was convinced I

was the ugliest person in the room and everybody knew it and everybody was

talking about it. It was a warped way of thinking.

Cindy pulled me aside at this camp, we are sitting beside this fountain, and

she said, "Do you not realize how selfish that is?" I will never forget that

statement. I will never forget how I felt in response to it, it literally felt like I had

been hit by a car, completely flattened. When you are that insecure you feel like

you are doing the world a favor, you feel like you are supposed to feel that way,

that everybody expects you not to like yourself. I was absolutely convinced that I was supposed to feel that way. Because you think you are doing everyone a favor, the thought of being selfish was abhorrent, I just couldn't handle it. I asked, "What are you talking about?" She said, "All of your thoughts are consumed with you, all of them, good or bad, they are about you. They are not about other people, they are not about God, they are not about things that are going to benefit this world; they are about you." I know it's cliché, but I was changed that night. I thought, "No, I'm not going to be a selfish person. I'm not going to allow my thoughts to revolve around me."

She gave me this verse, Zephaniah 3:17 – "The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save, he will take great joy in you, he will rejoice over you with singing." She asked me, "Who are you to tell a God who rejoices over you with singing that you don't like what he made?" In all my years in church, I had never thought of it that way. I honestly believe I prayed that out of me that night. I still have little weaknesses. I think we are hard wired with little weaknesses. But, now I know how to pull myself out of them. I know it's a conscious decision to not let that overpower me.

Anna continued learning from the experience after she returned to school. She said,

I came back to Athens and told Rhonda Abbott about it. She told me, "You have to share this," so I spoke at BSU one night. Stepping up to the stage I tripped, fell on my face [laughed], got up, and gave a little talk about how much I struggled with insecurity."

The evening at the beach began a process for Anna of letting go of past self-perceptions and constructing a more healthy identity. Nevertheless, as noted in previous categories, Anna endured additional difficult experiences and required the assistance of a therapist before she identified the depth of her struggle.

While a first year collegian, Chad found a mentor in his Bible study leader, who was a graduating senior. "Marshall took the time to talk with us about things. He knew how to ask a good question, which was a big, big part of it…. Marshall asked me, 'What's God teaching you right now?'" Chad led a similar Bible study the following two years, seeking to follow Marshall's example. Two other mentors provided Chad opportunities to lead at Christian youth conferences. His theology was challenged and expanded because of those experiences. He remembered, "It was bizarre, but it was the first time I had ever heard about the concept of faith by grace alone. It really kinda threw me for a loop." Chad's relationships with mentors while in college, "sort of pushed me down the path towards spiritual maturity." Reflecting on mentoring others, Chad said, "It's amazing how much you grow when you are trying to help other people grow." Chad, a high school teacher, recalled that two mentors the summer after college taught him how to teach.

Centrifuge [Christian camp] is where I learned how to teach kids. I don't think people really believe me, but one summer I worked camp with these two guys that were unbelievable teachers. They could stand up and teach a kid about an orange and they'd know everything about an orange when they were done. Talking with them and seeing how they do things and watching them over that summer is what taught me how to teach high school students. I have to give those guys a lot of

credit, because when I walked into a classroom when I started teaching I was ready to go.

For Chad, the connection with teaching high school and his faith has been an ongoing struggle; however, through the experiences in BSU and summer camp he learned that his passion is teaching others. He uses his platform as a science teacher to communicate the idea that it is possible to be an intellectual Christian who is not afraid of learning about the theories of evolution.

Like all of the other participants, Heather readily identified mentors who helped her spiritually. Her artifact was her "Franklin fan," a funeral fan with a drawing of one of the campus ministers at BSU. She told me, "I don't know if you knew about this, but I spent a lot of time on Franklin's couch my senior year." In addition to being overcommitted on campus and in the community, Heather was struggling with reconciling her faith with what she was learning experientially and in her classes. Franklin offered for BSU to pay for her to see a therapist. She remembered,

> I appreciated how it was OK for things to be open ended with you guys and with this therapist. There wasn't an answer to every question. Sometimes figuring out a question was enough to validate asking it. That experience validated how I intellectually viewed my faith, it sort of stretched out my brain. But I think it also showed me as a human, in my heart, in my soul, that this is how you need to act if you want to act out your faith, like these people are acting in ways that you can learn from and that you can try to emulate.

Heather's understanding of spirituality was expanded further by contact with Alyssa, a woman she met through the community theater in Athens. She was one of the

most significant "people who have lent guidance to me spiritually." Alyssa died of cervical cancer in 2005. Heather told me her story.

> I had just broken up with my first boyfriend ever and Alyssa was getting sick. She was sort of a really great mother figure. My own mother is a wonderful woman, but she hated [my boyfriend] and she and I have never really been able to talk about that kind of stuff. So I needed a mom and Alyssa was that mom. When she got sick, I would drive up to see her. She was being treated in Atlanta. I'd come see her and she was still this great light of a person. She was Atheist. So when my dad said, "Your good time friends won't be here if you were sick." I said, "Dad, I've known people who don't have Sunday School friends and they are still surrounded by a wonderful, caring community." It was a very sad experience. I miss her pretty much every day. But to see that kind of community form, and to see the kind of grace, acceptance, and peace that she had, was a really great example of how to deal with adversity, how to deal with your community, and how to deal with death. She was just a really remarkable lady and as an Atheist, was a spiritual example for me….I miss her, "I love you Alyssa!"

Influence of Affinity Groups

As demonstrated above, significant others, peers, and mentors assisted and influenced the faith and spiritual development of study participants; however, for some participants, groups of people had a more vital affect on the changes that occurred in their lives. Kate, Carl, and Heather experienced collegiate faith differently than the others in this study. While each was involved in BSU leadership, the organization brought different meanings because of dissimilar personal experiences and changing ideologies.

Kate stated that she never found a Christian corps of friends with whom she felt the same

type of connection as she experienced in her High School youth group. She did find such

a group at the restaurant where she worked. Her new group of friends was negative in

their perception and approach to Christianity and those who attended church.

> I remember working at Chili's. I would work on Sundays because I needed the
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> money. As a result, I got out of the habit of going to church. While working we
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> would talk about church people. We would say, "Church crowds;" we hated
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> Sunday mornings. Everybody was grumpy. Why are all the church people so
>
> unhappy? I had never thought about it until I saw it. I almost considered myself
>
> not one of them. I was outside looking in at that point….I would perpetuate the
>
> whole thing, you know, "these church people!" And that was my mindset of
>
> organized religion. I had come so far that I didn't care. I wasn't a part of it.

Carl and Heather's faith was moving away from traditional Christian experiences

and toward connections that could be deemed more spiritual, yet less connected with a

particular religious belief or deity. Carl noted while in college he began moving away

from faith and towards spirituality. Although he was involved with BSU, during college

he began questioning his faith while examining the incongruent actions of many who

professed to be Christians. Heather made comparisons between her experiences and those

of friends and family members. She explained, "I guess it's just more difficult for some"

to experience deep connections to God. Heather noted, "Going to church is not that

compelling when somewhere in my gut I feel like, 'Well you've done that before and you

are still questioning certain things.' I don't want my faith to just be a superficial thing."

Reflecting on her participation in BSU in college, Heather said, "I do think that part of

the reason I even got involved was it was a fun social group to run with." Later she

enumerated,

> part of being social with people of faith is that's part of the discussion. Mark was
>
> the king of deep philosophical discussions about faith at three in the morning at
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> Waffle House. That was not something that I had experienced, but it was
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> something that really helped. I learned a lot mentally, but also spiritually. It
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> carved out more room within myself to consider these things when I wasn't
>
> hanging out with these people anymore. Even when they all moved away, it was
>
> something that I considered and something that was always on my radar. So, I
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> think that that group was positive. I also think it has done my heart good to be
>
> around such caring people.

Groups were an important aspect of Lucy's faith in college, where she was

involved with BSU all four years. She says that it was through BSU that she solidified

her faith, made lifelong friendships, learned to practice leadership skills, and discovered

what she wanted to do for her career. After college, she helped to start an organization for

young emerging adults similar to BSU in a local church. She met the man that she later

married in that group. Now she and her husband lead a small group of young married

couples at the church they attend.

Bryson's artifact was a nude hula doll. He said that it was illustrative of the

exposure that had the greatest influence on his faith development. His experiences with

diversity in faith began in BSU. In contrast with his home church Bryson remembered, "I

think that was one of the really nice things about the BSU. There was such a variety of

ideas, and people still loved each other." His BSU involvement in college allowed him to

be comfortable in a rural Baptist church near his farm. Although his opinions on politics and many moral issues differ from the majority of other members, he still feels loved and accepted in the congregation. He said,

> I think the church I am in now is the coolest church ever. It reminds me of *Little House on the Prairie*. It was built in the 1800's. It is beautiful, made of old wood, and it's rural. In the morning I can gaze off into a cow pasture. There are about 25 people on a good Sunday, and we have a pastor who is a theology student from Mercer University. He spends the night with us on Saturday nights when he comes, so I get to have a lot of good conversations with him. He's very thoughtful. I think if he presented his theology to the members of our church he would never come back. Sunday mornings are a time for him to say that God loves us all; that's basically his message every time. God is a God of love….What I love about it is it's rural, it's traditional, but the people are accepting. It's a crowd that just loves you for who you are. Sometimes I feel really uncomfortable in churches that are production-based and where there is lots going on; it's just very simple.

Bryson stressed that the church is not Southern Baptist, but identifies with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. He reflected that most Southern Baptist churches he has encountered are focused too much on judging others, not enough on loving.

Rebekah led a small group of girls in a BSU small group in college. Together they read *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Manning, 1990), a book written for "the bedraggled, beat-up, and burnt –out" and "anyone who has grown weary and discouraged along the Way" (p. 14). The author presents the idea that grace and love for God, self, and others is the

heart of Christianity. He suggests that followers should experience "the thrill, the excitement of falling in love with the risen, living Jesus Christ" and that faith should be marked by living lives of "reckless love" (p. 257). Rebekah said she identified with those sentiments and "hopefully" incorporated them into her changing theology and deepening faith. That small group of girls became some of her closest friends. She conceded that throughout emerging adulthood "supportive bunches of people that I've found and could connect with" have influenced her faith in positive ways. Rebekah's faith development was also influenced when she could not find a welcoming Christian group to join during graduate school. As a result, she practiced her faith on her own, introspectively seeking to understand what she believed. Likewise, other negative experiences have prompted changes in her experience and expression of faith. She remembered,

> There have definitely been a few times that I've gotten really mad at whatever institution I have been a part of, the Southern Baptist comes to mind. But even some churches where I have been a member, after my worldview expanded and then [voice breaking] I returned to the community that was such a big part of my life, I realized there was this huge disconnect that I had to try to make sense of. I guess mostly it was realizing that there were huge limitations to the scope of love that was being offered there.

As with several other participants, Rebekah found judgmental individuals, groups, or churches to be spiritually repulsive. In contrast, when she went to New York as an intern with a law firm she found a Methodist church that appeared to be as liberal as she was becoming. When she later returned to the same firm as a lawyer, she joined the church. She "forced" herself to get involved by signing up for retreats and other activities

at the church. She was asked to play in the band for the small contemporary service. Rebekah served as a member of several church committees and was a representative at the annual Methodist state convention.

The groups with which Braxton has chosen to be involved also influenced his development. At camp, he enjoyed outdoor activities with a group of peers as a leader of middle school boys. He continues to go back to Camp Woodland each summer to reconnect with counselors and assist with mentoring campers. In college BSU provided Braxton with a framework to meet the core group of peers that helped him learn leadership skills and become comfortable in his deepening Christian faith. Braxton has discovered new outlets for his faith at church. He said, "I feel blessed that I got plugged into a church that I'm still in that has pushed me and continued to help me grow." He continued, "The thing I love about our church's model is the importance of small groups and just doing life together. Kristen and I were lucky that we got plugged into a married group two weeks after we got married."

Anna compared the differences between the church where her ex-husband was the pastor and the one she attends as a late emerging adult. Regarding her husband's church, she remembers,

> feeling like I lived in a little tiny glass box and he was wanting to keep me in there. It was a little tiny church of about 50 people, all over the age of 70. They were under the impression that I would be there every time the doors were opened. I was a fulltime master's student, working three nights a week, and a fulltime teacher. So no, I wasn't there every time the doors were opened. I didn't teach Sunday school, didn't sing in the choir, didn't want to go Sunday night if I

had been Sunday morning, and they really resented me and were very in my face about it. Obviously, they did not like me. And then he started echoing their behaviors so I was getting it at home and I was getting it at the church. It really just shut me down.

Currently, Anna is involved in a church in Atlanta where she feels supported and encouraged to be herself. She is accepted and allowed to be involved as much or as little as she is able. She has joined a few small groups, but they did not fit with her place in life, so she quit. She is pondering leading a small group soon. The sermons are practical and helpful, without "churchy talk" or "Christianese" which "just turns me off" because that is all she heard from her former husband and the small church where he was the pastor.

Emily noted the groups that she has been involved with have helped her to grow spiritually as well. She and Ron were married halfway through her graduate program. She explained,

> We got involved with a church that had a good newlywed program. So we joined that group and then, as couples got older and left the group, and we moved from the newliest [sic] newlyweds to the longest newlyweds, we ended up leading and teaching the group.

They currently attend a church that does not have any fulltime staff. Everyone is bi-vocational and volunteers perform much of the daily activity; however, the church does not meet her needs for a small group bible study. While a women's study is offered, all who attend are stay-at-home mothers. She feared being ostracized because she is a working, professional mother who places her children in daycare. Between the first and

second interview, Emily joined a non-denominational group, Bible Study Fellowship, that is devoid of any social elements save discussing the scripture being studied.

Stephanie volunteers at her church as the logistical director for the contemporary worship service and as a volunteer with the youth group. The summer before interviewing Stephanie she accompanied the youth group on a mission trip to Mexico. The trip was foundational for her in many ways, primarily because she began to build meaningful relationships with individual youth on the trip. Between the two interviews, Stephanie accompanied the group on another mission trip, this one to a nearby state working in an impoverished community. The group has provided her with the opportunity to reciprocate the mentoring she received as a teenager and as an early emerging adult.

Though diverse in experiences, all of the participants in this study indicated that relationships with other people have provided the most significant influence on their current faith and spiritual practice. This influence was evidenced in both positive and negative ways. The majority of participants also indicated that the most profound spiritual experiences occurred with other people.

Theme Two: Emerging Adult Faith is influenced by the Bubble

While only two participants employed the term *bubble*, all fourteen presented a juxtaposition of ideas, experiences, people, or constructed archetypes that promoted ideological change, resulted in paralysis, served to validate existing ideology, or were met with resistance. The first to use the term was Braxton. He said, "In college I was kind of in my Christian bubble." After inquiring how he defined "Christian Bubble." Braxton responded,

That, to me, is basically only surrounding myself with other Christians, who I spend my time with. I probably referenced it as my time in college was spent in a Christian bubble, meaning all my friendships, relationships, were pretty much inside BSU. There was a large pool of people there to have relationships with. When I say Christian bubble, it is interacting within that little zone of Christians.

Carl, the only other participant who employed the term, used it while telling me the story of the Australian woman he met while traveling: "She told me. 'You can break out of your bubble.' She said, 'You can do whatever you want to do.'" During his second interview, we had a lengthy discussion regarding his definition of the *bubble* and how the bubble affected one's faith and worldview.

Carl defined the bubble as the culture with which you surround yourself. A key component for Carl was that each individual chooses his or her *bubble*. When faced with different ideas or experiences, one can either embrace the new idea or choose to return to one's old manner of thinking. He explained,

I don't think you can avoid changing the way you think about things. But I think when you stay in your *bubble* things change very slowly or they only change a little bit. I think when you break out of your *bubble*, you see the world in a different way and have no choice but to either reject what you see and return to your bubble, or to change, and to change, and to change, and to change, and to change. For better or for worse, maybe it's worse, I feel like I've changed a lot more than other people who just got married, got a job, moved to Atlanta, and had kids. Not to say that one's better or one's worse, I just feel like I've changed more than those people have changed and I continue to change more than they change. I

think that you either embrace the changes or reject them. Rejecting them is a

natural indicator that maybe you need to go back to your *bubble*.

Carl presented the comparative analogy of a tourist versus someone who engages

new cultures and experiences. He suggested that a tourist has no interest in actually

engaging another culture, but is only a visitor or observer who carries his or her *bubble*

on the journey or immediately returns to it at the conclusion of the trip. In contrast,

someone who chooses to leave his or her *bubble*, engages with and allows the culture or

experience to influence his or her ideology or sense of self.

Included in the concept of the *bubble* is the idea of worldview, the holistic

philosophical lens through which participants viewed the world, represented by the

contrast between saints and sinners found in traditional Christian doctrine. A participant's

worldview also influences his or her values and moral behaviors. While a worldview

certainly affects the concept of the *bubble*, the *bubble* is formed by the culture that each

emerging adult chooses to inhabit and the experiences he or she allows himself or herself

to have.

One of the questions in the interview protocol was, "How does your faith affect

your worldview?" While some participants answered immediately, others needed an

explanation or example of a worldview. Some participants had difficulty answering the

question directly. Nevertheless, all participants told or illustrated the influence their faith

had on their worldviews.

The worldview of half of the participants, including Braxton, Chad, Chris,

Jennifer, Lucy, Stephanie, and Thomas, is dichotomistic. Chad illustrated this perspective

when he told me he views reality as "black and white, right and wrong." This worldview

is based on a shared traditional Christian theology that believes everyone is either "saved" or "lost" and bound for Heaven or Hell. There is also variation within this cluster. After working among a diverse clientele and befriending people whose lives seem to contradict her narrow perspective, Lucy admitted, "I think I would have felt it's more a black and white, right and wrong thing ten years ago than I do now. The statement, 'love others' is huge for me." Perhaps Lucy is learning to be comfortable living with her questions and not needing answers to be content with faith. She dismisses the quandary with, "that's God's to deal with, that's not mine."

The mindset from which participants approached the world is at least partially formed by their faith and partially by culture. Participants who claimed dichotomistic beliefs about God tended to be more exclusive in their relationships and viewed people as right or wrong in beliefs, behaviors, and lifestyles; whereas those who understood spirituality and faith to be framed by love or by a connection between all people, professed a more inclusive worldview.

Participants' stories contained two different approaches to their bubbles or worldviews. A majority described experiences of bursting out of the bubble that resulted in a change of ideology. Just over half of the study members demonstrated that they enjoyed the comfort of their bubble and resisted opportunities for ideological change.

Diversity Promotes Change

The majority of participants narrated experiences that resulted in ideological change over time. Carl expressed the concept best,

> I've had these types of conversations with hundreds of people, and there are always varying and different ideas and that's something that I really like. Often

I'm shocked when I hear a new idea about the world or spirituality. A lot of times I cast those ideas off, I think they are stupid, but a lot of times I think about those ideas, they get stuck in my head.

This section will explore the participants' encounters with diversity through liminal space, situations, education, introspection, and therapy.

Diversity through Liminal Space. Bryson introduced me to Richard Rohr's (2003) concept of liminal space. According to Bryson, "liminal space is when you have to move out of your environment, your space, in order to be transformed." Changes ensued for Bryson when he moved to college and encountered diverse ideas and people within the Christian groups he visited. He admitted, "That's what I needed. I needed to move, to change environments." Bryson remembered the bubble of his home church as being "artificial, the whole church experience was just not real." He enjoyed the church youth group while he was living at home. However, after being a part of a diverse group of people in college his perspective changed. In retrospection, he realized that in his home church,

There was nothing about real-world life going on there. It was just sort of protected. We'd go to camps, we would go have ice cream, we would go to this place, and that place, but we never did anything challenging. We never did anything that would make us challenge how we saw life. There were no visits to homeless shelters, there were no visits to a third world country, there were no visits to poor neighborhoods. If we ever went to somebody's house, it was a rich person's home in our church. It was all artificial.

The artifact Bryson brought to the interview was a topless hula dancer, symbolizing the exposure he has experienced as an emerging adult. Bryon's bubble began to break when he attended church one Sunday morning in Athens. The Sunday school teacher mentioned in passing that consuming alcohol in moderation was an acceptable activity for Christians. Bryson recalls being disgusted, declaring he would never go back to such a "liberal church." He voiced his revulsion to his parents, peers, and campus ministers. Now he laughs at holding such a narrow-minded opinion. He and Abby enjoy wine with dinner quite often. From Bryson's perspective, "experience and exposure are such important factors in growing in your faith. I don't really think I've traveled too far in my faith journey, but I think moving and changing environments was a big, big step."

Likewise, travel was a significant factor in perspective transformation for Carl. His bubble began bursting "when I went to Hawaii as a student missionary with BSU I found my faith challenged." In a conversation for a class project in 2008, Carl described those experiences. In lieu of narrating the experiences anew, he suggested I look back at the transcript from the previous interview. Below are some excerpts of that interview.

> I loved Hawaii and had a lot of great times there. I developed a dislike for the Southern Baptist church. I was living with a preacher and his wife. I thought the wife was great. She was very loving and comforting….The preacher I didn't enjoy at all. He was very demanding, saying this is how you are going to do things, this is what you are going to think, and this is how it's going to be. I think I mentioned I don't react well to authority, especially when I don't agree with it. I didn't agree with some of his conservative interpretations of the Bible, nor did I

agree with his general condemnations. That summer, I was a leader in the church. I got thrown into all of the politics of the church – who was dissing whom and all of the power struggles. I didn't see a lot of Jesus there. Another thing that was hard for me to reconcile was the preacher's son, who was not at that church, but was kind of a traveling preacher. He would come every now and then and do a bible study with the younger kids or the college age kids. I had tremendous respect for him…. He was a spiritual voice for God and a spiritual leader for me. I've never heard anyone pray like him before or since. It's hard for me to reconcile how he could be so revered and respect what he was doing and to see such a difference in his dad. [I began to ask] What is a Christian? What does it look like to be a Christian? What makes a Christian? Being in that church really started helping me determine not to be in church…. I experienced up close the faults that plague many churches. The people involved in that church really turned me off.

Being away from his normal environment, provided Carl an opportunity to compare his emerging ideas with the practices of the pastor and the congregation of the church where he worked. When he came back to Athens the following fall, he began asking more focused questions about how he could practice his Christian faith outside of a church setting.

Carl's travels provided him a diversity of cultures, ideas, and liminality to compare with his long held faith. He reflected,

I didn't want to get away from my faith, I just wanted to find a part of that faith, or the Southern Baptist religion or culture, or Christianity, or protestant American

Christianity, that more agreed with the way I thought the world should be and the

way I thought religion should work.

Though he has "let go" of his faith and embraced spirituality, he believes his current

lifestyle is more reflective of the religion Jesus taught in the New Testament and of the

faith he practiced before. In striving for ideals that were shaped by his former faith, Carl

said, "It is kind of a conundrum; I think I'm more Christian than lots of Christians out

there and I'm not a Christian."

After college, Braxton moved out west with a college friend to work and play in

the mountains of Colorado during ski season. He noted how the change of location

provided an environment for growth in this period of transition between college and

career. He had begun dating Kristen just prior to graduation. The liminality of the

situation provided space for Braxton to make some major life decisions.

We both saw enough potential to decide to keep dating. That three months [in

Colorado] was great for us because we were forced to talk a lot on the phone. We

had the opportunity to do some devotionals together on the phone. At the end of

those three months, I knew I was going to marry her. Not only from a dating

relationship, but also from a spiritual standpoint, being completely away and

removed, with a college friend and a girlfriend back home, was really a strong

period of spiritual growth for me.

Anna also experienced the perspective changing benefits of liminal space. After

their wedding, she and her husband moved to Atlanta. The rich diversity she encountered

in the new environment of "living in the city, living among people who were not like me"

provided a welcomed contrast to her previous life.

I grew up in a small North Georgia town. Everyone was the same. When I went to

Mercer, I immersed myself in people who were just like me. I went to Georgia

and did the same thing. I never created a world of diversity…and all of a sudden,

there was this big world that I'd never seen before, because I had kept a little tiny

universe. This city opened my eyes to being around homosexuals, being around

different races, and being around different socio-economic groups.

While Anna enjoyed the broader world around her she said, "I never let go of my

faith. Coming into the middle I brought my faith with me, just as a person being more

tolerant and more opened minded." She noted that her perspectives changed gradually. In

contrast, her husband enjoyed normalcy and routine. "We talked about it. He hated the

city. All of a sudden I was like, 'This is where I'm supposed to be! Where has this been

all my life?' The city lifestyle made me come alive." Anna's husband did not like

watching her worldview expand.

Anna enjoyed the freedom she experienced after their divorce. She dated a wide

variety of men, began going to bars and experiencing nightlife with friends, and

ultimately went back to school to obtain a master's degree. While navigating her newly

discovered freedom, Anna wondered about authenticity and faith. In a journal entry she

wrote,

What does it mean to be authentic? At school right now the buzz word is

Authentic Assessment, which means students prove their mastery of a standard in

a way other than a test or a quiz. This is difficult for a lot of teachers because it is

easier to tell whether the student got it by seeing his/her score. Skits, projects,

speeches, etc. are more challenging to assess, but they are authentic. Another

context I have heard is from a girl who spent her Saturday night as the designated driver for some seminary friends at a hip hop club. When telling me, she said she didn't feel very authentic. What does she mean by that? I wonder if it is in reference to the friends being in seminary. Or is it because they are Christians? What took her away from feeling authentic? I guess it is a combination of both. I can't help but ponder if I am authentic in my everyday life. Do I authentically represent Christ? Is there something different about me? Or do I blend in unauthentically?"

During the first interview, Anna told me of two pending events. Soon after the interview, she was moving to an eclectic part of Atlanta known for diversity. Later that summer she would be traveling to Europe by herself for three weeks to work in a conversational English workshop for business professionals. Anna said the trip was going to be a "religious experience." Though the journey was not religious in nature, she would be asserting her newfound independence and realized, "it's the biggest thing I've ever done. It's huge."

Anna indicated her worldview expanded after leaving the small town where she grew up. Now she reacts with horror at her parents' references to those who are different using pejorative colloquial terms and categories. The combination of the narrow perspectives of her parents and ex-husband, the recognition that she is a divorced Christian, and her experiences with a great diversity of people, accompanies her increasingly open faith that is focused on the love and acceptance of God for all people.

The artifact Rebekah presented during her first interview was her passport. Expressing the importance of liminality in her development she recalled, "I always tell

people that a major turning point was when I was in college and I studied abroad for the first time." While studying at Oxford through UGA's study abroad program, she lived with a family whose values and lifestyle was foreign. She asserted, "This was the first time I was really outside of my normal Southern Baptist community," and "I was used to only hanging out with people that went to church." She explained, "I thought the people that I was staying in the house with were all heathens!" The liminal experience of moving to a new place for school and work provided environments that were incubators for change.

> I feel like even the process of having to completely start over with everyone, you can't really hide behind the friends you have, you have to find new ones. It happened to me at work as well. When you are not tied to the people you were already hanging out with you are more open to the possibility of meeting people.

Talking about her spirituality was difficult for Rebekah in the first interview. There were several times that she became emotional, particularly when she related fractures in familial relationships resulting from her new ideology. She said,

> I don't think I always recognized that the changes in my worldview had anything to do with my faith. Maybe it's because I thought it was counter to my beliefs, or somehow, maybe even suggested that I had been wrong or was wrong, or whatever. Looking back on it now I see it as one big, continuous process, but for a while it seemed so irreconcilable that it might even be something that I couldn't be a part of, at least in the way that I always had been. I realized later that instead of having to throw everything out of the window it's just another way of thinking about it. [crying] It's very vague.

Rebekah concluded, "It seems like the more that I travel, which I have done a lot since college, I've realized that the world is a lot bigger than I thought it was when I was living in Georgia or South Carolina."

After his recent mission trip to Nepal, Chad reflected on what he learned. "I did not realize what wide-spread poverty was. I knew it on a cognitive level, but it's a completely different experience to see it and to see people living in that environment." He reflected, "It was weird to be surrounded by that intense poverty the whole time. We stayed at the nicest hotel in every town we visited, but sometimes the toilet would flush and sometimes it didn't. But we always had toilets." He told me of one experience,

> At one point, I was having a conversation with a guy and I made the statement that the economy in America is really bad right now. Later I thought, "That was stupid; what a dumb thing to say!" I'm annoyed because gas is higher than usual at home and this guy has to go pick rice so he has something to eat tonight.

Chad also worshiped with a group of Christians in a refugee camp. He explained, "In the refugee camp they didn't have electricity or running water. We went to church one Sunday. They did a responsive reading prayer. We pray for prosperity too, but when they prayed, they asked for clean water and electricity." Chad told me that he is still trying to process what he saw and experienced. He surmised that the trip would probably prompt him to be "more generous, if nothing else." In contrast to his own life, where he often complains about job satisfaction, "These people who didn't have anything were still happy. They had a sense of joy about them. I think for the people I met their joy is attributed to their faith."

On the mission trip the second year of her marriage, Jennifer realized, "I had given up my identity." Though her husband David was also on the trip, he was involved in medical clinics all day while Jennifer cared for the children of patients. As the week progressed, she became increasingly homesick, and found herself in a crisis of faith and identity. She told me, "I realized my whole identity, who I was, was that I am a mom to Joseph and I am David's wife, because that's all I had and that was my fault. I had put myself there." After she returned home, she spent time thinking about the identities she had constructed. Again, she turned to her faith and found meaning, she realized,

> What I "do" is I take care of my child. I am a mother. I am also David's wife. I had this big identity of being David's wife. I'm so proud of him. I am so proud to be on his arm. But I realized that's not who I am. I realized through this that I am a child of God. That is who I am. Other than that, everything else are just my jobs. So, I have really grown.

The liminality created by traveling to a foreign country provided Jennifer the required disequilibrium in which her newly constructed identities became apparent.

Stephanie enjoyed the experience of moving to college. In her hometown, she felt under that shadow of her well-known family. The youngest of a large, notable family, she felt she had little choice in determining activities, positions of leadership, and faith involvement. However, when she left for college, she recalled, "it was my choice every step of the way. Whether I went to BSU Gathering or not, whether I signed up for the ministry team or not. No one expected me to; I did it because I wanted to." College was "an extreme time of just me, by myself, nobody else." She was able to seek out those from whom she wanted to learn instead of having them introduced to her by her parents

or mentors. Though she chose to be involved in Christian activities, she reiterated that it was completely her choice and was not expected nor imposed on her. As a result, "There was a lot of growing at that point in my life."

Diversity through Situations. Some of the experiences mentioned previously could also be categorized in this sub-theme. Braxton told me about the difficulty he had leaving his Christian bubble and moving to Atlanta for a job removed from his Christian shelter.

> Honestly, Nate, you look back at the last ten years and eight of those ten have been in my professional career. It's a big transition to anyone going to a job and a career and that responsibility. I think it changed the way I thought about my faith in more of an introspective way. In college I was in my Christian bubble….When I got out into the working world, where it was very different than my Christian bubble, I saw the opportunity then to live [my faith]. I quickly saw that the way I lived, via my words, my actions, and just building relationships, was one of the biggest things I focused on and have continued to focus on over the past few years at work and in life in general. Particularly with non-Christians that I'm around, the more I can build those friendships and relationships, the more insight they get into my life. Conversations just happen, because of questions they ask, like "Why do you do something this way? That's really different from the way a lot of people do things."

Braxton continues to be involved in church and other religious activities, but he is the only practicing Christian in his office. While in college, much of his daily conversation with friends was mixed with discussions about God; however, now such

interactions rarely occur unless someone asks Braxton a question about his motivation that is at odds with normal business practices.

Bryson, who described his faith journey as being one of exposure, identified numerous situations that influenced his faith, "I think it took a while for me to understand that people can have different beliefs and still coexist." He believes that in the past ten years as an emerging adult he has become "more flexible and more open." Bryson confessed that he has struggled with self-righteous pride when considering others in his community who have not had his breadth of experience. To counter those feelings he has tried to accept people for who they are and learn from each person. The result has been a more meaningful sense of community.

Chad worked as a counselor for Centrifuge and Missionfuge (Mfuge) Christian day camps during and immediately following college. Prior to camp his faith experiences had only been expressed within his familiar youth group or through times of private prayer. "Working camp" introduced Chad to the idea and experience of serving others. The second of his artifacts brought to the first interview was a collage of photographs made for him by a friend from camp. He explained, "I could tell you a little story about just about every picture. The whole camp thing was really a big time of spiritual growth for me. It shows the time when I could really put my faith into action." His most meaningful experiences came while working in a small town in rural South Carolina. Pointing at one image, he added,

> I really like this little girl right here, her name is Lisa. She would sit and play with
> these little dome cones for hours at a time. At first, she was really mean. She
> would throw a stick at everybody and then one day I gave her an orange out of

one of the lunch boxes. After that she was really nice. She was really fun to be

around.

Typically sarcastic and distant, Chad explained that connecting with the children

in simple ways taught him that joy can be found in small acts of love and grace for

others, a lesson he tries to apply daily as a teacher. He told me he would like to go back

to that small town and see if he can find some of the children he worked with that

summer now that they are older.

Chad's cultural bubble burst when he graduated from college and moved into a

life dominated by his career. His former framework of friends and schedule that revolved

around activities of the BSU was gone. Instead, he learned that he had to make time for

spiritual activities. Chad had to determine if, when, and where he was going to go to

church. He told me that for two years after graduation he found the temptation to do

nothing spiritually too great to resist. After noticing a lack of focus in his life, he rejoined

church participation.

Emily, who described herself as "extremely antiviolence," had an experience

where several elements of her past and conflicting worldviews intersected. Her father,

paternal grandfather, and both maternal grandparents were in the military. Her maternal

grandparents are buried in Arlington Cemetery. When Emily was in seminary, her

grandmother died, and she was asked to officiate the graveside service. She remembered,

"I did my grandmother's funeral at Arlington when I was seven months pregnant with

Ray." Laughing, she said, "I thought the funeral director from Arlington was going to

have a stroke when we informed him that I was performing the funeral." She told me the

story:

My mom and her brothers asked me to do the funeral long before my grandmother

died. It was comical the way it all played out time-wise in my life with everything

else that was going on. I got about a third of the way through the pregnancy,

started having some anxiety issues, and had to take medication. I forgot to take

the medicine with me on the trip and didn't have to take it anymore. Does that not

make the whole thing even more bizarre? I went to something that I have all kinds

of conflicted feelings about, because we were burying my grandmother at a

military cemetery, I was pregnant and a woman doing a funeral at a place that is

very patriarchal. On top of it all, I forget to take my anxiety medication, realized I

don't need it anymore, and didn't have to take it again for eight months.

  I planned really hard. I thought that she wanted an Episcopal type funeral

done by the book. So I got out the 1922 Common Prayer book and that's what we

used. Then my uncle said he wanted to play some Irish music. When he started

playing, it was as if all of the words never even happened, the music came over

the entire thing. I thought, "Will anybody even remember what was said?" What

they would remember was that my grandmother would have loved this! I was so

worried, I was 27, very pregnant, showing up at Arlington to do this funeral, and

all of that totally disappeared. Why do funny things like that happen in our lives?

I guess so we can look back on them and laugh really, really hard. I think that

there were so many comical elements to that that any really deep down serious

ones get lost in the humor of the whole thing. It would have only been better if I

had been pregnant with Emily, because I think only another woman would be able

to enjoy that story. Whereas, if I told Ray that that happened when I was pregnant

I don't think that he will appreciate it. So I think that the only loss is that I should

have been pregnant with her when it all happened. Cause she would really laugh

at that in 20 years.

Emily continues to be conflicted about the issues of antiviolence and war. Her

father's experience in Vietnam as the only surviving member of his team left him feeling

immortal, yet emotionally distant. She told me while she respects individuals who serve

in the military she does not like wars and questions the government's use of military

force. In seminary, Emily studied Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in a New Testament class.

She was not able to verbalize the reasons that those passages confirmed her antiviolence

worldview. Emily said she experiences a deep somatic reaction when hearing of churches

that celebrate Independence Day with much fanfare during services of worship. In

addition, her husband Ray is an avid hunter. Emily cringed and grimaced when

anticipating the day he will introduce hunting to their son.

Emily indicated two additional situations since graduation that have prompted her

to realize that "there is a whole lot more variety in faith experience and worship than I

thought. I think when you're young you just figure most churches look the same, most

Christians look the same, most people believe relatively the same." She said when she

went to seminary she believed that those who are not supportive of women in ministry

were naive and wrong. After meeting and getting to know people who attend various

churches she has changed her mind. She said,

I now think I'm just really glad we live in a country where people have so many

options to find something that works for them. And if I have the freedom to find

something that works for me then I think everyone else should have the right to find what works for them.

Another experience that broadened her perspective occurred while working on a social work degree.

The second year of school we had to interview a family different from our family of origin. I was the youth minister at a church at the time and there were two men in the choir whom everyone presumed to be gay. No one knew for sure so I asked the church staff, "can you confirm for me?" They said, "We know they live at the same address, but if they are gay, they're not expressive of it at church." So I asked them. Fascinating. Fascinating! My only interaction up to that point with gay and lesbian couples was with young people who felt the need to be flamboyant. Point blank they asked, "Do you feel the need to go around and make sure everybody is aware that you are heterosexual?" I said, "No!" They said, "We just don't see any reason to talk about our relationship."

This experience demonstrated her previous assumptions were wrong. She learned that those she had considered outside of normative Christianity could also experience Christian faith.

In conversation with some Christian friends, Lucy also changed her perceptions about Christians and homosexuality. A mutual friend from church had begun telling people he is gay, "his background is very spiritual, and he's still very rah, rah in terms of his love for Christ." She explained, "We don't want him to feel shut out, we want to love him, we want to include him, we should get to know his boyfriend, and we should be loving friends." She is not ready to believe that a homosexual marriage is "sanctioned"

by God, but she thinks she would attend his wedding because she has been to weddings of heterosexual couples with which she did not completely agree.

Lucy faced a crisis following the flooding of the city in which she lives. Although her home was not damaged, many of her friends and neighbors lost everything. Because her home was spared, Lucy had to travel for work during the clean-up efforts. She secretly wished that her house had been damaged slightly so she could stay and help. She said, "I'd rather be here volunteering or figuring out some way to connect with my community." Instead, she had to make a music video. The crisis prompted her to think about making a movie where the main character struggles finding meaning in life, faith, and work as a young adult woman. She explained the story:

It's very parallel to what I'm feeling right now, but the whole idea was that this girl, for whatever circumstance has to pick up and leave, she's being pulled away, and the only place she knows to go is from this picture of a place that her parents went on an island. While there, she connects spiritually with a simpler way of living and with her faith in unbiased circumstances. I think that would parallel where I am. I get these feelings of connecting with something else, connecting with something that doesn't involve getting in my car every day, going to work, doing what I'm supposed to do, making a living, trying to have a 401-K, while going to the all-white church that's really big and has lots of money, and then only helping some people on the weekend. I kind of identify with how this character needs to get away from her stuff, from the idea that we have to make money and have things. It's more like, what is it doing for me and for God and for the world to put someone's picture on TV because they need to sell a record? Is

there something past this? Is there some place I can still use my gifts but can connect better?

Lucy has begun to wonder if she can discover new meaning in her current job or if she should resign and seek another way to make a living that incorporates her love for drama and film.

The spiritualities of Kate and Heather are yet to be defined; nevertheless, they both possess an inclusive worldview marked by loving behavior and openness to all people. Kate has begun to reexamine the faith that once was so vital to her. Her worldview is reactive against those who are not real in their practice of Christianity. She desires ideological and practical authenticity and is tired of those who pretend not to be interested in normal activities. In the first interview, Kate used the phrase "perfect Christian" while discussing her experiences as a member of a strong high school youth group, in BSU in college, and in her college church. When I inquired about the phrase in our second conversation, she expounded,

> I feel like there's this idea of what the perfect Christian looks like. I think I surrounded myself with people who really adhere to that role. I don't know if I am describing it right. They not only say things you shouldn't be doing, but also things you should be doing, like "quiet times." They had dumb, stupid names for things. I hate that….When we were on a hike, a retreat, anything away, it was how quick can they pull out the Bibles at bedtime just to show that they do their quiet times. I thought, "Whatever, you are thinking about your boyfriend now, you are not reading that scripture! I know you're not. Get out of here. Can't we just talk about girl stuff?"

Throughout her interviews, Kate criticized most Christians she knew as being "fake." When describing the type of church she thought she might attend, Kate said, "real, authentic" and "not fake." As a result, her worldview at the time of the interviews was one of open experientialism. She indicated a desire to return to an exploration of faith in the future, but was presently too focused on obtaining her accounting degree.

Although Heather's "agnostic with a side of salvation" faith continues to develop, she wants to emulate the open spirituality that is inclusive of what she has seen modeled by her heroes. At the same time, she is reactive and not as accepting of those who are intolerant because of narrow worldviews. She noted, "Anyone who uses the church as a means to look down on or pass judgment on someone…really depresses me." Furthermore, discovering that her father smoked marijuana until he was almost fifty years old demonstrated that living by such a restrictive, legalistic ideology was practically impossible. Heather's resulting worldview is one that favors the outcasts or marginalized in society, particularly incorporating those who are not members of exclusive mainline Christianity.

Heather, who describes herself as a Christian who likes homosexuals and who wrote she is "Agnostic with a side of salvation" on the demographic form for this study, stated that she used to believe "Hanging out with conservative Christians just isn't as much fun." She developed that perception while a part of a megachurch in her hometown. That belief also influenced her belief that south Georgians were ignorant and backwards. In contrast, her involvement with BSU in college demonstrated that not all Christians are alike in their expression of faith. She found camaraderie with some like-minded Christian friends. She also said, "I met some really cool South Georgians, which is probably why I

love South Georgia now. Although she does not openly discuss her faith, she maintained, "My friends know that I'm a Christian."

"Struggle never stops," Heather suggested. After thinking a moment about the way her faith has changed in the past ten years she rearticulated,

I think priming is an interesting word; you spend four years growing in faith and developing faith, but then you spend the rest of your life really testing it. Not to say that college isn't a time where faith is tested, certainly it is, especially if you're solipsistic; but when you are in more of a sheltered environment, which BSU can be, when you come out if that you think, "Whoa, what?"

The juxtapositions of Heather's family, members of her home church, friends at BSU, and relationships after graduation created complex conflicts of people and ideas in which Heather sought to make meaning. Because of the complexity of these influences, she has not been able to reach accommodations between faith and relationships. As a result, her spirituality has become stymied with paralysis of expression and experience.

Thomas reflected on the faith crisis he created when he chose to have sex before marriage. The legalistic faith he brought into emerging adulthood was insufficient to navigate the emotional and spiritual turmoil of such a great perceived moral failure. The artifact Thomas brought with him to the first interview was a graphical rendition of the key he had received as a gift from a mentor at church. The skeleton key, embellished with the Christian symbols of a cross and a fish, was to symbolize chastity and purity for Thomas. After his employer asked him to have sex with someone to win a sale, he resigned his lucrative job in international sales. Thomas returned to college to complete

prerequisites for medical school. He was lonely much of the time because he was significantly older than his classmates. He lamented,

> I ended up with this girl and I lost my virginity before I was married. That would be the struggle that I feel like affected me the worst. If I could go back and change it I would, but you know, hindsight is 20/20. I look back at it and I think, I lost the key, figuratively and literally, I lost the key. Even though I passed that first challenge, I was unsuccessful in the end.

Thomas has not been able to experience faith as he did before that event. He wondered how he could continue to be a Christian after consciously choosing to commit such an obvious sin against God.

Diversity through Education. Formal educational pursuits and informal self-directed learning through books and listening to sermons have also provided juxtapositions of ideologies for participants. Anna said one of the reasons she left her husband is that he did not want to learn how to be a better marriage partner. Though the couple received a plethora of resources regarding marriage and sex, he would not read or discuss any of it. Anna and Heather both stated that Atticus Finch, from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), was a hero for their faith. Bryson noted that he would never go to seminary, but he enjoyed learning from those who have been. The current and former pastors of the church Bryson attends provide ready responses to his queries. Bryson also enjoys reading. He introduced me to Richard Rohr (2003) and Wendell Berry (2000) and provided the term "liminal" for this study. Thomas's faith has been affected by his formal scientific education, giving him further reason to doubt his Christian beliefs. However, he has found the intellectual arguments of Lee Strobel's (1998) *The Case for Christ* to be

compelling. Rebekah said learning to think critically during law school has transferred to thinking deeply and critically about her beliefs and practices. Reading *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Manning, 1990) with her small group in college introduced Rebekah to the idea that Christianity was primarily a non-judgmental gospel of grace. Heather also found Manning's book helpful after being introduced to it at a church in Athens. Carl has been pursuing spiritual knowledge since arriving in Athens for college. His search has led him away from his Christian faith, although he acknowledged that he might return to it in the future. At the time of the second interview he was experimenting with "letting go." An avid reader, Carl has a journal in which he inscribes quotes that he finds significant. He emailed me some selected entries that related to his spiritual pilgrimage. He describes himself as "a deeply spiritual non-believer," a paraphrase from an Einstein quote inscribed in the quote-book, "I'm a deeply religious non-believer."

Chad enjoys the intellectual aspect of Christianity, reading classics of Baptist theology as well as works that are more current. One of the artifacts he brought was a sermon by Paris Reidhead (1980), labeled on an internet search as "the greatest sermon ever preached." Chad said since he first heard the message in college he has listened to it fifty or sixty times. The first time he heard it he cried. He explained, "It sort of helps me understand and explain why I do the things I do, whether they are in some ministry, or in teaching, or anything like that." In the sermon Reidhead asked,

> What is the standard of success? And by what are we going to judge our lives and
> our ministries? And the question that you are going to ask yourself is: Is God an
> end or is he a means? And you have to decide very early in your Christian life
> whether you are viewing God as an end or a means.

Later in the homily, he provided the answer to his earlier query.

> I say to you, dear Christian, if you do not know the fullness of the Holy Ghost, come and present your body a living sacrifice and let him fill you so that he can have the purpose for his coming fulfilled in you and get glory through your life. It is not what you are going to get out of God, it is what [he is] going to get out of you. Let's be done, once and for all, with utilitarian Christianity that makes God a means instead of the glorious end that he is. Let's resign. Let's tell Micah we are through. We are no longer going to be as priests serving for 10 shekels and a shirt. Let's tell the tribe of Dan we are through and let's come and cast ourselves at the feet of the nail-pierced Son of God and tell him that we are going to obey him, and love him, and serve him as long as we live because he is worthy.

Chad told me that he listens to the sermon "usually when I go to bed" whenever he is embarking upon a new ministry, starting a new school year, or going on a mission trip. The message has helped him to stay focused on God instead of on lesser things.

Chad also acknowledged, "I try to have a couple of books going at a time. I feel like I'm not growing spiritually unless I'm learning. I just feel like that's a big thing for me." He continued, "When I'm not reading something that is challenging for me I don't feel like I'm learning anything; I don't feel like I'm thinking about God enough. I really have to have something to think about, to ponder." From A.W. Pink's (1975) *Attributes of God*, he learned that "God doesn't act on a singular point, it's more of a big line or a push across everything." Reading Packer's (1993) *Knowing God*, "helped me to realize that it is so important that I develop an image of God independent of my own preconceived notions." The classic, *Mere Christianity* (Lewis, 2001) "helped me deal

with the issue of right and wrong." *Desiring God* (Piper, 2003) taught Chad that "I have to bring my pleasures from the cross." He asked me if I wanted him to provide more books and illustrations. I told him these were sufficient.

Emily is the most highly educated participant in this study. She has earned dual master's degrees since graduation from college. As noted above, her search for knowledge has not provided her with answers to her deepest questions, but has only given her more to consider. She told me she would constantly be in school if she had the wherewithal. Instead, she reads voraciously. She described the calming effect reading the works of Henri Nouwen had on her spirit when she was struggling with depression and anxiety, as he too suffered from those ailments. Emily has also found a kinship with Anne Lamott's (1999) work. The author's unconventional, honest approach to faith has been an encouragement to Emily as she struggles to live her faith daily.

Diversity through introspection. Change is usually related to a combination of experience and introspection. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Anna said she actively pursued self-knowledge. Through reading, praying, thinking, and journaling she attempted to understand her preferences, passions, and ideology. She explained, "It has turned me into a very opinionated person." Rebekah is a deep thinker and is "pensive." During law school, she learned to cook and bake to provide opportunities to ponder her ideologies. Jennifer describes herself as "very philosophical." Mornings between waking and getting out of bed provide her with essential time for introspective pause and prayer. Braxton has a chair by his computer at home where he spends the first waking hour of each day. He reads the Bible, prays, journals, and reads devotional literature. Likewise, Chris has developed a habit of reading daily personal devotionals. One of the reasons

Bryson enjoys farm life is the opportunity for mindless work where he can listen to music on his personal audio device and think. The slow speed of his daily routine encourages introspection. He said, "Quality usually happens when things are going slow." Nevertheless, he longs for answers to his many questions. He admitted, "I don't feel like I have any answers. I read things and I hear people say things and I think, "Yeah, that is right, that's exactly right, that's what I think too." Although, in times of personal reflection he often becomes confused, "but I think I would rather be confused than to have God stuffed into a box and be sure."

Carl said second only to travel, contemplatively listing to lyrics in music have influenced his current ideology the most. He supposed the reason is that musicians discuss topics that are taboo in other venues. The combination of getting lost in the music supplemented by the lyrical undertones has stimulated introspection. After the first interview, Carl forwarded a list of lyrics he has found to be the most influential. Foremost on the list was Michael Franti, a reggae and Indie Rock artist. During the second interview, Carl explained why the artist and his lyrics have been such an inspiration for him. He quoted *Hello Bonjour* (Franti & Itene, 2006),

> I got faith in the sky, faith in the one
>
> faith in the people rockin' underneath the sun
>
> 'cause every bit of land is a holy land
>
> and every drop of water is a holy water
>
> and every single child is a son or a daughter
>
> of the one earth mama and the one earth papa, so
>
> don´t tell a man that he can´t come here

'cause he got brown eyes and a wavy kind of hair,

And don´t tell a woman that she can´t go there

because she prays a little different to a god up there,

    (Chorus)

You say you´re a Christian ´cause God made you,

You say you´re a Muslim ´cause God made you,

You say you´re a Hindu and the next man a Jew

And we all kill each other 'cause god told us to? NAH!

Carl asserted that the lyrics gave voice to his experiences while traveling and meeting folks from many different expressions of faith. Claims to divine exclusivity are repulsive to him; "Especially when it comes to Jewish and Christian and Muslim, because we have the same God. Often those three groups have fought each other over the past several thousand years under the name of the same God." He told me about a friend who was placed on the "do not fly list" and was unable to return to the United States to defend his dissertation at Brown University, only because "he got brown eyes and a wavy kind of hair."

Likewise, the Eagles' tune *Last Resort* (Frey & Henley, 1976) "shocked" him the first time he heard it, "because it went against what I was supposed to believe." The lyrics describe the "rich white man" coming to the United States with his religion, killing and driving out the Native Americans while worshipping his God of love. Carl has identified "more and more" with the song in the past ten years of listening to it. In my last conversation with Carl, he told me that while he is an American by citizenship, he identifies more with Europeans ideologically.

In contrast, Kate has attempted to rekindle feelings associated with the faith of her early emerging adulthood. She began listening to her old contemporary Christian music compact disks in the car as she used to do. Instead of finding comfort and passion followed by prayer and introspection, she felt silly. When she stopped practicing her faith in college, Kate admitted that she was "tired of faking it." Her attempts at "being real" and honest about her doubts and desires were met with disapproval by her peers, so she stopped thinking about it. "I try not to think about it much," she confessed. One of the reasons she was interested in participating in this research study was to provide her a frame within which she could "think about this stuff again." She has realized that introspection will assist in determining what, if anything, to do with faith and spirituality in the future.

Diversity through counseling. As mentioned earlier, formal therapy with licensed counselors assisted Heather and Anna in their spiritual development. Heather sought a therapist when one of the campus ministers at BSU offered to refer her and pay for her sessions. The experience with a Christian therapist helped her to understand that the differences between her expression of spirituality and her parents' was acceptable. Anna went to marriage therapy with her husband. When the therapist noticed that joint sessions were not assisting the couple, she began to meet with Anna separately. Through the process, Anna learned of her unhealthy enmeshing between her role as a wife and her understanding of God and view of her husband.

Emily sought therapy when her panic attacks began while in graduate school. Since then she has worked with several therapists and psychiatrists. While the therapists assisted her in understanding the psychological core of her depression and anxiety, she

was only recently able to apply the lessons through awareness of the stressors that produce rising levels of anxiety. In the second interview, she said she has been able to retard anxiety attacks without medication and without the need for additional counseling.

The juxtaposition of ideologies and experiences resulted in a change of perception for most participants. This bursting of the confines of the "bubbles" of culture most often was not immediate, but was a process of change occurring over time, supported by each successive disorienting experience.

Resisting Movement Out of the Bubble

While most participants noted changes after encountering ideas that pushed the edges of their ideological bubble, some chose to return to their comfortable perspective. This subtheme is marked by unquestioning acceptance of one's sense of normal and right or by a return to one's bubble after examining the available options. Carl explained that one's bubble consists of "the filters you put up, whether it is friends, or family, or whatever. Everyone puts up filters for what they want to let in and what they don't want to let in." Although his perspectives have changed significantly while an emerging adult, even Carl has a bubble. He illustrated this in the last interview.

> I think it's much healthier for me to live in the culture that I'm living in. I think
>
> that's just one of the aspects of it. I get really *inquieto*, or restless in the United
>
> States, but not just restless, I get restless in my mind. I just get absorbed; I let the
>
> world absorb me in the there. When I come [back to Europe] it's a lot easier for
>
> me here to become *tranquillo,* more at peace.

As a result, Carl returns to the United States less each year.

Lucy first experienced the bursting of a bubble when she moved as a senior in high school. However, at UGA she found another bubble in and with her friends at BSU. After college graduation she left her college bubble and moved to a new city with a BSU friend. Instead of exploring new experiences there, she and her roommate found a church-based ministry much like the BSU. They served as leaders there for five years. Lucy met her husband while volunteering in the church. Though she works in the very diverse environment of the entertainment industry, in many ways Lucy remained ensconced in a comfortable ideological bubble.

Even though Heather seeks to live inside of her bubble, she has built a protective wall around her to shield her from her former ideology. She told me that because the world is filled with so much noise, "I want to create a place that is free of negativity" at home and on Internet social network sites. She divulged, "I think there is something to be said for managing our experiences. Especially on the internet, there is just so much negativity out there. And I already have enough of that." As liberal and open-minded as Heather has become, she still seeks to protect herself from what she considers negative ideology.

> I'm not saying I want to live in a world where everyone agrees with me, but there is enough negativity in the world and if I can shield myself from it, I'm going to do that, even if it's something that somebody believes that just irritates me. Nothing I say is going to change what they believe, so I might as well not be irritated about it.

During our conversation, she told me she thought it was normal for people to create protective enclaves for their worldview. Heather appears stymied by faith and

spirituality. Though she refers to herself as a Christian, she cannot negotiate intellectually or emotively the gulf between her beliefs and the practices of those she considers heroes of faith. During the interviews, she talked about the mystical comfort that so many friends receive from their religious practice, yet she has been unable to find or to create such a faith in her own life. Heather's Christianity is more about social connections and rarely includes a connection with the divine. In her experience there is a paralyzing gulf between her present spirituality and what she desires, expects, and sees in other people's lives. As a result, Heather does not pursue faith.

Although Braxton was the first to apply the term "bubble" to his life, he has never really left the idyllic comfort of his Christian worldview. His faith artifact was the journal in which he scribes his daily prayers and documents experiences and struggles. He explained,

> When I look back on my journals, the biggest take away that I get is God's
> faithfulness….What my memento represents to me is that no matter where I am in
> life, if I look back, no matter what the circumstance, God is always faithful.

When Braxton worked as a summer camp counselor in college, he missed Christian camaraderie, so he asked friends from the BSU at UGA to come work with him.

> There's a lot of individual growth that took place in me up there. I was the only
> Christian up there before I recruited Bryson, Ben, and Andrew. That was honestly
> one of the reasons that I wanted to bring those guys up there, because I wanted to
> have an influence, and those were guys that lived the same kind of life I did. I saw
> the benefit that having those guys up there did for other counselors and kids. It

wasn't a Christian camp but that kinda made it that spiritual place for me and I experienced a lot of growth during that time.

Although Braxton enjoyed the camp experience, during college his perspective shifted towards Christianity. When working at camp he missed the support he received from his friends and roommates at college. He told me that he and his friends met daily in his cabin for Bible study. As a result, over the course of the summer several other camp staff members became Christians.

Stephanie admitted to living a protected life. She traveled overseas for the first time a year before these interviews as a youth chaperone on a church mission trip. Despite spending a week living and working with people in a third world culture, her memories of the trip are about what the youth from her church learned, not about what the experiences taught her. When asking about spiritual places, a later theme, Stephanie told me it was "home." Unexpectedly, for Stephanie "home" is not where she lives, but her parent's house, nestled in a small town in the North Georgia mountains. Mentioned above, Stephanie's parents understood the value of surrounding their daughter with a "village" of people who would nurture her into adulthood. Although she has thought critically about her faith and ideology, she noted that she has never had any experience or personal crisis to encourage doubts or questioning. Christians even surround her at the office in her work to raise funds for a national healthcare foundation. The majority of Stephanie's social activities are at church or with church or college friends. She lives and works in a cultural bubble.

Participant responses to the juxtaposition of ideas and experiences counter to those of their cultural bubble are varied. A majority of those in this study allow the new

experience to burst the bubble, resulting in an expanded perspective or ideology. However, others enjoy the enclave of ideological protection offered by their cultural bubble. The result is little change in perspective, theology, or faith practice.

Theme Three: Significance of Emerging Adult Faith is Indicated and Influenced by Activities

It is evident that the activities of all fourteen participants are indicative of their faith; however, it is not clear if this is cause or effect. Does one's faith deepen as a result of participation in certain activities, or are one's activities determined by one's depth of faith? Both perspectives are supported by the data in this study.

While participating in various activities influenced the faith and spirituality of participants, six noted the ways a lack of participation affected or was indicative of their fervor. Thomas admitted he does not practice the activities that were present when his faith was most active. He told me he could identify the periods when his faith was most important by examining his journal entries. The gaps between notations indicated the times when his faith waned. He acknowledged that it had been months since the last entry. Similarly, Kate said, "I think subconsciously, I just don't have enough desire at this point," to begin practicing "those disciplines in my life" again. She has "too many other things to be disciplined about." However, she has begun to have faith-based conversations more often and did attend church once this year with a friend. She appears to be flirting with Christian activities, and hopes to one day "find a relationship" with God that "works for me," but is in no hurry, feeling God is patient and is waiting for her to figure out a manner in which she is comfortable incorporating Christianity into her life again. In the same way, Chad readily noted the influence working long hours has had on

his faith practice. Faith practices that resulted in feelings of connectedness and focus were easily abandoned when he was coaching two sports. Though he did not want to give up coaching, he felt God wanted him to make some changes and orchestrated events so he would have more time and energy for Christian disciplines and church attendance. While Anna confirmed that faith has been a river that runs through her whole life, she also admitted that it has been "too easy" to leave behind faith practices "that she should be doing" because of relationships or situations. Anna's breaks from faith practices occurred when dating men for whom faith was not a priority.

This section outlines the ways activities influence faith and spirituality of the participants in this study. The subthemes of answering a vocation, attending a church, operationalizing one's faith, and pursuing meditative practices are discussed below.

Answering a Vocation

The narratives of eleven participants demonstrated a sense of divinely inspired vocation, or a calling, on their lives or careers. Both Bryson and Carl shared a Frederick Buechner (1973, p. 95) quote in their interview that they heard in college. Bryson recalled,

> It's not specific to farming, but my favorite quote is in the Parker Palmer (1998) book. Buechner said, "Your vocation should be where your deep joy meets the world's deep need." For us, for Abby and me, we feel we are exactly where we are supposed to be. We are so joyful when we are farming, and, like many things, one of the needs of the world is good food. It seems like we are pretty in line with what we are called to do. It seems when your soul is at ease with where you are

everyday, with what your goals are, and with what you are trying to pursue, it

makes that relationship with Christ a little closer.

Likewise, Carl explained his sense of vocation:

The president from McAfee spoke and he gave a very simple quote about

vocation, "where your deep joy meets the world's deep needs." I like a Howard

Thurmond quote even more. It says, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what

makes you come alive. Come alive and go and do it. Because what the world

needs is people that have come alive." If you are not embracing what is around

you, then you are not alive, you are just living but are not experiencing the best of

life.

In college, Carl discovered that travel made him come alive, so he formulated a plan to

alternate work in the United States with extended adventures in South America. He

employed tutors while overseas to learn Spanish. Currently he lives and works in Europe

and South America conducting tours into countries where Spanish is the primary

language.

Anna and Chad believe that God created them to be public school teachers. Chad

explained, "I feel like it is sort of a calling to help these kids be better people, to help

these kids become intellectuals, because I feel like something the church lacks is

intellectuals, especially in the realm of science." Anna admitted that her own personal

struggles from high school motivate her at work as a middle school English teacher.

I remember being on the bathroom floor and crying and not wanting to go to

school and being so overwhelmed with insecurity. I can see that in my kids, so I

just try to love on them. I don't know if I would still be that way if I wasn't a

Christian. I don't know how to separate being loving apart from my faith.

Although Anna must take care in discussing religious topics with her pupils, because of

her faith, she says, "I love on those kids and invest in them and pour into them and build

relationships with them while sharing this beautiful language with them."

Thomas and Heather have changed career plans since graduating from college.

When Thomas arrived at the University of Georgia, he was a premedical student. He

mentioned that in returning to school to become a physician he has come back to what he

was "always supposed to be doing." Heather contended that she "stumbled upon" graphic

design three years after she graduated from college after being a writer and editor for

several magazines and newspapers. She said, "It feels really good to use gifts that he has

given me" and to be doing what "I know he called me to do." While working with the

drama ministries of BSU, Lucy discovered a passion for directing and producing that she

continues to use in her career. She acknowledged that God has gifted her with a love and

a need for drama in life and work.

A sense of divine vocation is illustrative of the way the faith and spirituality of

participants is incorporated across roles and identities. As will be discussed later, the idea

that one was created to perform a task or engage in a specific career has provided

motivation for participants in times of stress. Such a perspective also served to enhance

the faith of those in this study. Believing that "God has created me for this" can also

support and enhance one's faith and spirituality.

Attending a Church

The most obvious faith related activity for many Christians is attending church. Eight of the participants in this study stated that church attendance and participation has been a vital aspect of faith. As she began her narrative, Stephanie listed the churches of which she has been a member since high school, as if such participation defined her faith identity. While attending worship services is important, being involved in activities of service, "doing something" and "giving back," gives "meaning to the service." She said she has enjoyed her spiritual experiences lately "mostly because it's not just about me." Stephanie observed that she and her husband, "have found our place for the rest of our life" in the church they attend. In the same way, Chris noticed that not only attending church services, but also being involved in multiple church-based activities helped him to be more engaged with his faith.

Conversely, Heather has not been attending church. She observed, "if you're not in the context of other people who are, seeking and are active with their faith, it's easy to fall out of it." After not attending a church for four years following college graduation, she also stopped thinking about matters of faith. Heather explained how that changed two years ago:

> I got up one Easter Sunday morning and went to church. I hadn't done that in 5 years. I've always loved the Easter service. Aside from how it's a nice day to go and 'people watch,' I love it – the message, love it! It's just so hopeful and wonderful. I lived near this church over in Inman Park. It's this beautiful old building. It wasn't some sort of Earth shattering event where angels came through the windows and spoke to me or anything. But it was a really positive experience

and it got me thinking about faith again. I've got questions and I've got problems

with it, but then things like that are really comforting to me. I think that's sort of

an ongoing discussion in my head. I feel bad that in two years I haven't come up

with an answer.

Heather said she has continued to think about faith matters since then; however,

she has not given it sufficient consideration to warrant finding a church where she would

be comfortable and where she might find an avenue to explore her spirituality further.

Since her family wants her to be active in church, Heather wonders why she has not

found a place to attend; "I don't know why I haven't put more energy into that. It's not

that I think it would be a bad idea."

The level of church attendance and participation corresponds to the importance of

faith for a majority of participants in this study. For those members, church attendance is

regular when faith is deemed vital. Seven participants did not indicate that church

attendance was an important aspect of faith or spirituality; however, the interview

protocol did not specifically ask about church attendance, but only about "important faith

activities." Two participants began their response asking, "Do you mean in addition to

church?" More than eight participants discussed church related activities. Perhaps others

assumed that I would deduce the importance of church attendance or participation from

their interview transcripts.

Operationalizing One's Faith

Seven participants indicated that volunteering in venues other than church has

been important to their experience of faith or spirituality. Chad anticipated that his recent

mission trip to Nepal would prompt new depths of faith and experience, though he

admitted that such changes would take time. Heather told of volunteering in several community programs. She volunteers in a literacy program at a local school assisting an elementary school child in writing a biographical story about a family member. While the experience was not quite the fun experience that Heather expected, she observed, "even if Tina and I are not super close, there is still some good energy going out into the world." Heather also worked with the Beltline Project of Atlanta, helping children in the summer program construct murals that were installed around Atlanta. After the installation, the teachers and students travelled around the city to see their work. Of both experiences, Heather boasted that she was proud to have helped some children gain a sense of agency.

As mentioned in detail above, Braxton has been involved in work with younger men and boys throughout emerging adulthood. In addition to teaching Sunday school at church, he has found it important to have "those younger men in my life that I can pour into that I can help initiate through manhood at whatever stage, at whatever point."

While in Law School, Rebekah began experiencing the joy of showing hospitality to her classmates. She explained that since she could not find a church to attend she began to bake to provide a creative outlet as well as time to think critically. She gave all of what she made away. "I didn't even want to eat it," she reflected; "I liked making it, I like creating it, and I liked how it felt to give it to somebody else." Two expressions of faith for Rebekah are showing hospitality and practicing kindness. Both of our conversations were conducted using Skype video conferencing. As she sat on her sofa I could read a quote, attributed to Ettiene De Grellet, on the wall behind her:

I expect to pass through this world but once;

Any good thing therefore that I can do,

Or any kindness that I can show to any fellow creature,

Let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it,

For I shall not pass this way again.

When I asked her about it, she agreed that the quote summed up her perspective of serving others. Rebekah, who enjoys her pro bono legal work where she has fought against marriage inequality, said, "I've always thought it just comes down to love. It seems like that is the prominent theme of the New Testament."

In the same way, Bryson's reading of the New Testament in college greatly influenced his burgeoning theology of love for all people. His is a natural or organic faith that centers on God's creation of the world as "good." Working with his hands on the farm, growing food, and living in close proximity to those with whom he finds meaningful community has furthered his understanding that everyone should live in like manner, appreciating each other as people. As quoted on his profile in the previous chapter, Bryson said, "I finally realized that my job is to…. love people for who they are just because they are people." Bryson said he enjoys doing "useless things" for people. "Useless things" is a phrase he discovered in *Jayber Crow*, a novel by Wendell Berry (2000). One of the characters in the book took time each day to pet the mangy town dog, an act that really didn't matter to anyone but the dog. Bryson said he wanted to be someone who takes the time to cut someone's yard while they are on vacation, who feeds stray dogs, or who delivers food to someone after surgery. He wants to be known for "doing the little things that are insignificant and seem useless, but really make someone's day. It would be nice to be remembered as someone who sacrificed time to do things for others."

On several occasions, Bryson referred to the sense of community he has discovered in the rural area where he and his wife live. While we were talking during the second interview, a neighbor wandered to the farm. He began loudly instructing Abby on how to complete her chores. Bryson commented that most people find the man to be annoying, but Bryson explained that he is very knowledgeable about repairing and operating all farm equipment. Instead of being offended by his constant opinions, Bryson and Abby decided to humor the neighbor and ask for his advice and assistance.

The couple also hosts monthly dinners on their farm, attend monthly community potluck suppers in town, and enjoy fellowship events with church members. He told me,

> Tonight we were at a social where we played softball in somebody's front yard
> and had ice cream. It's fun living in a community where Abby and I walk to
> church, we live about half a mile away. A lot of the folks from church come by
> the farm to buy food. About 99% of people in the church live in a three or four
> mile radius, so this is our community.

He continued,

> It almost feels like I'm in this idealistic world. It's not a commune we live in, but
> it's typical, rural America; we don't lock our doors, we know everybody, we
> worship together, we eat together, we do a lot of things together. Even if our faith
> never comes up in conversation, if we don't ever talk about different ideas or
> biblical concepts, it's reassuring and joyful to be in the presence of other folks in
> our neighborhood.

Such activities and experiences quietly feed Bryson's spirit without calling a lot of attention to him.

Bryson's best friend Carl noted that he wanted to be a "vessel of love," an idea emanating directly from his spirituality. Carl said the worldview that motivates his activities is best expressed in the lyrics of three songs. The Eagles (Henley & Frey, 2003), *Hole in the World* declares the problem:

Until we learn to love one another,

We'll never reach the promised land.

There's a hole in the world tonight.

There's a cloud of fear and sorrow.

There's a hole in the world tonight.

Don't let there be a hole in the world tomorrow.

Carl told me his ideas are resonated by Jason Mraz (2008):

Well open up your mind and see like me,

Open up your plans and damn you're free.

Look into your heart and you'll find love, love, love, love.

Listen to the music of the moment baby sing with me,

I love peace for melody,

And it's our God-forsaken right to be loved love loved love loved.

The answer to the world's dilemmas for Carl is found in the Beatles (Lennon & McCartney, 1967) classic, "All you need is love, love, love is all you need." Quoting a biblical passage from Galatians 5:22-23, Carl claimed his former Christian faith provided him the values on which he continues to base his life:

I still try to shape my life around the "fruits of the spirit", "love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control." But for

me it doesn't have any sort of religious or even a spiritual aspect anymore. I think

it's positive for me and for the world that I practice those things.

Carl has taken the foundational values he learned as a Christian while abandoning his

former affiliation and identity as a believer of the Christian faith or "Southern Baptist

Religion."

His concept of being a vessel of love is an amalgamation of ideas gleaned through

religious practice, conversations with others, and expansive reading. Being a vessel of

love is active as well as passive. For Carl it involves being open to love everywhere in the

world, but also giving love to others through spiritual connections and acts of service and

kindness. Being a vessel of love leads Carl to be charitable and to focus more on others

than on himself. Unlike most in this study, Carl does not volunteer through a church or

formal organization. He tries to be a vessel of love through daily actions at work, among

his neighbors, and with those he encounters while traveling.

Almost half of the participants identified volunteering as an expression of their

faith or spirituality. The venues varied from public community activities, to traveling to

another country, to feeding stray dogs. In addition to being an expression of faith or

spirituality, often each action reciprocally benefited the volunteer on a spiritual level.

Pursuing Meditative Practices

Seven of the fourteen members of this study mentioned participation in meditative

activities, such as praying, meditating, exercising, & journaling. Anna told me that she

rises early each morning to have a quiet time, consisting of praying, journaling, reading

her Bible, and memorizing scripture. Demonstrating that she tries to recall verses

throughout the day she recited Psalm 19:14, "May the words of my mouth and the

meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."
Anna also told me that when she is "in the right place" spiritually she has more "quiet
thoughts," or prayers, during the day.

Bryson finds time doing mindless chores at the farm has provided him with
opportunities to pray; "I think it offers a lot of time for reflection and meditation. That is
something that I don't do a lot of, so that's nice." Reading often inspires meditation and
deep thinking about his life and activities. He has found the works of Wendell Barry, who
is a farmer, an author, and a Christian, to be both inspiriting and thought provoking.

Chad spends time in prayer to help him be "a little more at peace" about the stress
in his life. He defined prayer as "having a conversation with God." In response to my
question about how he hears God speak to him he said, "I don't feel like I directly hear
something back. It's more like he puts things in my path in order to direct my faith in the
right direction." Chad has also found the need at times to get away from home and
journal about his deepest struggles; "Sometimes I just write out my thoughts. Usually it
ends up being a conversational piece between God and me. I guess that's usually the
voice I write in; It's like I'm talking to God."

As mentioned above, Jennifer said, "I also need some type of quiet time every
day. I try to take five minutes, it may be 30, before I get out of bed and I say some type of
prayer. For me that is something that I have to do. It's important." Braxton has a chair
beside his desk at home where he spends the first part of each day praying, reading
scripture, and recording his thoughts, concerns, and God's faithfulness in his journal.
Chris has incorporated a daily morning quiet time into his routine where he reads a
devotional and scripture and tries to pray throughout the day. He confessed, "When I'm

frustrated all I can do is to pray about it. I ask for peace, work out, and try to get things off my mind." Chris believes his faith and the resultant values have cost him promotions and advancements at work. He said, "I'll follow my faith before doing that just to make a sale." The practice of daily prayer helps him to remain grounded in the midst of the daily stresses of work. Emily has "become a big lectionary reader." She said printing out Episcopal and Presbyterian devotions to read has been a helpful part of beginning each day. The practice has provided a balanced approach to reading scripture and praying about things she would normally avoid. Although Kate does not have a regular meditative practice, she admitted that she finds herself praying during the day about little stresses and pending tests at school.

Carl has discovered that being in nature has provided the best venue for him to be contemplative. He acknowledged,

> sometimes it happens in 20-30 minutes, sometimes it takes several hours, sometimes it takes a few days, but letting myself go and just looking inside, looking to what I see and what I feel and what I think is important for me and important for the world, I think that's a very spiritual practice for me. I feel like I am becoming more connected with the spirit of the world, or the energy, or with God or whatever you want to call it.

Carl has also been doing Yoga over the past few years. While he began the practice for exercise, he has enjoyed the meditative aspect of the discipline. It has enabled him "to calm my spirit to be able to connect to the spiritual world or to at least see inside of myself, and to open myself up to…to the spiritual to what I can't see and feel."

Attending concerts and getting lost in music through dance has also been a spiritual activity that he discovered. He described the experience.

> Sometimes I just get caught up in the dance, in the music. First, I lose the self-consciousness of what some people are going to think about some idiot dancing, and then I just lose the fact of even where I am and I get left with the music and with the dancing. And I like to close my eyes a lot when I dance. I don't know why. But it's almost like a meditative, trance-like state. I don't want to say it's a trance, exactly, but it's like a trance-like state where you are lost in the world of joy and dancing and music and everything else just disappears. I don't seek out the specific moment, but I seek out the types of concerts or the types of music or the environment where I know those things can happen. Sometimes they happen and sometimes they don't. I put myself in places where it's likely that they can happen. I don't think it's a moment that you can seek out.

As noted earlier, Carl is very introspective. He needs periods of contemplation to order his thoughts and to gain self-understanding.

Though Lucy did not discuss the importance of a daily activity for her faith, she mentioned times when she feels a "need to connect" and the resulting "conversations" she has with God asking God to "help me figure this out, show me what you want me to do, give me some clarity, peace, courage." It is on such occasions that she begins "to open up and listen a little bit more," when "I'm looking and listening for God. I'm looking and listening for the right thing, to open the Bible to the right verse or something, I'm trying to find something that engages my relationship so I can connect." For Lucy, moments of deep connection are serendipitous. She explained,

I'm not a good logical person. I'm all emotion [laughs & gestures to her watering

eyes], clearly, anything that's dramatic connects with me. I need those big

moments. I'm not feeling connected when everything seems mundane. I just do

better when I'm listening to my emotions and learning to connect with them.

When things are day-to-day and smooth and quiet, I just tend to not be connected,

I tend to not look for answers, and I don't pray regularly or think about God,

because I can just relax, I don't have to think. It's not that I feed the drama, but I

like it. Even simply tooling around on our boat over the weekend and seeing a

beautiful sunset is the kind of thing that I need to feel connected. The way that

sun set, at that particular moment, with those colors, was enough for me to have a

connection with God, because I think "this is heaven, this is what heaven looks

like." Just to have a peaceful moment where I feel, "Oh my God, he's actually

going to let me snuggle with him today!" Just to have that connection is important

for me.

Dramatic encounters provide Lucy meditative, prayerful interludes in her otherwise

routine life.

Half of the participants noted meditative practices that have influenced or

emerged from their faith or spirituality. Such prayerful or introspective experiences

provide pauses from the busyness of the day to collect their thoughts and order their

world. For some participants, such times involve seeking divine guidance through

relational conversational prayer.

The emerging adults in this study demonstrated that participation in faith-based or

spiritual activities is both indicative of and influential on the value of faith and spirituality

for their lives. When engaged in spiritual activities faith is deemed more important. Conversely, faith and spirituality are not as important when there is a lack of involvement.

Theme Four: Emerging Adult Faith is Influenced by Mystical Experiences

The narratives of all fourteen participants included mystical experiences. While most of these events involved perceived mystical, or transcendent, encounters with God, all participants readily described places they considered to be "holy," or distinctly "spiritual." This section includes the subcategories of holy places, encounters with "other," and intuitive knowing.

Experiencing Holy Places

One of the questions in the interview protocol asked, "Are there any places that you consider to be holy or spiritual?" All of the participants described places that were holy. Most of these were associated with nature or being outside. Jennifer and Braxton mentioned camps they attended and at which they worked as being holy because of memories associated with those places. Carl said, "Nature is by far the most spiritual place" for me. Bryson claimed the farm had become a holy place. He explained,

> Everyday we're working with the earth, we're in the soil, we're in the air, we're amidst the trees and the grasses and animals, so just being in the middle of God's creation and being a part of that every single day would definitely fit into my faith.

Bryson also noted that when he went to Hawaii for the year-long internship, he felt like he was living in paradise.

Anna's experience as a young emerging adult attending camp at the beach has marked that spot as holy. Emily grew up near the coast. For her beach feels like home, but experiences in beach settings also helped to mark the sand and surf as holy. She explained,

> When I was 17 and became a Christian, we had been going to church for about three months. We went on a beach retreat near our home. I think that I can tell you the exact moment that I experienced God for the first time. It all kind of clicked together. I was sitting on a sand dune, and it was like, "huh? This was always all in there and I've just not been able to recognize it?" Ron and I were engaged on a beach. It's still a very spiritual place for me – the smell of it, sound of it, the whole thing. The first summer I worked MissionFuge camp was at the beach. I spent a lot of time actually on the beach while I was there, went out there stupidly late at night once we let all the campers go to bed, was out at the beach from 11-1 o'clock at night, lots of nights, just being at the beach.

Emily said she wants to write, but to do so she will need a house on the beach to feed her spirit and inspire creativity.

"The water is really big for me," Lucy told me. "I love canoeing and kayaking and swimming and boating and the whole thing, there is just something about the power of that element that's really big for me." She traced experiences that involved water from childhood until the present where water has "been almost a lifetime kind of obsession." As mentioned earlier, seeing a sunset over the water can inspire a deep sense of spiritual connection for Lucy that is like a hug from the divine. In the same way, the beach or the mountains, "somewhere that's just away from all the buildings and concrete" has allowed

Chris to "become a little closer to God." He told me of experiences hiking out west or watching a sunset on a cruise in the Caribbean that were spiritual highlights.

While working one summer at a retreat center in North Carolina, Chad discovered a place to which he still returns to think, pray, and gain perspective. He told me, "I can take you to a spot right now that is hands down my favorite." That summer he led weekly hikes to the top of a nearby mountain. He explained that at the pinnacle,

> There's this little place, if you follow the path around the side, this little place where the rock juts out and you can sit down on the edge; I've spent a lot of time on that little rock up there. For me that's the place that I really like to go to since then. For a while, I tried to go every year, but I didn't go this past year. I'd drive all the way up there just to climb that mountain, to get alone, to think, and to pray.

Chad has been unable to find a substitute place closer to home.

For Stephanie, "home," the area surrounding her parent's home where she grew up is the most spiritual place on earth. She grew up in the mountains of North Georgia. Her parents house is not what is so compelling, she explained, "I mean the physical beauty of the mountains, the fresh air, the quietness of it, just the tranquility of the location…it represents where I started, but more. It's Home." Stephanie said that a song by Miranda Lambert (Douglas & Shamblin, 2009), *The House that Built Me*, describes her feelings; "Recently, I have not been able to stop listening to that song. I think the reason I love it so much is that no matter where I am in life, home will be home to me."

Braxton mentioned three places that he considers to be holy. The first is "out west." He said "I feel like I connect with God in creation." He described some transitional "key moments" of his that occurred in natural settings. In addition, Braxton

noted that the chair in his office where he prays and meditates each morning is his "quiet-time-with-God spot."

"You know, being on stage for me is kind of a faith enhancing experience," Heather said. It is not a connection to the divine for her, but "seeing all of these disparate people coming together to act in concert, to perform this thing, I mean I get a rush doing it, obviously, but for that even to happen, it's like a miracle, almost." She explained she continues to be drawn to theater because of that spiritual component. "It just requires so much work of everyone to put out this singular thing, in some ways I think that can correlate to church; just feeling like I am a part of something larger feels deeply spiritual to me." In a similar fashion, Heather said that anytime "disparate things" come together it is a spiritual experience for her. She noted as spiritual the times at work when projects seemed impossible, but "came together" at the last moment.

Rebekah, who presented her passport as the artifact characteristic of her faith journey, described the impact traveling to "beautiful places" all over the world have had on her spirituality.

> Most recently, I was in Greece and everything you see is just perfect. Even places I've been that were manmade are inspiring. On my trip to Cambodia after I took the bar exam there were all these temples that were a thousand years old and had been abandoned for six hundred years. It's just amazing. I feel like seeing the wonders of creation touches my spirit. In Europe there's all those crazy, giant cathedrals that have taken hundreds of years to build…there are few reasons that people will go to that much effort to make something. It's the same thing as the

temples in Cambodia, people were spending all this time and effort to create

something to remember and honor whatever higher being they worship.

Rebekah feels a spiritual connection in those places. One of the main reasons she travels

is to feed her spirit through adventurous experiences and incredible sights. She was

introduced to international travel after graduating from high school, "I went to Australia

and New Zealand for a month. That was my first big trip without my parents. As an 18

year old I realized that was something that made me really happy."

Thomas and Kate answered that their most spiritual places were impossible to

recreate. For Thomas, it was the experience of being in his youth group at church as a

teenager. When he returns there now, he does not feel the same spiritual connection. Kate

responded, "In my car, which I don't have any more, I sold it. I just remember listening

to music in my car really connected me to God." She told me she recently tried to

recapture those feelings in her new car by listening to her old compact disks, but it made

her feel silly.

Specific locations have been spiritual for most participants in this study. While

the next two subcategories are not specifically about location, each experience occurred

in a particular place that resulted in a designation of "special," "spiritual," or "holy" by

the participant.

Experiencing the "Other"

Seven participants described specific mystical encounters as being significant

moments in their faith or spiritual journeys. Lucy said she has experienced God's

presence through her younger sister, who suffers from several chronic illnesses. The joy

possessed by her sister in the midst of such a difficult life has shown Lucy God's very

nature. Likewise, Emily experienced God through giving birth to and nursing her children. Chris said that he felt God's presence at two points in his life. One was when he was hospitalized in college and was facing major lung surgery. He said God intervened and he did not have to have the surgery. Again, when he and his wife were trying to sell their home Chris said he had to rely on God's will and exercise patience. God gave him "a peace" that allowed him to relax and have faith that the house would sell "according to God's time."

The most profound moment in Anna's life occurred at the beach when she was twenty years old. The event was mentioned several times in previous themes, but it is also applicable here. After her mentor accused her of being selfish for her recurring negative thoughts, Anna remembered,

> I actually felt God as a physical presence. I've never had an experience like that since. Most people I've told about that night probably didn't believe me, because I would have never believed it before I experienced it. It was an absolute physical presence. It was by far the most monumental night of my life, not just spiritual night of my life, but just huge, huge.

The divine encounter was foundational for Anna's future moments of self-discovery. Each time she discussed new personal developments in the interviews she referred to the realization that she is a child of a God who loves her and likes her, "and rejoices over me with singing."

Heather recalled her experience in college floating down the river at midnight with the rest of the BSU leadership team as "such a beautiful moment for me and for my faith. It was just – awesome!" However, she confessed that such moments have "been so

elusive for me and I don't quite know why." Heather also referred to more recent mystical experiences where she has felt God inspiring her or "telling her" to do something that she would not ordinarily want to do. A self-described "selfish person," Heather said that motivations to help others must be "Christ."

When Bryson was in Hawaii, he spent "three or four days on the coast hiking and walking" alone. The time was "an excellent experience with God." I conducted the second interview with Bryson on his farm. When I asked about spiritual experiences he looked around and gestured, "just living here, in this area, for the past couple of years has been a very spiritual experience." He described moments spent with God while weeding or doing other "mindless" chores that have deepened his feelings of being connected with God and others.

Thomas told me about a key event in his spiritual growth. When he was in middle school his father was demoted at work. As a result, his family went into deep debt. In desperation his father took the family to visit Thomas's maternal grandparents. It was an emotional event in Thomas's memory.

> I saw my dad talking to my mom's dad about needing help. My grandfather is awesome; This guy is just incredible. You want to talk about a spiritual place in my life, it's there. My dad was having this conversation, and my mom's dad helped him out so much spiritually by just talking to him, but also financially [Thomas paused, choked with emotion]. We were driving back, they lived two hours away, and I remember seeing my dad cry. He didn't want to leave. He looked at my mom and said, "I just don't know if I can do this" [his voice broke again]. "I don't know if I can make it, make it at all. I don't know if I can leave

here and make it with our lives. I don't know if I can handle it." God, it just

brings it back; I remember being in the car. I prayed to God, I said, "God, I will

give myself completely to you right now if you help my dad." A month later, he

got a job in Atlanta, making twice what he was making in his old job, it was more

money than he had ever made in his life. Answered prayer! It's tough to talk

about. That was the beginning of my spiritual journey.

Thomas told me he recalled that moment in the car after our first interview. He

remembered being in the car at age thirteen,

I had this visualization of myself and I see this invisible wall. There was nothing

else in this dream, it's just me and this invisible wall. On one side of the wall is

me and my world that I'm not giving to God. On the other side of the wall is the

idea that I am giving everything to God. Now the only catch is that once I cross

the wall, I can't come back. I remember sitting in the car thinking about that, "Is

this really want I want to do?" I remember being so taken with what my dad was

doing that I chose; right there in the car I said, "Alright God, I've crossed the

wall." I remember making that decision and realizing at that point that I can't take

it back. I've crossed the point of no return. But at the same time, every couple of

years, I will think about that moment and know that God really kept his promise

to me.

Although Thomas has recurring doubts about intellectual proofs for God's existence,

remembering that moment has kept his faith alive.

These examples demonstrate that mystical encounters can influence faith development and practice. Though alone none of these experiences was sufficient to carry faith through a lifetime, each one anchored and gave meaning to future experiences.

Trusting and Living with Intuitive Knowing

Another mystical aspect of faith and spiritually demonstrated by participants in this study is trusting and living with intuitive knowing (Slee, 2004), the inexplicable idea that something is correct, valid, or true. For instance, in describing her relationship with God, Kate said, "I don't think [God] is just sitting waiting in the corner, because he does reveal himself to me in little ways that slowly allow me to go, 'Oh, that is how I feel about that.'" Notwithstanding, it was difficult for her to explain what she believed about God; "I know I sound frustrated. This is the first time I have tried to talk about these things." In contrast, Stephanie talked about how God has protected her and surrounded her with people to guide her. Emily told how "extremely blessed" she has been. When she attempted to qualify what she meant, she could not find words to express her ideas clearly. Emily and Anna described their faith using the metaphor of a river or stream that flows through their lives. Likewise, Rebekah said it has been obvious that God has been involved throughout her life, though sometimes each day it is not so easy to notice it. She said,

> Reflecting back, seeing how I've ended up here and the thousands of arbitrary
> decisions that I've made in my life that pointed one way or the other, they all
> seem like they come together. Being in New York City was a whim in itself
> because I was trying so hard to be in Atlanta. I knew I was supposed to be here
> the second I arrived. I feel like it was like one of those times where someone

knew better. It was something that I only saw in hindsight. It's always been like that for me. Even with what the next step is going to be, I know it will work of right, the way things always come together for me.

In the same way, Jennifer said, "There are very few things in life that I know, that I can look back and know that God did these certain things, but I know God gave us Joseph and Aaron and this child" [in reference to her current pregnancy]. She said she sees God in the small aspects of her life, as well as the big parts. Jennifer continued,

One way I know God loves me is that I have David, a human that is not related to me who can love me despite of my ickiness – I am icky – that has to be God, and there has been no doubt in my mind about that. It's so comforting to have a few things in life that I am very confident about.

The inexplicable events in her life have been easier to navigate because she attributed them to God. Though she does not intellectually understand why some things in her life occurred, her faith allows her to proclaim with confidence that God caused them. Even in the pain of the moment, that explanation has been sufficient for her. This was most evident when she narrated the experience of her unplanned pregnancy before college graduation. Though she described the emotional pain and embarrassment of that period, she was able to say, "I never doubted that it all happened for a reason." For her the reason was, "God's will."

Chris discussed not understanding what God was doing when his house would not sell or when he did not earn raises or promotions at work. Braxton spoke of the pain of his wife's miscarriage before they were able to have a child. Though he still does not understand why it occurred, he dismisses the question with, "It was God's will." Thomas

expressed a mixture of faith and doubt when looking at those who suffer even though they are committed Christians. He wondered if such experiences suggested that God is not real. However, he said faith is about trusting when he does not understand or have all of the answers.

Mystical or intuitive knowing through faith was demonstrated by most of the participants in this study. Recalling events that can be attributed to God has bolstered the beliefs of those mentioned above. Similarly, encounters with the divine and visiting holy or spiritual places were important aspects of faith experience for study participants.

Theme Five: Faith is Influenced and Motivated by Emerging Adults' Hopes and Dreams

All of the participants in this study described ways their faith influenced their hopes and dreams for the future. When I asked, "How do you think your faith will change in ten years" and, "How do you want to be remembered," most responded with answers of generativity (McAdams, 1996). However, data for this theme emerged primarily from answers to other questions or in the course of general conversation.

Braxton recently completed a legacy assignment with his mentor. As a result, he provided a well-organized, succinct answer when I asked how he wanted to be remembered. He had four hopes for the future. First, he wanted to be an excellent husband. Second, Braxton hoped to be a good Christian role model for his children. He realized,

> Their view of Christ and his love is going to be what they see every day in our house, seeing how we treat them and how we treat each other. We want to teach them about God and about relationships, but we have to back that up with our

lives and our actions. One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is showing them how much we love and care for each other as their parents.

Braxton wanted to model his parenting style on that of his father-in-law, not his own father. Third, he wished, "to be known as a guy who was always pouring into those younger than him." Recently, he worked with middle school boys at church; however, "Ten or twenty years from now I hope to be in the situation that my mentor is in with me." He wanted to constantly teach other men how to live their lives with Jesus as the center. He continued, "I have a heart for seeing the development of a man. It's important for me to be finding those younger men in my life that I can pour into, that I can help initiate through manhood." Fourth, Braxton wanted to be known as someone who was generous in all areas of his life; "not just from a monetary, tithing standpoint, but generous with my time, with my talents, with everything that God has given me and blessed me with." He concluded, "Summed up in all of those is influencing others for Christ and hopefully planting seeds along the way and winning a few lives here and there through my day to day life."

Anna said she hopes to be married in ten years, "living a life where faith is an integral part." After the past few dating relationships she said, "I've realized I'll either be alone and content with my spirituality or I'll be married in that same place. I'm so much happier when that's part of my life, when I'm in active pursuit of a relationship with God." After the failure of her first marriage, she now foresees a relationship where she and a future husband will live, "a life of mutual respect, encouragement, and putting the other first."

"I think I want people to know that I am a good Christian guy that has good views and lives my life in that way," Chris asserted, "but who is also liked by everybody, who is easy to get along with. I'm just a simple person." He said God wants him to be vocal about his beliefs. As a result, everyone at work knows Chris is "living my life for God." Having a child has changed the way Chris practices his faith, "I'm much more responsible about doing the things I need to do now."

Stephanie said she wanted to be remembered as a compassionate person who made a difference in people's lives; "I definitely think the older I get the more that becomes important to me." She traced a line of compassion through "all facets of life, politics and religion and every area." She complained that most Christians "don't truly get what showing God's love means…and misinterpret what tolerance actually means." Stephanie's parents modeled the type of love modeled by Jesus, where every person is valued. For example, [hitting the table for emphasis]

> They were so conservative, and they were so strong in their beliefs and did not waver... there is not a single person in any walk of life, who have made any decision, who my parents do not love and love on and have ever shown anything but love for. And I think that's what I saw, is that you can have a moral stance on something and still tolerate someone else who either lives differently or has a different belief, or whatever, because God made both of you and loves both of you just the same and I think that's what we miss.

As a result of her parent's example, Stephanie said she desired to be the same way. She has struggled with how to put her beliefs and desires into practice. She has found it

difficult to have strong faith-based convictions while being a compassionate, tolerant person.

I think that's more of what God was trying to say, by "love others and love God." He meant it. You don't actually have to agree with them to show God's love to others. I grew up Southern Baptist. One of the things about the Southern Baptist church that has made me the most mad, what they get in the news for is not that they believe a certain way, but that they have come out publically with this announcement which comes across as a condemnation. There's a difference for me about holding a belief and condemning someone. But what homosexual person ever will set foot in a Southern Baptist church when they publically condemned them? The church automatically separated them from God's love. I always had an issue with the way the Southern Baptist Convention made announcements about stances they were taking, because it never came across as done in love. It always came across as a bunch of crotchety men in a room who were making decisions. And I think that's the way Christians usually come across.

In contrast, Stephanie said she wanted to be known as a person with compassion for all people.

Emily wanted to be remembered as a person of integrity. She realized that her views might change in the future, but she said she always wants to be able to have a professional career helping others while caring for her family in a healthy manner. She and Ron have tried to model their relationship on their Christian faith. Both Emily's and Ron's parents divorced while Emily and Ron were in college. Emily believed the reason was both sets of parents focused entirely on their children, and not on building and

growing their marriage. Emily and Ron are intentional about having dates where they do not discuss the children, but seek to know each other better. Emily wants to be a supportive wife to Ron as he seeks to minister to wealthy businesspersons with whom he works. She is not comfortable is such settings, but is more at home with the poor she encounters in her job as a social worker. Emily also wants to be able to preach regularly in a church. However, as a matter of integrity, she said, "I'm not capable of determining the truth all the time. So the burden of preaching in front of a hundred people is somewhat intimidating because I know I will tell them a lie at some point while I'm preaching." Emily is afraid that as a pastor she would focus solely on issues that are important to her, not the truths the congregation needs to hear.

Jennifer, a stay at home mom, reflected her current roles and responsibilities in her answer. She said,

I don't want to just be somebody who lived a good life and died. I would hope that people would say I loved deeply and forgave deeply, completely, freely, and without regrets. I hope that they would say I had a deep faith. I hope that our faith will be passed along to our children and grandchildren. I hope that God can use me to teach my children and that they would teach their grandchildren. That this big old world that we live in will not suffocate their faith out…I would love for one of my grandchildren to say, 'My grandma is my hero because she loved God.' I mean that would be a great accomplishment.

A mother desiring to influence her children and grandchildren is the epitome of generativity; however, Jennifer would also like to return to the BSU and speak to current

students about her experiences and failures in order to help them avoid the same fate. She informed me,

> I would like to come back to give my testimony to the BSU, saying "Ya'll need to stop acting like that! Seriously, be open with each other! Love each other, lift each other up, encourage each other, and don't let each other get away with things!" I want to tell people sometimes that it doesn't have to be that way, you don't have to go through certain hard times if you help each other and don't turn your head pretending you don't know what is going on with each other! I think I hid it pretty well, but there were also friends of mine who looked the other way. I intentionally surrounded myself with people who were not going to say anything to me. I intentionally stepped back from people like that who would criticize me and hold me accountable.

She does not want current Christian students to make the same mistakes that she made, and if her experiences can help them, she wants to be able to tell her story.

Lucy, who described herself as dramatic and emotional, told me, "In all honesty, I want to be remembered as somebody who can make you laugh. I get a real rush for coming up with something funny and being like, "I came up with something funny!" and then repeating my joke at least two more times until everybody knows that it was funny." Because she is such a dramatic and emotional person, she likes to bring joviality and excitement to everyone's life.

When I asked Rebekah how she wanted to be remembered, she replied, "I guess at this point, I want to be remembered as a genuine person who cared about people." She has pondered hosting a study group to talk about faith issues and current events. Instead

of replicating Bible studies like she has been a part of in the past, Rebekah said it would have to be a book study.

> Here you are much more likely to find a book group than a Bible study. Everyone likes book groups. I was going to call it a conversation group, it was going to be for a lot of different kinds of people to get together and talk about current events and also spiritual things. I've been thinking about it for six months. I haven't done anything about it yet. It's a commitment. I'll do it eventually. I just have to figure out which day of my schedule I can definitely set aside.

She explained that commitments always seem like a good idea until after she has made one. Rebekah has a long-term goal of opening a pastry or pie shop after attending culinary school. A current reassignment for her boyfriend might provide the opportunity to move to France, buy a Chalet, and convert it into a bed and breakfast. While she enjoys dreaming about the future, she is very optimistic, believing that "somehow, I feel like everything will come together."

> When I asked Kate, "Where do you see yourself in ten years?" Her response was immediate. Without a break she said, "Shit, I have no idea. I don't know. I know I want to raise my family in church." She concluded, "I don't really think about it that much to be honest with you. I'm just sort of seeing how it goes. I don't force it, so I don't know; I don't have an answer to that question." Later, when she talked about visiting a church recently with a friend, she said,

> I'm interested to see how I would be at church. I'm interested to see how I would evolve. I know at first I would feel nervous, almost like I don't belong, or I've been gone for too long and now they are letting me back in, like a misfit, but if I

was there, probably with any commitment I would just push past that feeling. I would like to see what activities I would choose to do and how I would plug-in and get involved. I'm interested to see that.

Kate imagined that when she finishes her degree she would find a church that is comfortable where the people are "real."

Chris and Chad voiced their generativity in comments quoted previously. Chris wants to be remembered for doing "small things" for people, doing things that do not seem to matter, except to the recipient. He enjoys cutting grass for neighbors when they go out of town and depositing fresh vegetables on the doorsteps of those who cannot easily leave their homes. Chad wants to help his students become intellectual Christians who are not afraid to learn science.

Unlike those above, Carl, Heather, and Thomas did not reference Christianity when they talked about their desired futures. Carl, who described himself as a "deeply spiritual, non-believer," did not present desires much different from the Christians in this study. He said,

> I want to be remembered as someone who was sincere, someone who tried to make the most out of life, someone who followed his passions and dreams, someone who lived, not guided by culture or the world, but guided by his own passions and his own convictions. I want to be someone who enjoyed life and who tried to make the world a better place and tried to give more back to the world than he took from the world. I want to be known as someone who wasn't selfish.

Heather hopes to define her spirituality more clearly in the future, but she also wants to have an impact on people's lives through volunteering. She wants to be remembered for being kind and trying to help people. In the second interview, she was contemplating volunteering with the fifth and sixth-grade policy debate team at a local school. She said,

> I am thinking about volunteering for that, just being in these kid's lives. Debate was a big intellectual exercise for me when I was in school. I remember, there were so many things that were awkward for me scholastically, but you meet so many other different types of people doing debates. It was a really positive experience for me. I think being able to help with something like that would be cool.

Voicing her desire to be generative, Heather wondered, "Who knows, maybe I will meet some kid who I just really connect with."

"What I don't want to be is a failure," Thomas observed; "I don't want to be the guy who looks back on his life and says, 'Man, I'm ashamed of that.'" In contrast, he said he wants to live a life like his maternal Grandfather:

> He's getting up there in age and is recovering from some back surgery. He and my grandmother got rid of their two recliners and they got a loveseat recliner so they can sit together. He knows this is coming. Because of the pain he has in his back, he knows he has maybe a decade. So, he is spending his time doing things with my grandmother, loving her, staying close. Instead of sitting in two separate chairs they sit together. He'll call us. I got a call from him yesterday. He'll call us every week to see how we are. He's on his way out and he realizes it. He gave me

a loan for college. I said, "Look, I want to pay you back. I want there to be some kind of interest on it." He laughed at me. I realized later, he is not expecting anything. The reason I bring that up is that I want to be able to live the end of my days like he is doing.

Thomas wants to live the advice of his friend who said, "Find a sense of urgency for your life." Though he is still wondering how he can still be a Christian after losing "the key" and having sex before marriage, he wants his life to have meaning and purpose. During the second interview, Thomas wrote down a statement I made. After discussing his Myers-Briggs personality inventory, I commented that he seems to desire a black and white faith, but he does not have a black and white personality. His stated personality typically enjoys change, flexibility, and drama. He wondered if he would be able to explore ways he could rediscover flexibility in his understanding and experience of Christianity.

The participants in this study all voiced a desire for generativity that emerged from their expressed faith or spirituality. Some of the hopes and dreams for a better future were obvious, such as parents wanting to provide an ideal atmosphere for their children or professionals desiring to make a difference through their careers. Other goals presented by participants were more obscure.

Chapter Summary

The themes identified in this chapter illustrate the diverse ways faith development is navigated during emerging adulthood. The experiences of the fourteen participants in this study demonstrate that faith is not static, but changes through human interaction,

juxtaposition of experiences, participation in activities, mystical experiences, and dreams

for a better future. The next chapter will discuss these themes in relation to the literature.

CHAPTER 6:

DISCUSSION

"I think this is when most people give up on their stories. They come out of college wanting to change the world, wanting to get married, wanting to have kids and change the way people buy office supplies. But they get into the middle and discover it was harder than they thought. They can't see the distant shore anymore, and they wonder if their paddling is moving them forward. None of the trees behind them are getting smaller and none of the trees ahead are getting bigger….and they go looking for an easier story"
– Donald Miller (2010, p. 214).

Stanley Hauerwas (1980), frustrated with current epigenetic stage models of human development and faith development, proposed an exploration into the diverse ways Christians compose their lives to integrate personal and corporate narratives, which include spirituality and faith, into a cohesive story. The faith biographies in chapter four and the findings in chapter five illustrate the diverse ways the emerging adult participants of this study connected the dots (McAdams, 2003) of faith and life. To date, little research has been conducted examining the transition of Christian emerging adults from college into young adulthood.

The purpose of this narrative study was to gain understanding into the faith development of Christian emerging adults after graduation from college. Emerging adulthood has been defined as the period of life between adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). All of the participants in this study defined faith as believing and trusting in God without scientific proof. For them faith was a religious term that implied a relationship with a divine Other.

Three questions guided the narrative interview process and data analysis. First, how does the faith of Christian emerging adults change after college graduation? Second, how do emerging adults negotiate the relationship between faith and identity? Third, what happens in the experience and expression of faith during emerging adulthood?

The fourteen participants in this study were members of Protestant churches during high school and college. They are graduates of the University of Georgia where, as students, they served as leaders in Baptist Student Union (BSU), a Christian collegiate ministry. Most members of this study were introduced to the Christian faith as children within conservative Southern Baptist families. There is a culture of personal and communal study, introspection, and prayer within this conservative evangelical community, primarily located in the "Bible Belt" of the Southeastern United States. Devotees are encouraged to seek guidance and find meaning and purpose for every area of their lives from their faith (Willard, 1998). Within BSU, each student leader is mentored, or "discipled," by a seminary educated professional campus minister employed by the Executive Committee of the Georgia Baptist Convention. The influence of this discipling in early emerging adulthood was evident in the findings and results of this research. Therefore, the results of this study do not reflect the general population or even most religious or Christian emerging adults.

Five key findings were presented in chapter five. First, faith was influenced by each participant's relationship with others. Second, the *bubble* constructed by each participant influenced faith. The *bubble* is the cultural environment that gives meaning to one's life and experiences while providing insulation from influences contrary to one's chosen or preferred perspective. Third, the significance of faith was indicated and

influenced by each participant's activities. Fourth, each participant's faith was influenced by mystical experiences. Fifth, for the emerging adults in this study, faith development was influenced and motivated by his or her hopes and dreams for the future. In this chapter, conclusions will be presented that were derived from these findings. Implications for research and practice will also be discussed.

Conclusions

Four conclusions were derived from the findings of this research study (see Table 20). First, for the participants in this study, faith was operationalized. Faith that did not

Table 20

Summary of Conclusions

Conclusion	Description	Informed by Themes	Addressing Research Questions
1. Faith was operationalized	• Participants desired a faith that worked • Participants desired a loving faith	1, 3, 4, 5	1 & 3
2. Faith remained vital	• Twelve participants actively pursued faith or spirituality • Faith was vital even if not attending church	1, 3, 5	1 & 3
3. Faith and identity were negotiated	• Faith identity is found in the *bubble* concept • Something happened to challenge the *bubble* • Faith identity was negotiated within the *bubble*	1, 2, 4, 5	2
4. Self-authorship was a continuous narrative process mediated through experience and relationships	• Self-authoring was not reactive, but was self-constructed or self-authored. • Self-authoring was a relational process • Self-authoring occurred within the *bubble*	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	1, 2 & 3

work within individual contexts, or was deemed unloving, was changed or abandoned.

Second, faith remained vital after college for those in this study, even for those not

attending church or not participating in traditional faith practices. Third, the fourteen

participants in this study negotiated identities that included faith. For the majority of

participants, faith was central to their identity that was found in the *bubble* concept.

Fourth, self-authorship was a continuous narrative process mediated through experience

and relationships. The process of self-authorship described by the participants in this

study was different from that discussed in the literature (Baxter Magolda, 1998a, 2007;

Kegan, 1994). Self-authorship occurred in various ways, and ultimately was not achieved

with finality, but was a narrative process that continued throughout emerging adulthood,

dependent upon and influenced by the constructed *bubble*. In the final section, I will

discuss implications for future research and practice.

Conclusion One: Faith was Operationalized

The late emerging adults in this study actively sought to operationalize their faith

after graduation from college. Though they defined faith as believing in something you

cannot see or prove, each participant told of the ways their faith influenced their activities

and relationships in addition to their ideologies. Faith was more than a set of religious

beliefs or practices reserved for church attendance. Similar to Fowler's (1981) idea, faith

was conceived of as a verb. *Faithing* was living out Christian beliefs in a struggle to

become more loving, trusting, and kind.

The operationalizing of beliefs provided an opportunity to test the validity of

faith, to deepen the experience and meaning of faith, or to abandon individual

components of one's ideology in lieu of those that worked. In her journal, Anna debated

the meaning of an "authentic faith," a faith that was operationalizable, that influenced even the smallest decisions and actions. Similarly, Kate said she was tired of "being fake." She wanted a faith that was "real" or "authentic," not forced, and did not put on a show for the sake of others. The idea of desiring an authentic, operationalizable faith characterized all of the participants in this study.

In many cases, the participants' systems of belief were found to be insufficient for life after college when they encountered the plurality of ideas, experiences, and diverse relationships found outside of what Carl called the "Christian bubble." Though not voiced, two questions emerged during data analysis that guided the participants' operationalization of faith: Is it working and is it loving?

Is It Working?

For members of this study, an authentic faith was one that could be successfully operationalized and expressed through their life experiences. The participants voiced many ways of expressing their beliefs. A faith that worked was one that was more open to consider diverse perspectives and relationships. It was also a faith that provided a healthy balance to life.

More open & relational. A faith that worked for the participants was one that could easily fit existing relationships and activities. As a result, such a faith was less religious and more relational than it was in high school and college. Herein, less religious means not as creedal or propositional, and not as tied to a particular church, denomination, or doctrinal statement or rules of behavior. The four participants that defined religion said it was a negative term, believing religious institutions to be more concerned with structure and rules than with members living lives of grace. For instance,

although Lucy's faith tradition taught that homosexuality was a sin, she refused to condemn or disassociate with a friend from church who "came out" and announced that he was gay. She chose to adapt her beliefs rather than judge him as wrong and abandon the relationship, saying that if he were wrong, God would have to judge him because she would not. She said she would consider attending his wedding if he decided to marry. Likewise, Rebekah no longer attended a Southern Baptist Church because to her Southern Baptists were defined by what they were against. Rebekah, a feminist Christian, who was also a lawyer, said equality was one of her primary concerns. At work she sought to fight injustices against gay men and lesbian women, particularly in court battles against the *Defense of Marriage Act*. She joined the church of which she is a member because of the social causes the church supports and the diversity of the congregation.

Bryson's initial contact with a church in Athens as a freshman was one of shock after a Sunday morning discussion advocating moderate alcohol use. The conversation offended his conservative Southern Baptist heritage. However, over the next few years, his ideas began to change because of conversations with Christians with diverse beliefs and practices, traveling internationally, and reading. Bryson's transcripts revealed that the most important element of his faith has become community. He has enjoyed living in walking distance to his church and in a community where those who live nearby also buy food from his farm. Bryson said that he is the most liberal member of his church politically and religiously, yet he is welcomed and loved in the small congregation. Bryon and his wife enjoy wine with dinner on occasion.

Healthy balance sought. The participants in this study indicated that they desired faith and spirituality to provide a sense of balance to their lives. This balance was realized

in various ways. When Carl began "letting go" of his rules-based Christian faith and moved toward a spirituality centered on his own self-authored choices, he stopped suffering from migraine headaches. Like the gay men in Yip's (2000) study who left the church to save their faith, Carl, who is heterosexual, sought spiritual sanctuary outside of traditional religious practice. Though he did not have a model for a more healthy idea of the spirituality he was constructing, he pieced together ideas from his former faith, popular music, a wide range of books, and conversations with people he encountered while traveling the world. Although his reasons were humanistic, Carl sought to integrate the "fruits of the spirit" found in the Bible in Galatians 5:22, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control," into his life as non-religious, "core values." He told me that his desire to be a "vessel of love" should influence all of his relationships and actions, opening him up to new experiences and relationships seeking deep connections with those he meets.

In contrast, Chris, Jennifer, and Stephanie had a different motivation for balance. They further ensconced themselves within veritable cocoons of faith that served to insulate them from the rest of the world. Chris and Stephanie both have careers that place them in the business world. However, Stephanie admitted that everyone in her office and most of the people with whom she works in the community are Christians. Jennifer, a stay-at-home mom, rarely meets anyone who is not associated with her church.

Kegan (1982) presented the idea of balance in his developmental theory as the primary force driving human development. For adults, moving to new "orders of consciousness," through developmental growth, experiential learning, and critical thinking requires acquiring or creating new, more advanced, methods for making

meaning and often takes years to advance from one "balance," or state of equilibrium, to the next (Kegan, 1994, 2000). In exploring transformation of learning for middle adults, Schapiro (2009) added *creation* to Kegan's (1982) culture-of-embeddedness forming processes of confirmation, contradiction, and continuity. The emerging adults in this study appear to support this addition, as they created or adapted their faith to meet their new or changing experiences.

Is It Loving?

The majority of participants in this study expressed the essence of their faith to be unconditional love. Loving faith was non-judgmental towards others, generative in looking to the future, and more universalistic.

Loving faith was non-judgmental. The judgmental attitudes of some Christian people, churches, and denominations were offensive to some participants in this study. Bryson, Carl, Emily, Heather, Kate, Rebekah, and Stephanie named the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) as an antihero or a villain because of public statements and actions the denomination has made against women in ministry and churches that accept gay Christians as members. Rebekah and Stephanie identified specific statements issued by the convention as reasons they no longer attend an SBC church.

This non-judgmental love for all people was demonstrated to be the litmus test for personal theology, doctrine, and practice. If participants expressed judgment of others' actions, lifestyles, or beliefs, any condemnation was relegated to be solely God's domain. For instance, Chris, Jennifer, and Lucy all said that they were not comfortable making judgments about others; if there was to be judgment it was God's responsibility.

Loving faith was generative. A key aspect of love is represented by a parent's care and generative concern for her or his child. For example, Braxton, Chris, Emily, and Jennifer talked about desiring to create an environment of protection and positive faith experiences for their children. Jennifer said she wanted her future grandchildren to be strong Christians, learning to practice faith from the lessons she instilled in her two boys. In this study, participants demonstrated a desire to make a difference in the world (Parks, 2000). Though the rest of the participants were not parents at the time of the study, they all expressed generative motivations for their faith. Carl discussed his desire to be a vessel of love, giving love to those he meets in order to make the world a more loving place. Braxton and Stephanie worked with youth in their churches in order to influence future generations, to "give back" and make a difference in the lives of youth. Bryson said he wanted to be a sage, to pass acquired knowledge and wisdom to the interns working at his farm. Heather volunteered in local schools mentoring youth to make her community a better place. Thomas said that activities have no meaning if they are not done for the sake of others. Chad said his motivation for teaching in a public high school was to develop "intellectual Christians" who were not afraid of science.

Fowler (1981) described the importance of generativity in stages five and six of his epigenetic theory of faith development. While some participants in this study might be located in stage five in his system, it is more probable that they are in stages three or four. Entrance into Fowler's stage five typically does not begin until middle age, if at all. Conversely, in writing about his narrative theory of identity development, McAdams (1993) believed generativity to be an important component driving growth, development, and meaning making throughout life.

Development moved towards "universalizing faith." The open and loving, non-judgmental faith expressed by many of the participants in this study appears to be moving towards Fowler's (1981) sixth stage, "universalizing faith." Heather and Carl are the closest to realizing a universal belief system, though they both struggle to practice it. Anna, Bryson, Emily, Kate, Lucy, Rebekah, and Thomas all struggle to rationalize the idea of God's unconditional love with God's condemnation of some people to hell. For Carl, seeing other Christians fail at loving all people was the prompt that drove him away from Christianity. He said his parents were selective in the way they offered love to others while offering love freely to those who were like them. In Fowler's model, development occurs in epigenetic stages where "universalizing faith" is the sixth and final stage attained by few. In his initial study of 400 participants, only one member attained this pinnacle.

Conclusion Two: Faith Remained Vital

Anna said, "I was raised in the church" and "I never left my faith." Save for a period of "rebellion" in her tumultuous marriage, Anna's Christian faith has been an integral part of her life since she was a child. Ten of the study members were active in churches at the time of their interviews. Of the remaining four members, three expressed a desire to find a church in the future. Only one participant, Carl, is no longer a Christian. As a result, the participants in this study are not typical; they contradict recent studies (Astin et al., 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008) and popular explorations (Dyck, 2010; Rainer & Rainer, 2008), suggesting that participation in Christianity is declining significantly among emerging adults who practiced the faith in high school. Perhaps the difference is found in the depth of faith

participants in this study experienced during college, actively participating as leaders in Baptist Student Union (BSU). The Pew Forum (2008) study also denoted denominational switching occurred for a majority of respondents. This was confirmed in the present study.

Twelve Participants Actively Pursued Faith or Spirituality

Twelve of the fourteen participants were actively pursuing faith or spirituality at the time of the interviews. The remaining two participants, Thomas and Kate, said they want their faith to be active in the future. Thomas has been unable to find a way to practice faith comfortably after choosing to break his chastity vow. Kate is waiting until she finishes school and settles into a job before trying to discover a faith that works for her. Participants noted that relationships were the most important influence on their current practice of faith. When they were younger, the faith of their parent provided a foundation. During emerging adulthood, the participants began to differentiate from their parent's faith, with their peers providing the greatest influence.

Parents' faith was foundational. All members of this study were introduced to Christianity in their families. Stephanie and Jennifer narrated their experiences of a parent actually "leading" them to a relationship with Christ at home. The rest went to church with their families. Though Braxton, Emily, and Kate went to church as children with their families, they did not become serious about their faith until they joined a high school youth group. Anna, Braxton, Bryson, Carl, Emily, Heather, and Kate differentiated their current faith practice from that of their families, identifying their parent's faith during their childhood years as the kind of faith they did not want to practice. Anna, Bryson, Carl, and Heather reflected on their parent's legalistic or

incongruent faith as a negative example. Braxton, Emily, and Kate said their parents were not serious about Christianity.

Peers provided the greatest influence. The faith of the emerging adult participants in this study was influenced more by their relationships with peers during and after college than by the faith of their parents. For instance, Carl's faith was expanded in reaction to the limited ways his parents practiced their faith. However, it was conversations with friends in school and travels after college that had the greatest influence on the new form of non-Christian faith he described during the interviews. While Chad's parents are very committed Christians who pray often, he learned how to live more fully as a Christian from his friends and older student mentors in college. This conclusion is contrary to recent research (Smith and Snell, 2009) that suggests that the greatest influence on emerging adult faith is parental faith practice.

Faith was Vital Even if Not Attending Church

There was a difference between being active in faith or active spiritually and being active in religion or participating in a church. Most members of the sample experienced a gap in active church participation after college from two to five years,

Table 21

Church Membership Following Graduation

Smooth transition to a post-collegiate church	Joined a church after a break	Left church participation
Brock	Anna	Carl
Bryson	Chad	*Heather
Emily	Chris	*Kate
Jennifer	Rebekah	*Thomas
Lucy	Stephanie	

*Expressed a desire to return to church involvement in the future.

although during that time most continued to experience a vibrant Christian faith that continued to provide meaning and spiritual direction (see Table 21). Returning to participation in a church was often based on available time and whether or not the church demonstrated the operationalization of a loving faith within its membership and in the community. Between school, work, and a steady boyfriend, Kate felt she did not have time to focus on figuring out her faith. However, she said when she does return to church she will be looking for one that is "real" and "not fake."

This conclusion contradicts recent research, which suggests that emerging adults are leaving churches in record numbers. Kinnaman & Lyons (2007) found that 80% of emerging adults who were involved in church as teenagers will leave before their thirtieth birthday. Those who leave church participation usually do not come back (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008).

Conclusion Three: Faith and Identity were Negotiated

There was a correlation between faith and identity for the participants in this study. Perhaps this is due primarily to the ways in which members of this group were indoctrinated through intentional methods of discipleship and Christian education in their youth and college years.

Faith was Experienced Within The Bubble

During Brock's interview, he used the phrase, "Christian bubble" to describe his college experience within BSU. Similarly, Carl noted that breaking out of his "bubble" was a key aspect of his personal and spiritual development. Though other participants did not use the term, all of them discussed the way their relationships, ideologies, or experiences formed their worldview and connected them to or insulated them from

others. Stephanie told me that she has lived a protected life within a village initially constructed by her parents. Following her parents' example, Stephanie surrounded herself with people who shared and reinforced her Christian worldview. As an emerging adult, Heather admitted to being selective about whom she allows into her life. She manages her "social ecology" online to keep out the negativity brought about by her outspoken conservative Christian friends. Carl only travels back to the United States once a year because of the *inquieto* brought about by living with his parents and the constant media messages of consumerism here. Though he is still an American citizen, he identifies more ideologically and experientially with his new friends in Europe.

Though this study does not employ Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory techniques, the idea of the *bubble* is the result of theory building from themes that emerged from the participants' narratives. The narrative themes in the participants' experiences and stories combine to form their *bubbles*, the invisible lens through which they view, understand, and make meaning. Thus, the concept of the *bubble* refers to the chosen or constructed culture that forms one's worldview and encompasses, defines, and regulates relationships and ideas that are accepted or even considered. The *bubble* is not a rigid, prescriptive formula, but gives form to the fluid, organic, contextualized experiences of those in this study. The *bubble* is a mental model through which the world is seen and by which experiences are interpreted.

Though not expressed in this form by these participants, the ideas contained in the *bubble* concept have been discussed in other research as a worldview, mental model, framework, meaning perspective, or prevailing ideology. For instance, according to narrative identity theory, the themes of our lives

form a basic narrative, an overarching frame of reference that governs our

feelings about ourselves, our relationships with others, and how we behave in the

world. Lifelong interpretations and narratives become permanent parts of our self;

we act to perpetuate them, which is why we confront change reluctantly.

(Wimberley, 1997, pp. 15-16)

Palmer (1998) suggests that the phenomenon of internalizing philosophical and

sociological influences to create a worldview is Mills' (1959) "idea of the 'sociological

imagination'" (p. 26).

In this study, the *bubble* provided an invisible framework used in "connecting the

dots" (McAdams, 1994, p. 96) between faith and life. Within this context, *the bubble* is

the equivalent to Mezirow's (1985) combined "meaning perspective" and "meaning

scheme" (as cited in Kitchenham, 2008), Kegan's (1982) "holding environment" or

"culture of embeddedness," and Ebert's (1988) "ideology" that form what Carl and Brock

termed their "bubble" or "Christian bubble." Such a framework influences what one

expects to see and experience in the world. Mezirow (2006) wrote, "Our expectations

powerfully affect how we construe experience; they tend to become self-fulfilling

prophecies. We have a proclivity for categorical judgment" (p. 29). Therefore, in this

study, the participants gaining new understandings of self and others required the

removal of their lenses, or the bursting or expanding of their *bubbles*. The *bubble*

determined the emerging adult's process of *faithing* (Fowler, 1981), of understanding and

applying religious beliefs to other areas of life.

Faith was their identity. Ten of the fourteen participants expressed faith that was

enmeshed with their identity. It was difficult for them to talk about parts of their lives that

were not influenced by their faith ideology and practice. Faith was experienced within their *bubble*.

The bubble was defined by home, ideas, and practices. In this study, the key elements of the emerging adult participant's *bubble*, or holistic constructed worldview, was composed of three major components: *home*, *ideas*, and *practices* (see figure 2). I will describe each component in detail in this section.

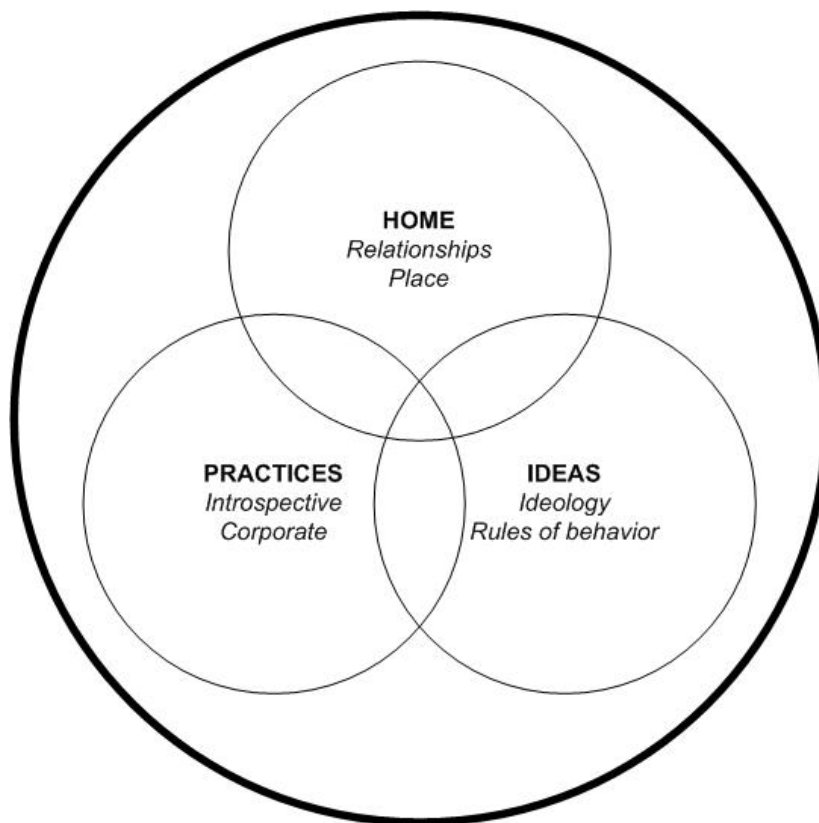*Figure 2*. Participant's faith *bubble* was composed of home, ideas, and practices.

The first inner circle of the *bubble* was *home* or the "comfort zone." When Jennifer talked about going on the medical mission trip to Peru with her husband, she said she was out of her "comfort zone." "Comfort zone" is a common phrase within evangelical Christian groups. It is *Christianese* or *Godtalk*, for the experience of leaving

one's sense of normal. Stephanie denoted *home* as the town where she grew up and where her parents still live. It was not just her parents' house, but also the whole community that represented a place and relationships that had helped to form Stephanie into the Christian emerging adult she had become.

   Home was composed of relationships and places where one feels most comfortable. Relationships that were the most influential for faith development began in an individual's family of origin. As participants matured, their relationships with their peers grew in importance and influence, eventually replacing the family of origin as the most influential aspect of meaning making (Tisdell, 1999) and, as a result, comfort. As noted above, all participants in this study were introduced to the Christian faith while living with their parents. However, as they moved through college, their relationships with friends overshadowed their parents' influence in matters of faith.

   Place was also extremely important in creating a sense of *home*. Place included the house in which a participant was raised, his or her current residence, any organizations or groups with which he or she was deeply involved, and other locations deemed to be spiritually important. As stated above, Stephanie's hometown was the primary place she felt most spiritually connected. In many ways, her childhood hometown was the source of her spiritual strength to which she returns in person or in spirit to achieve a renewed sense of spiritual security. Similarly, Chad mentioned returning to the mountaintop in North Carolina each year to think and re-center spiritually. Anna, Braxton, Chris, Emily, Jennifer, Lucy, Rebekah, and Thomas said they feel most spiritual outside in natural settings. They mentioned specific places (parents' home, a church, a retreat center, a camp, or a chair at home) or categories (the beach or

the mountains) that provided this sense of spiritual home. In this study, *home* was the place where the participants felt most comfortable and accepted. Obviously, the other two components in the *bubble* influenced the construction of *home* because participants were most comfortable with those who shared similar *ideas* and *practices*.

The second circle in the *bubble* was *ideas*. This circle was composed of the ideologies and rules of behavior that comprised each participant's faith perspective. Anna reacted negatively to her parents' practice of faith. While they had bibles and bible verses all over the house, Anna did not think their lives were affected by their beliefs. For instance, she said they continued to be racists. Instead of adopting her parents' perspective, Anna constructed an ideological faith based on the diversity she discovered in Atlanta. Her reading and interpretation of the Bible confirmed for her the idea of equality of all people. Carl and Rebekah adopted a similar open, loving worldview, in contrast to some members of their families.

A participant's faith ideology included his or her philosophical perspective of the way the world works. In this study, *Ideas* of faith were constructed based upon the individual's locus of authority (Mezirow, 2006), which emerged from the participant's sense of *home*. Each participant's worldview was influenced by the theology and doctrine of his or her *home* church, closest relationships, and those that the individual deemed to be trustworthy or authoritative. For instance, Thomas constructed his faith around the rule of chastity that was given to him by a mentor at church in the form of a platinum purity key. When Thomas failed to keep that guiding principle by choosing to have sex before marriage, his whole faith structure collapsed. Despite attempts to recover his Christian faith, he has been unable to construct a form that works for him.

Some participants chose to give away authority (Ebert, 1988) when constructing their *bubbles*. For most participants, during emerging adulthood, the locus of authority was with peers or reserved for self. Therefore, each participant's constructed or adopted theological ideology, combined with the accepted church doctrines, influenced the determination of the rules of behavior that dictated each participant's actions and expectations of others. As mentioned above, Lucy chose to ignore the doctrine of her church regarding homosexuality when one of her close friends announced that he was gay. She chose the relationship over the doctrine.

The third circle in the *bubble* was faith *practices*. In this study, the *practices* component included both introspective and corporate activities and disciplines. For instance, Braxton had never heard of a personal quiet time until his college roommates taught him how to study the Bible and pray as an act of personal daily devotion. Learning to study the bible for himself, to pray, and to meditate helped him to be more focused throughout the day in his practice of Christianity. Likewise, Bryson had not been on mission trips that challenged or expanded his worldview until he got to college. Encountering wider diversity of people and ideas, he began his process of growth through "exposure" (represented by the faith artifact he brought to the first interview).

For participants in this study, faith *practices* were determined by the other two circles of *ideas* and *home*. Such *practices* included the personal discipline of a "quiet time" or devotional time, wherein one read the Bible, prayed, meditated, and sometimes reflectively journaled about the experience. *Practices* also included corporate elements such as worship or bible study (with a church, small group, or gathering of friends), mission trips, volunteering in the church (teaching Sunday school, leading in worship,

cooking meals, hosting, etc.), visiting and proselytizing potential members, or working within the secular community. Though the participants' *practices* were influenced by *ideas* and *home*, it was often while participating in a practice that one was confronted with an idea or relationship that pushed the boundaries or burst one or more of the inner circles (*home, ideas,* or *practices*), necessitating a reexamination of the entire *bubble*.

Changes in Faith Resulted When the Bubble was Challenged

Changes in faith resulted when an aspect of the *bubble* was challenged. The resulting stimuli to one circle within the *bubble* produced a momentum of change that influenced other circles and resulted in change (see Table 22). For participants in this study there were three major influences that resulted in changes of the faith *bubble*, including peer relationships, liminal space, and mystical experiences.

Table 22

The Primary Inner Circle Influencing Construction or Re-construction of the Bubble

Home (place and relationships)	Ideas (ideology and rules of behavior)	Practices (personal and corporate)
Anna	Carl	Rebekah
Braxton	Chad	
Bryson	Heather	
Chris	Thomas	
Emily		
Jennifer		
Kate		
Lucy		
Stephanie		

Peer relationships. The findings discussed in chapter five indicated that the most important influence on the participants' faith in this study was peer relationships. After leaving home to go to college, the budding emerging adults began to examine their parents' faith in discussions with their friends. Bryson and Carl were college roommates.

Their conversations with each other about matters of faith prompted both to change their ideology and practice. Bryson and Carl both moved away from their parents' conservative faith, adopting more open, liberal perspectives that focused more on love than on the doctrines and the rules promoted by their home churches.

Liminal space. Bryson cited Rohr's (2003) idea of liminal space as useful in his own understanding of how "exposure" to diverse places, ideas, and people has helped shape his faith. Liminality refers to the open learning space created when one moves to an unfamiliar location (Turner, 1969). As demonstrated in chapter five, travel introduced the element of liminality to the experiences of Anna, Braxton, Bryson, Carl, Chad, Heather, Jennifer, Rebekah, and Thomas. To illustrate, Bryson brought a hula doll acquired while traveling in Hawaii as his faith artifact, and Rebekah presented her passport as her artifact. These liminal spaces provided an opportunity for introspection and critical thinking on ideas, experiences, and relationships previously unnoticed or taken for granted.

In many evangelical Christian groups liminality is not a foreign concept. It is referred to as "leaving my comfort zone" and is usually sought during retreat settings or serendipitously experienced on mission trips. Jennifer noted that she left her comfort zone to go on the mission trip to Peru. Carl, while traveling in South America, was told by a woman he met that he could choose his own path in life. He said that the idea was nothing new for him, as he had heard it his whole life. Being out of the country provided an environment where he understood the idea for the first time. In my professional experience as a collegiate minister, changes in the *bubble* are normative for Christians after returning from retreats and mission projects; however, changes from these events

usually result in deeper entrenchment into communal ideologies, experiences, and relationships.

The movements to college after high school and away from college after graduation provided liminal spaces for the participants in this study. Within the liminal space created, new experiences and relationships were examined without the strictures of their home or college culture, including parents, faith communities, and friends.

Rohr (2003) is not the first to use the liminal space or liminality in relation to education (McWhinney and Markos, 2003; Schapiro, 2009; Turner, 1969) or faith (Doehring, 1995; Wimberly, 1997). The concept of liminal space helps to clarify the impact of place on emerging adult participants' worldview. Liminal space and peer relationships were not the only motivators for change. Mystical experiences also influenced the faith of participants.

Mystical experiences. Mystical experiences, intuitive knowing, and intimate peer relationships became key sources of meaning for participants of this study. Mystical experiences for the participants included transcendent encounters with God, moments of deep spiritual connection with others, or a deep sense of personal peace. All of the participants indicated mystical encounters with a God through prayer, meditation, or similar experiences. Often such experiences resulted in inexplicable intuitive knowing (Mezirow, 2006; Slee, 2003) that deepened participant's faith. For instance, Anna talked about her experience at the beach when her mentor, Cindy, challenged her poor self-esteem as being selfish. Cindy read some scripture to Anna and prayed with her. Anna says that during that time she experienced God as a "physical presence." Similarly, Thomas talked about the way God answered his prayer for his father on two different

occasions. Heather discussed the emotional "high" she experienced in community floating down a river with the BSU leadership team in college, performing on stage with a drama troupe, or when reaching out to someone in kindness after she felt God nudging her to do so. Mystical experiences provided an important element in the participants' understanding of faith as knowing or belief that defied scientific explanations.

Faith Identity was Negotiated within the Bubble

The *bubble* served as a lens in which participants negotiated their faith identity. This negotiation was done in relationship to other people, ideas, and experiences. The elements contained in the *bubble* concept provided a lens through which participants viewed and made sense of experiences, but it also insulated participants from ideas, people, and experiences that were perceived of as being similar or different (see figure 3). I refer to those participants perceived as different to be "not us"; they were either *Others* ("not-us") or *Anti-heroes* ("us-but-not-us").

Others were easy to identify; they were people with completely different *bubbles*, such as those of a different religion or a very different cultural heritage. In the example mentioned earlier, Kate found it easier to associate with outspoken agnostics at work than with overzealous Christians at church and in BSU. Carl demonstrated that he would rather associate with Muslims in northern Africa than with fundamentalist Christians in the United States.

Anti-heroes, on the other hand, were those who shared a similar *bubble*, however, their *bubble* was different in significant and somehow repelling ways. For instance, a majority of participants in this study had strong reactions against Christians, churches, and denominations that they perceived as judgmental of others. Thus, "us-but-not-us"

became the *Anti-heroes*, or villains, who represented the antithesis of how the emerging

adults believed the Christian faith should be lived and embodied. For those in this study,

it was often easier to associate with *Others* than with *Anti-heroes*. Anna and Kate

commented that Christians who frequently employ *Christianese*, or *Godtalk*, were

repulsive. Carl, Heather, and Rebekah did not like to associate with family members who

held extremely conservative Christian views. When Bryson arrived at college, he was

repelled by the suggestion that Christians may drink alcohol in moderation. Some

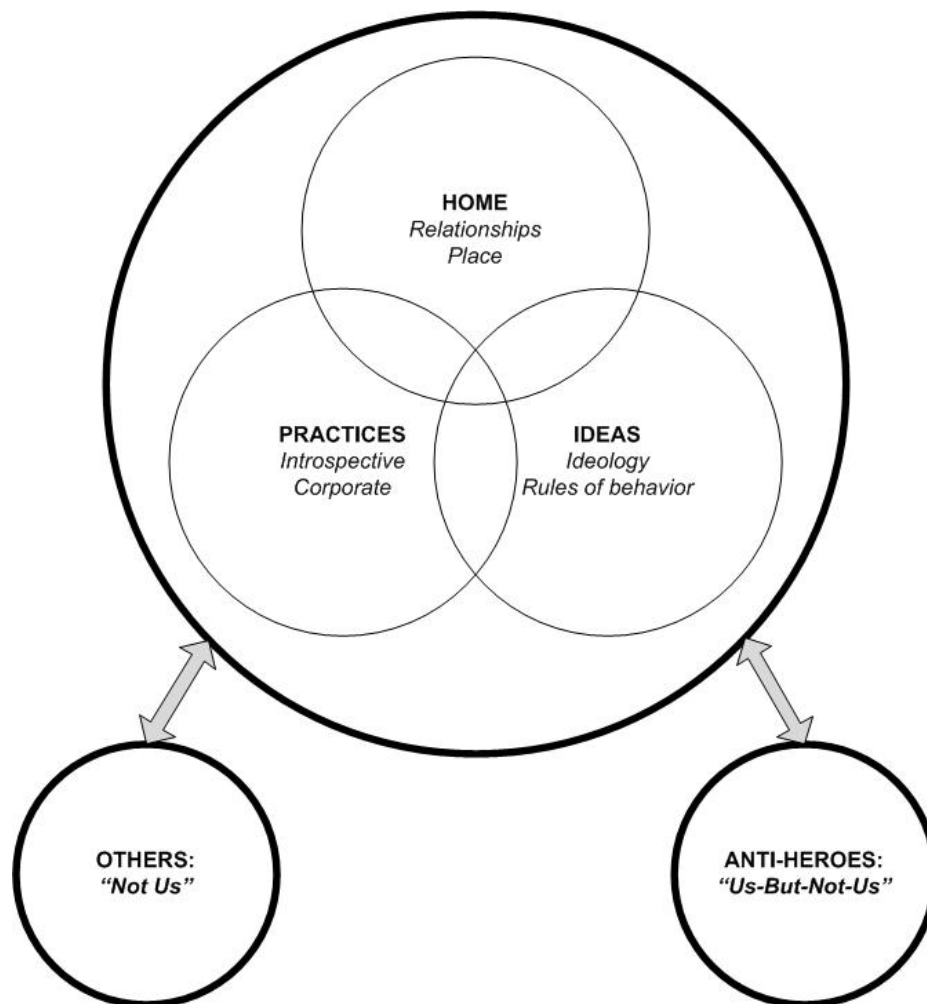participants also experienced judgmental attitudes of other Christians. For instance, after

Figure 3. The *bubble* and those who were perceived to be different.

Anna's divorce and Jennifer's unplanned pregnancy before she was married, some of

their former Christian friends pushed them away. Anna said she felt like she was walking

around with a big "D" (for divorce) emblazoned on her chest.

The expanding or bursting of an emerging adult's *bubble* necessitates a new

ideology be accepted. The result was the creation of either a new *bubble* or the expanding

or strengthening of the old *bubble*. In constructing their *bubbles*, nine of the fourteen

participants began with faith as the foundational perspective from which to view the

world (see Table 23). However, five of the participants' new worldview was constructed

with other influences as primary. Representative of those, Heather and Rebekah built

bubbles around intellectual arguments and critical thinking. Kate reacted against what she

deemed to be the "fake" or forced spirituality of her Christian friends. The participants in

this study negotiated faith and identity in three ways within their *bubbles*: (a) the existing

bubble was reinforced, (b) the existing *bubble* morphed, or (c) the *bubble* burst

necessitating the creation of a new, more comfortable *bubble*.

The bubble was reinforced. For some participants, encounters with different

people, ideas, and experiences only reinforced their existing worldviews, strengthening

the walls of their *bubbles*. Braxton, Chad, Chris, Jennifer, Lucy, and Stephanie described

encounters with others that reaffirmed their worldviews. Jennifer and Stephanie told me

that their faith and their identity were the same. Stephanie said, "I am my faith." After

reflecting over his roles and activities, Braxton told me that there was not a part of his life

that was not influenced by his faith. After being passed over for promotions and salary

increases at work, Chris blamed the system at work. Because he was the only Christian in

the sales department, he determined that his employer and coworkers looked down upon

him because of his faith. While that may be true, he has not looked for other possibilities of why he may not have been as successful in his job as his coworkers. His experience of being different provided a defensive structure from which he could explain his lack of success. He said he prays for his boss to see more clearly and for his own success at work. However, Chris also wants to find a new place to work where he does not feel so alone in his expression of faith.

Table 23

Motivators to Negotiate Faith and Identity

Motivator	Participant(s)	Description
Faith	Anna Braxton Bryson Chad Chris Emily Jennifer Lucy Stephanie	Faith was the foundation for their identity construction. The substance of faith was considered to be a reality that was not questioned. The *bubble* was constructed around faith community, ideology, and practices.
Reactive	Carl	Was given permission to create a *bubble* of his own design ("vessel of love") that was disconnected from his Christian faith.
	Thomas	Reactive (he failed to live within his legalistic *bubble*) and intellectual arguments.
Intellectual Arguments and Critical Thinking	Heather	Applied intellectual arguments to reformulate her faith to be more open.
	Rebekah	Applied intellectual arguments through personal reflection and critical thinking to adopt a faith centered on love that resulted in justice and equality.
Desire to be real	Kate	Tired of being "fake," she chose to ignore her faith until she has time to reformulate a "faith that works."

The bubble morphed. Anna, Bryson, Emily, and Rebekah morphed their *bubbles* after a challenging stimulus. However, the changes they experienced were not instant, but happened over a lengthy period of wrestling with ideas and relationships. After Anna's encounter on the beach, of which she said, "I was changed that night," she spent almost ten years becoming comfortable with her self-image and faith. During that time she mended the relationship with her father, married and divorced her husband, dated widely, traveled extensively, experienced great success at work, lost many friendships, and established new relationships. Similarly, Emily experienced several tragedies during emerging adulthood. While she appeared to navigate them with remarkable success, one day while walking across campus during graduate school the realization of her father's death, which occurred two years before, hit her all at once. For the next three years, Emily struggled with depression and anxiety attacks. Therapy did not help, and medication only served to shorten the period between attacks. In the first interview, Emily told me that she knew her battle was spiritual and not psychological or psychiatric. By the time of the second interview, she had been able to control her depression and panic attacks through focused prayer and attention to stressors that formerly brought on panic attacks. After graduate school, Emily expanded her *bubble* to include her new roles as a minister, a mother, a wife, and a social worker.

The bubble burst. In this study the participants responded to a rupture in their *bubble* with either a stagnated faith or the creation of a new, more comfortable *bubble*. The *bubbles* of Carl, Heather, Kate, and Thomas burst during emerging adulthood. Heather, Kate, and Thomas experienced periods of stagnated faith as a result of their

bubble bursting. While Heather was becoming comfortable with her new *bubble*, Kate and Thomas still had faith *bubbles* that were sufficient for their experiences.

Over time, Heather and Carl created new, more comfortable *bubbles* after their *bubbles* burst. Heather described a three to five year period of stagnation where she did not think much about her faith. However, in the past few years she created a new *bubble* that was very different from that of her parents and more like that of her friends. After Carl's *bubble* began to morph in college, it finally burst while traveling in South America. After a woman he met on his travels told him he could be whoever he wanted to be and do whatever he wanted to do, Carl consciously began to dismantle his faith, letting go first of his Christian faith and then of his spirituality.

Within the context of their holistic constructed worldviews, or their *bubbles*, the participants negotiated faith and identity. As shown, faith was an integral aspect of identity formation for those in this study. Faith was a key aspect of meaning making and identity.

Conclusion Four: Self-authorship was a Continuous Narrative Process Mediated through Experience and Relationships

Twelve of the fourteen participants in this study described a continuous process of faith development that featured narrative self-authoring, while only two participants, Rebekah and Stephanie, indicated a linear cognitive process of self-authoring (see figure 4) like that described by Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda (1998a). However, even these two participants also demonstrated narrative processes in other areas of their lives.

While the findings of this study indicate that all participants were self-authoring in various ways, the data does not support Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda's (1998a)

Childhood through mid-emerging adulthood	At some point between ages 24-30	No regression (might achieve interindividuality much later in life)
Dependent upon external authorities for beliefs, practices, and decisions	*Achieves* **Self-authorship**	**Lives a self-authored life**
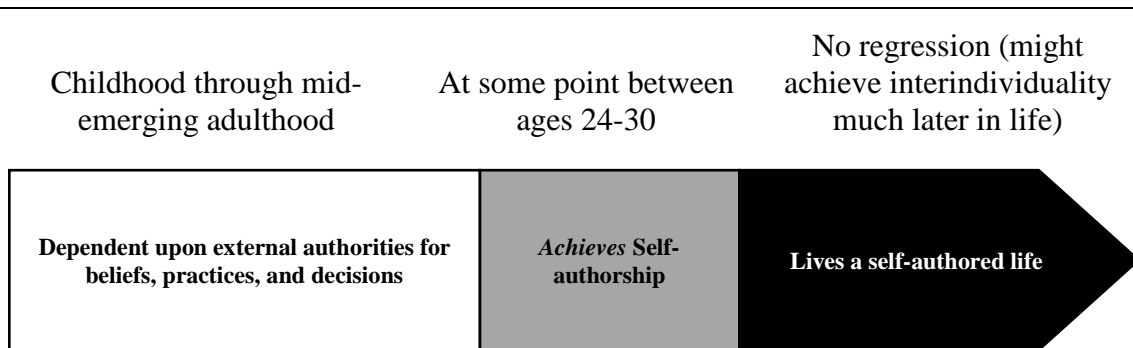
Figure 4. In the theories of Kegan and Baxter Magolda linear self-authorship is achieved during emerging adulthood.

idea that self-authorship is finally achieved, but suggests that self-authorship is an ongoing process of negotiation between conflicting authorities including self and others. Self-authorship as presented by Kegan and Baxter Magolda involved the application of critical thinking skills to one's own experience and ideology. While it was difficult to know the exact developmental level and resulting capacity for critical thinking of the participants in this study from the interview protocol used, it is possible to examine the participants' relationships and activities for frameworks that would encourage or discourage critical thought. Chad, Chris, Emily, Kate, and Lucy have been so focused on their careers and other responsibilities that there has been little time or motivation for critical reflection; whereas, Anna, Brock, Bryson, Carl, Heather, Rebekah and Thomas made more space where critical reflection was possible. Rebekah told me that law school taught her to think deeply and critically about everything. She readily adapted the skill to her faith and personal ideologies. Stephanie was taught by her father to think critically. Even though she is skilled in self-understanding, she admits that there has been no major crisis in her life to cause her to question her faith or her longstanding worldview.

The process of self-authoring expressed by the participants is more like that described in narrative identity theory, wherein one constructs meaning through

composing, editing, and re-editing the stories one remembers and tells of one's life (McAdams, 1993; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). Stories from the past are recalled, interpreted, and incorporated depending upon one's present experiences and worldview (Brunner, 1986, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1996). Experiences and people long forgotten might be remembered as significant in light of current circumstances. Participants in this study narrated stories in the midst of two research interviews; self-authoring or recomposing identities and meanings in relation to queries from the research protocol and in reaction to the interviewer.

Instead of the linear representation in Figure 4, participants in this study presented a wide range of types and processes of self-authorship better represented by a spiral pattern (Bateson, 1995; Tisdell, 2008). For instance, in college Anna began to understand her struggle with self-image from a spiritual perspective. However, she was not able to move on from that experience free from negative thoughts about her body image. With each recurring crisis or learning event, she began to move forward with less emotional and spiritual turmoil. However, she also began to question her learning, spiraling back until a new learning event or process occurred.

Though Kegan (1994) demonstrates a spiral of lifelong human development in his constructive-developmental model, his resulting adaptations of self-authorship are linear, and as a result, epigenetic. Participants in this study demonstrated an initial realization of the need for change (disorienting experience, or disequilibrium), followed by adaptation, only to return to another encounter of the same realization (see figure 5), albeit, on a
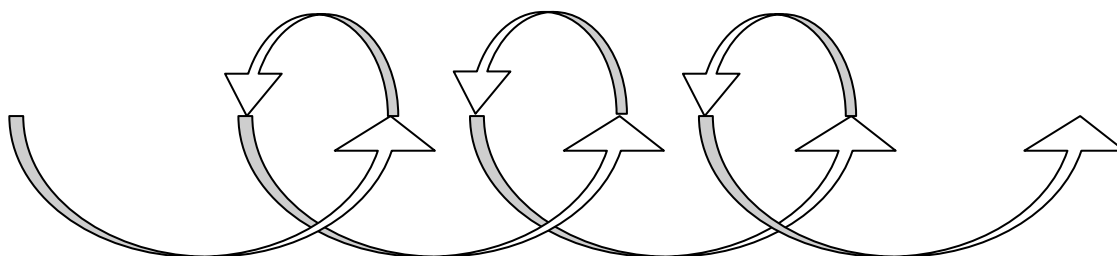
Figure 5. The spiral process of self-authorship.

deeper level. Unlike the diagram in figure 5 representing a singular line spiraling through

self-authorship, in the postmodern identity structure described by Kegan (1994), which

featured multiple identities or selves negotiating complex forms of meaning-making,

there are multiple self-authoring processes occurring simultaneously (see figure 6).
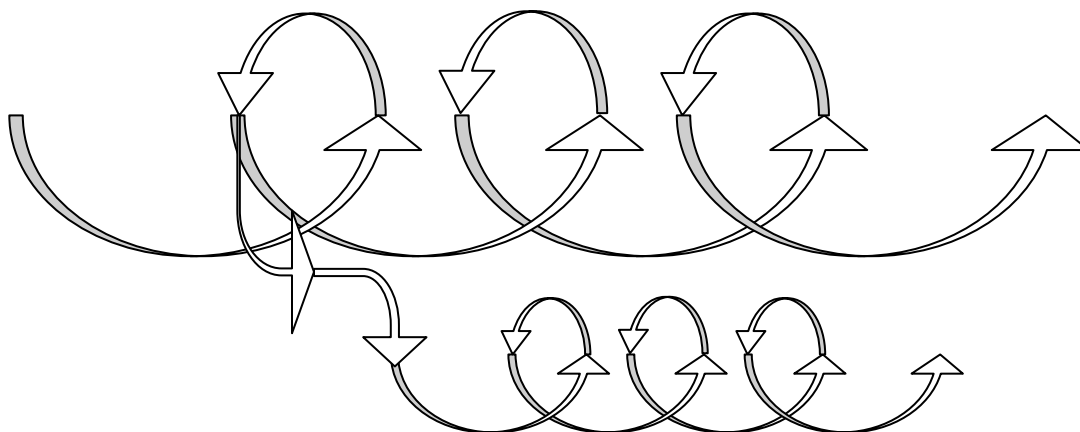
Figure 6. The complex postmodern process of self-authorship.

Anna's process of self-authoring represented multiple processes occurring

simultaneously. While she was negotiating self-authorship of body image in relationship

to her ideation of God and the important men in her life (her father and later her

husband), she was also authoring an identity at work as a teacher and later a department

head. This process was more rapid, but also emerged from her faith and her passions for teaching and learning that she attributed to being gifts from God.

Some participants demonstrated self-authorship in some areas of life, but not in other areas. In this study, there is evidence that authorship may be consciously deferred to others (see Figure 7). For instance, Chris chose not to reevaluate the contents of his faith,
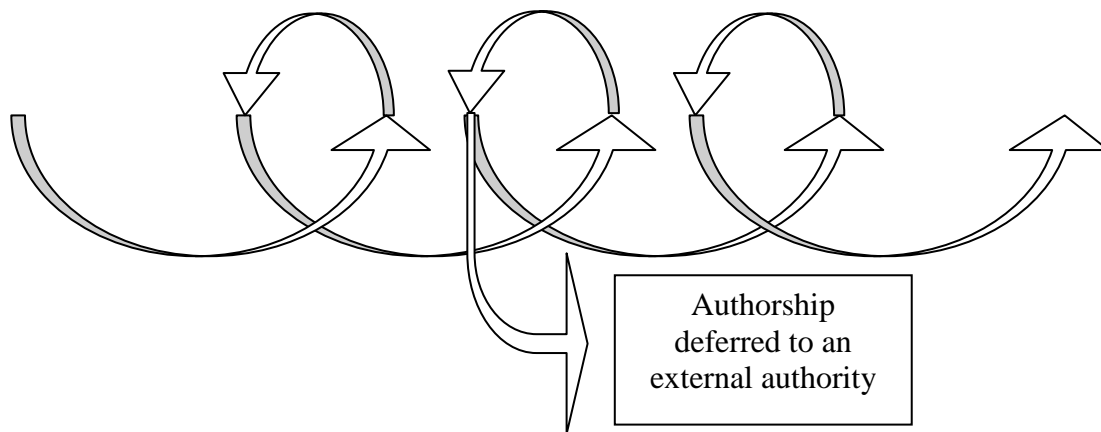
Figure 7. Authorship in one area deferred to an external authority.

instead, he deferred to his church, his minister, and the writers of his preferred commentaries for the providential doctrine he follows; yet he chose to self-author in the areas of work and home ownership. Similarly, Stephanie recognized that she was living a protected or insolated life. She consciously chose to remain within her *bubble*, choosing to ignore the world outside of her insulating community. In both interviews, Stephanie noted her parents' idea that "it takes a village to raise a child." She surrounded herself with people and organizations that share her ideology and practice common disciplines. Her concept of home continues to be the small town where she grew up.

One additional process of self-authorship emerged in this study. Some participants appeared to have experienced a postponement or a paralysis of self-

authorship of faith (see figure 8). Demonstrating a postponement of self-authoring a faith

that works, Kate said she has been too busy to think very much about faith matters,

though she does want to "figure it out" after she finishes graduate school. She believes

she has time, saying God is "waiting for me to figure out a relationship that works."

Thomas appeared to be experiencing a paralysis of faith. He voiced discontentment with

his lack of faith practice following his failure to remain chaste until marriage. Despite

years of faithful Christian practice, this one perceived failure resulted in a loss of faith.

Each time he has tried to return to some sort of practice of faith, he has been filled with

guilt, which led to doubt, which led to intellectual arguments against faith, which resulted

in giving up any attempt to practice his faith. While Heather has operationalized a faith

that works for her, she said she still struggles with finding the best way to express it. She

told of times when she felt stymied or unsure about the validity of her beliefs when

comparing her faith experiences with that of her peers. Only recently has she become

comfortable with her expression of faith as was evident in her explanation of her

"different" faith to her father and sister.
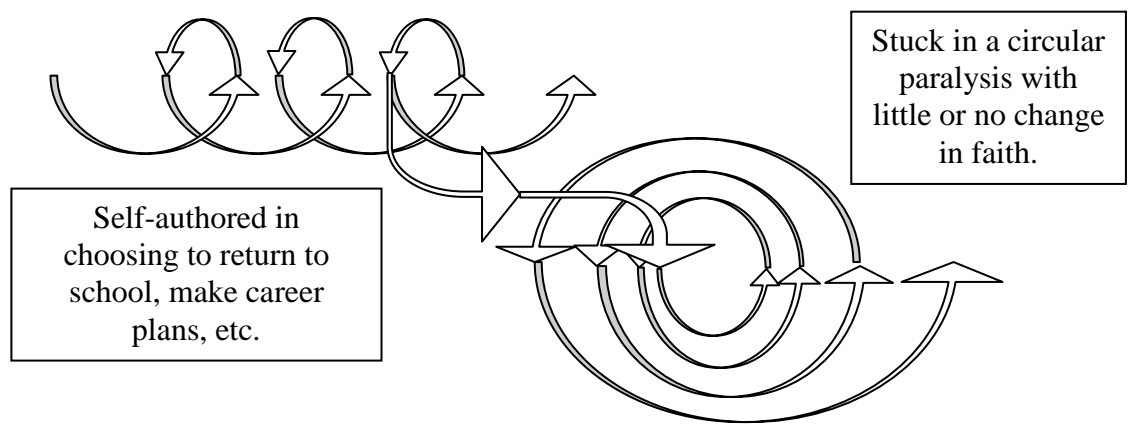
Figure 8. Circular paralysis and the inability to self-author faith.

Self-Authoring was Not Reactive

A key component of emerging adulthood is the developmental task of differentiating from one's parents and other figures of authority (Arnett, 2006a). In adolescence this task is often represented as typical teenage rebellion. However, in emerging adulthood the process of differentiation is most often manifested less as rebellion and more as the critical examination of one's ideologies in light of the ideology of one's peers as well as one's own acquisition of new knowledge and experiences.

A late aspect of this differentiation is the development of self-authorship. Self-authorship is not reactive against parents' beliefs and practices, but is the result of the choice of what is ideal for ones' maturing self. This was most evident in Heather's and Rebekah's conflicts with their families about their religious practice and ideology. Demonstrating unusual insight, Heather commented that her college experience was one of "priming" her ideology as she developmentally separated from her parents' ideas of faith. She then stated, "You spend the rest of your life testing" your faith. Heather is discovering comfortable ways to categorize and verbalize her understanding of Christianity to her family members. She has accepted that her theology and ideology are different from that of her family as well as from most of her high school and college friends. Her new perspectives are not reactionary, but are her self-authored beliefs about God, the world, and the way she wants to live her non-traditional Christian faith. Likewise, the divide Rebekah discovered in her practice of Christianity and that of her extended family members prompted a crisis of faith; however, she has found comfort in the similarities between her faith and that of her parents and maternal grandmother.

The participants in this study said they wanted their families to support their self-authored faith, but realized it may not be possible. For instance, Heather talked about the conflicts she has with her family over faith practice. They want her to adopt their beliefs and practices; however, her way of living her Christian faith is different from theirs. Chris also talked about the differences in the way he and Claire have constructed their relationship based on their understanding of the biblical instructions for marriage. His mother disapproved, and told him he should have a marriage where he, as the man, was the head of the house and his wife should submit to his decisions. Although their parents' faith was foundational for participants' current faith or spiritual practice, it was not prescriptive. Most participants noted differences in current faith or practice contradicting that of their families of origin.

Self-Authoring was Relational

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the faith expressed by the emerging adults in this study was highly influenced by relationships. Although most participants did not proselytize and rarely discussed specifics of faith outside of their close friendships, most felt a deep connection to like-minded peers. The participants found comfort with those whom they considered similar to themselves and with whom they found acceptance. Similarity was compelling. Though Heather's worldview was considered to be much more liberal than most of her peers in BSU, she remained involved because she found a small cadre within the cast of dinner theater that shared a sarcastic, questioning sense of humor similar to her own. After graduating from college, she lived with a group of boys, some of whom who had been in BSU with her. When I discussed the preliminary finding of the importance of relationships in her faith journey, she heartily agreed that her peers

influenced her spirituality; "I'm a big believer in social ecosystems and interconnections."

Braxton, Bryson, and Carl initially found affinity in BSU with intramural sports. Braxton also felt comfort and affinity with the counselors and campers at Camp Wilderness, and after graduation, at church leading the middle school boys Sunday school class. Stephanie's father introduced her to the campus ministers at BSU the summer before she enrolled in college; moreover, all of her siblings had been involved in BSU when they were in college. She arrived on campus with a familial tradition of BSU involvement and a sense of trust in the collegiate ministry staff. Thomas reflected on his experiences and surmised that relationships make life meaningful, "life is about people." As discussed earlier, many participants were influenced by their close friends or peer mentors in college.

Peers were most influential in the process of self-authorship. While the influence of peers pulled Carl, Kate, and Heather away from the practice of traditional Christianity, their spirituality was deepened in nontraditional ways. Unlike friends from her conservative home church, Heather said that the people she met at BSU were fun. In addition to starring in a dinner theater musical, she shared enjoyable late night theological discussions with her BSU friends at Waffle House. These conversations led her to broaden her understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. She decided that faith was more about relationships and less about the rules discussed in her home church. Chad enjoyed the small group environment led by a senior who challenged him to be more committed to his faith and who taught him to practice the discipline of daily devotionals. Jennifer enjoyed serving in leadership roles in BSU, continuing to apply her gifts and

abilities for which she was so praised in high school. Carl and Bryson, roommates in college, expanded each other's understandings and practices of faith. Others in this study narrated experiences of deepened traditional Christian faith and practice because of peer interaction. Over time, emerging adult relationships with peers became more influential on the participant's faith and spirituality than parents and siblings.

Participants identified heroes and sought mentors to emulate. Peers were not the only important relationships for the participants in this study. Each participant also talked about specific heroes who served as models for faith, and eight of the participants described constructed archetypes that were significant in their faith development. For instance, Braxton's narratives were replete with allusions to "fatherhood," "manhood," and his desire to be a "Christian father" and "spiritual leader," which he considered to be positive. Since college, he sought mentors who could "pour into him" and teach him how to live as a Christian man representative of these archetypes. Chad sought to be an "intellectual Christian." He read widely in order to be able to apply his intellect to apologetics (intellectual proofs for the Christian faith), philosophy, theology, and science. Bryson wanted to be a "sage" for others while doing "useless things" for his neighbors. He indicated that there were three men in the community to whom he could go to discuss his faith questions.

Anti-heroes or villains were also described by participants in this study. Anna battled against her conception of a "humble Christian woman" and what she called a "cookie-cutter pastor's wife." As discussed earlier, judgmental Christians repelled Anna, Bryson, Carl, Heather, Kate, Stephanie, and Rebekah. Kate also disliked those she

considered "fake" in their practice and expression of faith. Similarly, hypocritical Christians who did not live the faith they espoused were repulsive to Carl.

In his framework for lifestories, McAdams (2006) identified "imagoes" to be constructed personifications of an ideal or negative type. As denoted above, the narratives in this study were replete with examples of imagoes, or constructed archetypes, such as "ideal Christian," "Christian father," "Christian mother," "perfect daughter," "spiritual leader," and more.

Self-Authoring Occurred within the Bubble

Self-authorship was not an isolated process for the participants of this study. It occurred within the structure of the *bubble* described earlier. The interaction between the elements of the inner circles of *home*, *ideas*, and *practices* was involved in the operationalization of faith for each participant. For Carl, the more uncomfortable he became with the *ideas*, the theology and rules of Christianity, the more he began to notice discrepancies in the ways other Christians *practiced* their faith, corporately in churches. Carl then began to identify more with those outside of traditional Christian faith. This became his new *Home*, as he adopted new *ideas*, and began to experiment with new ways to *practice* his constructed spirituality through yoga & being a "vessel of love." Similarly, when Thomas chose to have sex with his girlfriend, the resulting guilt from breaking what he considered to be the ultimate rule of faith, or *Idea,* it caused him to abandon the *practice* of faith disciplines. He then felt uncomfortable around others who were traditional Christians. He began to associate more, and find a *Home* with those outside of the church. Any disruption in one area of the *bubble* affected the other areas.

Implications

Four conclusions emerged from findings of this study. First, the participants in this study operationalized faith. Second, faith remained vital after college, even for those who were not participating in traditional faith practices. Third, the participants in this study negotiated faith and identity. Fourth, self-authorship was a continuous narrative process mediated through experience and relationships. The results of this study call for further research with other groups of Christian emerging adults. In this section, I will present potential implications for research and practice.

Implications for Theory and Research

The findings and conclusions of this research project inform existing theories and might lead to future studies. In this section I will present some implications from the conclusions as well as additional questions to guide future studies.

Implications from Conclusions

The implications derived from the conclusions presented in this chapter inform existing theory in four areas, (a) implications for the theory of self-authorship, (b) implications of relationships on development and learning, (c) implications of the integration of faith and identity, and (d) implications of the *bubble* concept. Each implication will be discussed in this section.

Implications for the theory of self-authorship. In this study, self-authorship was not "achieved," as suggested by Kegan (1982) and Baxter Magolda (1992, 1998a, 2007; Baxter Magolda & Crosby, 2006; Baxter Magolda & King, 2004), but was a process of negotiating between competing authorities that continued and repeated for each individual. Would this prove true with other emerging adults? Research has demonstrated

and is supported in this study that developmental critical self-authorship does not occur during traditional college years (18-22 years old) because of incomplete brain development (Kegan, 1994; Lebel, Walker, Leemans, Phillips, & Beaulieu, 2008); however, is *narrative* self-authoring possible during this period (McAdams, 1993)? Is what Kegan (1994) deemed a postmodern structure of development experienced by all adults, or is the process a contextualized construct of culture, personality, and experience that does not fit everyone in this increasingly postmodern culture?

The fourteen participants in this study represented a distinct group of emerging adults. They were leaders within a conservative Southern Baptist collegiate ministry, with entrenched traditions of discipleship and Christian education. Their depth of involvement in and commitment to faith is not representative of most Christian collegians and is a delimitation of this study. Further research is needed to examine emerging adults who were leaders in other collegiate faith groups. Additionally, a study is needed to investigate emerging adults who were in collegiate faith groups (like BSU) in college, but were not leaders. Because of the correlation between faith and identity found in this study, similar research should be conducted with broader samples. Because the members of this study were conservative Christians in college, there may be a correlation between their conservative ideology, cautions from their faith tradition against intellectualization of faith (as mentioned by Chad), and self-authorship. Adherence to very conservative religious beliefs, and mentoring by likeminded religious leaders, might lead to a proclivity against cognitive self-authoring faith. Therefore, a study is needed to explore the influence of fundamental religious indoctrination on emerging adult self-authorship.

Further research is necessary to delve into these areas to gain a deeper understanding of the faith and spirituality of a wider range of emerging adults.

Implications of relationships influencing development and learning. Because relationships with peers provided such a significant influence on faith development for the participants in this study, further research should be conducted on relational learning in higher and Christian education. Wimberly (1997) demonstrated that the faith community assists Christians in the interpretation of narrated experiences. Investigations exploring the influences of peer relationships on narrative self-authorship should be conducted with other religious groups and within non-religious adult education classrooms.

Implications of the integration of faith and identity. This study demonstrated a correlation between identity and faith, providing another example of the artificial distinctions between developmental psychology, sociology, faith development, practical theology, Christian education, and adult learning (Osmer & Schweitzer, 2003; Schweitzer, 1997, 2000). The integration of faith and identity was different for each emerging adult in this study. Some appear to follow a more integrated sense of identity and faith, what Kegan (1994) would deem a *modern* order of consciousness; while others demonstrated a more segregated or complex *postmodern* order. While Fowler (1976, 1980, 1996, 2000; Fowler, Nipkow, & Schweitzer, 1991) has written extensively about faith and Tisdell (1999, 2000, 2003; Tisdell & Tolliver, 2001) and English (2000, 2001) about spirituality, they do not sufficiently delve into the integration of faith and identity nor how religious practice may assist in identity construction. Additional research should

be undertaken to develop a holistic philosophy of development that incorporates all of these disciplines.

      Implications of the bubble concept. The concept of the *bubble* and its components emerged during data analysis across interviews. While this notion is similar to others in the literature (worldview, mental model, et cetera), a simpler language was raised and used by more than one participant in this study and seemed to be powerful and useful for them. Parallel to one of the primary themes found in this study, the notion of the *bubble* seems to operationalize a "messy" theoretical construct in a compelling way for these emerging adults. In addition, the categories identified in this model of inner circles was helpful in conceiving of the identity structures and change processes of faith experienced and navigated by the participants in this study. Because the sample of this study was very specific, there may be other components of the *bubble* that are not represented herein. Further research might also determine if the *bubble* concept applies to other emerging adults.

      In this study, liminality was most often realized through changes of physical space, for instance, through travel experiences; however, it appeared that liminal space could apply to more than changes in location, but also could occur ideologically and relationally. Research should be conducted as to the nature of liminality in other educational environments, such as in the classroom. Would such manipulated or created liminality have the same influence as a serendipitous liminal encounter? As mentioned in the conclusions, in my experience emerging adults returning from liminal experiences on retreats or mission trips often return to previous ideology over time. Research exploring the differences between individuals who experience transformative learning because of

liminal encounters and those who return to previous ideological assumptions should be explored.

The *bubble* appears related to authorship. However, it is not clear in this research the extent to which the *bubble* is prescribed by context or external authorities or is chosen by the individual. Further research into the *bubble* needs to be undertaken with other groups of emerging adults.

While organizing the *bubble* I struggled with whether this concept incorporated all of the participant's identities, ideas, and experiences or if it was solely a *faith bubble* that was influenced by identity. This seems to be more than just a semantic concern. The findings in this study indicate that the *bubble* contains both faith and identity and that, for most of these participants, it is both an *identity bubble* and a *faith bubble*. However, this may not prove true for other samples. Additional testing of this concept is needed.

Other Future Research

In addition to the categories that emerged from the conclusions, this study also raised additional theoretical questions that warrant further examination. This section will present additional questions that arose during data analysis concerning (a) the need for a longitudinal study, (b) the relationship between faith development, personality, and emotions, and (c) additional studies examining reflexivity.

A longitudinal study is needed to examine faith development throughout emerging adulthood. This narrative study demonstrated religious change and development in experiences as recalled and told by the participants. It would be helpful to have information from the beginning of emerging adulthood and from middle to late emerging adulthood with which to compare the findings of the present exploration.

Therefore, a longitudinal qualitative study is needed to follow conservative Christian emerging adults from high school into young adulthood to examine changes in meaning making over time. An investigation is also needed to understand how meaning making will change for these participants in later adulthood.

Smith and Snell's (2009) report on the National Youth and Religion study, a longitudinal research of faith among teenagers of all faith backgrounds through adulthood, provided the first large scale examination of the faith experiences of emerging adults. Their report ended with college graduation and suggested that parents have the greatest influence on faith before graduation. While the present study examined a specific group of late emerging adults, it appears that friends influenced participant's faith significantly during college. A longitudinal study is needed to examine a similar group of students from high school graduation through emerging adulthood.

An investigation is needed into the relationship between faith, personality, and emotions. During the interviews for this research project, some participants dismissed their answers saying, "That's just my personality." I asked these individuals to describe their personality in an attempt to understand possible connections between faith experience and practice with personality. The descriptions they provided were so helpful in understanding the participants' narratives that I added the question to the interview protocol. Many answered by telling me their Myers-Briggs personality types or typologies from another instrument, while others provided personality characteristics such as preferences, proclivities, and attributes. While analyzing the interview data, I became convinced that there is a personality component to faith development. However, the data collected in this study was insufficient to draw any conclusions. An investigation

is needed which seeks to understand how one's personality influences the ways the *bubble* is constructed and navigated. A study is also needed to explore how one's personality type influences an individual's preference for an integrated, or modern identity structure, or a postmodern structure which features multiple, disconnected identities or selves (Kegan, 1993).

There also appears to be a connection between emotions and faith experience for some participants in this study; however, the research protocol did not explore emotions sufficiently to draw a correlation. During the interview process some participants mentioned emotions as being a cause or effect of a faith response. Similarly, during the interviews Lucy, Thomas, and Rebekah became tearful when discussing faith experiences. How does one's personality affect openness to faith or emotion-based faith? How does emotional intelligence influence the experience of faith and the process of faith development? What might be the correlation between emotionality and critical thinking?

Additional studies are needed exploring reflexivity. Finally, reflexivity demands an examination of the effect of such a narrative interview process on the faith development of participants. In narrative research, meaning is co-constructed between the interviewer and the participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). Several participants mentioned that the process had been helpful in understanding themselves more fully. The process of identifying themes was revelatory for Anna, Braxton, Bryson, Kate, and Thomas. A longitudinal study exploring the affect this study had on the experiences of these five participants might yield insights. How does a minister's positionality influence parishioners' narration of experiences? In this study, my presence as a minister influenced the stories participants constructed during the

narrative interviews, and thus, affected the data collected (Finlay, 2002). More generally, how does the presence of an educator influence the learning that occurs in a classroom or on a study abroad experience? How does a student's perceived "fun factor" or felt relevance of material versus the educator's sense of what the student "needs to know" influence learning? This is a vital consideration for educators in environments where mastery of curriculum is considered to be important.

Implications for Practice

The findings and conclusions of this research project also have implications for the practice of higher, adult, continuing, and Christian education. In this section, I will discuss implications and questions in regards to the classroom, self-authorship, faith development, and traditional churches and postmodern faith.

Implications for Learning

The educational benefits of collegiate study abroad classes and mission experiences are well known. The findings of this study reveal that liminality creates a powerful crucible for transformative learning. How can universities and religious groups develop ways to use travel and the resulting liminal space to encourage critical thinking about experiences holistically, not to encourage or discourage faith, but to provide a less restricted environment conducive for emerging adults to become aware of their *bubble* so that self-authorship can more easily be developed? How can travel experiences (study abroad and mission trips) be effectively used to facilitate educational growth, development of critical thinking, and self-authorship?

The *bubble* incorporated the elements of *home*, *ideas*, and *practices*. While helpful for conceiving of the process of faith development and self-authorship for the

participants in this study, questions arise as to the application of the *bubble*. How can

collegiate ministers and ministers of education use the concept of the *bubble*

programmatically without succumbing to emotional & spiritual manipulation through

implied power dynamics (Doehring, 1995)? How can understanding the *bubble*

framework assist educators and employers of emerging adults to provide better

educational and training experiences? How can educational processes be adapted to make

better use of relationships in learning environments? How can adult educators make

better use of the correlation between faith and identity?

Implications of Self-authorship

Baxter Magolda (1992, 2007; Baxter Magolda & King, 2007) conducted a

longitudinal study exploring how colleges can assist students with the achievement of

self-authorship. Her findings showed that none of her participants achieved self-

authorship before graduation. Kegan (1982) suggested that self-authorship is not

achievable before age twenty-four. How can colleges further assist students with the

practical application of critical thinking to encourage the development of self-authorship?

Is Kegan (1982) correct that self-authorship cannot occur during early emerging

adulthood?

This study demonstrated that self-authorship was not achieved, but was a

continuous developmental process like that presented by McAdams (1993). Is there a

relationship between cognitive self-authorship and narrative self-authorship? Are there

ways to promote liminality and critical reflection to encourage narrative self-authorship

among emerging adults (Williams, 2007)? Is it possible for the church or denominational

campus ministries to provide more meaningful programming to self-authoring emerging adults?

Kegan (1994) and Schweitzer (2004) suggested that development has changed because of postmodernity. In a book edited by Sweet (2003b), a group of scholars and ministers dialogue about the church in a postmodern age, agreeing that the cultural milieu for Christian ministry has changed. They adopt the term *cultural postmodernism* (Couch, 2003; Horton, 2003; McLaren, 2003) to explain practical manifestations of Ludic postmodern thought (Ebert, 1992; Tisdell, 2003).

Implications of Faith Development

Savage and Presnell (2008) observed, "It is our belief that, in order for faith communities to define themselves and to know what to do in ministry, they must first understand the multiple stories which intersect with a given ministry situation in their specific context" (p. 25). Constructivist ideology is not palatable to most leaders in Christian evangelical churches. Similar to the observations of Grenz and Franke (2001) on postmodern Christianity, participants in this study presented a faith that was more relational and less propositional than what they had been taught in church. How can Christian educators who are interested in spiritual formation and discipleship best use peer relationships to further the development of emerging adult faith? Is it possible for conservative Christian organizational leaders to overcome the fear of intellectualism to encourage and facilitate emerging adult members in the application of critical thinking to their faith and spirituality within a comfortable environment of supportive peer relationships?

This study demonstrated that narrative interviewing, analysis, and member checks (Merriam & Simpson, 2000) can be a helpful process for participants to narrate stories of their lives into themes extending through their experiences. Brooks and Clarke (2001), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), McAdams (1993), and Rossiter (1999) demonstrated that narrating the stories of one's life could lead to new insights and to transformative learning. However, can narrative methods of interviewing and analyzing experiences be used effectively in the classroom and the church to help members "connect the dots" (McAdams, 1993, p. 306) between faith and life to begin to view life as a constructed, narrative (Rossiter and Clark, 2007; Bruner, 2004) with plots and subplots constructed from relationships, ideas, and mystical experiences (Osmer & Schweitzer, 2003; Schweitzer, 1997, 2000)? Elsewhere, I proposed the development of programs and techniques of *Narrative Discipleship* (Byrd, 2011, in press), wherein a facilitator or small group leader guides the learner through a series of questions and reflective homework that is then analyzed individually or in the group to discover learning themes and common meaning constructs throughout his or her life or journey of faith. Such experiences appear to be helpful for emerging adults to understand more fully their learning preferences and frames of meaning making. Are such techniques of education and discipleship applicable to other adult learning environments?

Implications for Traditional Churches

Traditional churches are facing a crisis of membership retention in the contemporary milieu. While the majority of participants in this study continue to be actively involved in churches, consistent with recent large-scale survey research, most have left the denomination of their youth (Astin, et al., 2005; Barna Group Research,

2006; Smith & Denton, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009; The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008). While there is much speculation on why this is occurring, a sufficient number of studies have not been conducted to explore all of the reasons for a lack of continued involvement. Some, like Carl in this study, have argued that most Christian churches have lost the true meaning of operationalizing the faith they say they practice and, as a result, misrepresent the teachings of Jesus (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007; Sweet & Crouch, 2003). Other scholars and practitioners have suggested that culture has become postmodern and therefore, the most traditional churches are becoming increasingly culturally irrelevant (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; McLaren, 2000, 2007, 2010; Viola, 2008). Can churches, denominations, and collegiate ministries incorporate the postmodern idea of self-authoring faith without being manipulative of parishioners' meanings and experiences? Can the programs of churches that are losing membership be adapted to be more effective in providing for the educational needs and desires of emerging adults? How can Christian education efforts within the church be adapted from a modern structure of the integrated self to the postmodern frame of multiple selves? Will educational programs need to be developed that address both modern and postmodern constructs?

Chapter Summary

This research was used to demonstrate some ways in which emerging adults narrate their faith after college. The fourteen alumni participants clearly are not typical of most late emerging adults. Their involvement in the Baptist Student Union at the University of Georgia, after participating in vibrant church youth groups before college, provided intense, extended indoctrination into a conservative southern Christian culture.

Four conclusions were reached regarding emerging adult faith of the participants in this study: (a) Faith was operationalized, (b) faith remained vital, (c) faith and identity were negotiated, and (d) self-authorship was a continuous narrative process mediated through experience and relationships.

Implications for theory and practice were also presented and discussed in this chapter. Further research is needed to explore the conclusions of this study among other groups of Christian emerging adults as well as those professing other spiritual perspectives. Application of the conclusions of this research project with emerging adults in churches and collegiate ministries might better contextualize Christian education and discipleship for a new, culturally postmodern, generation of believers.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

REFEXIVITY STATEMENT

I am still discovering who I am as a researcher, a Christian, and a campus

minister. A part of that search is identifying, understanding, and naming my

epistemological perspectives and understanding how my subjectivity affects my work. I

have been steeped in my faith tradition. My father, Nathan C. Byrd, Jr., was a campus

minister for the Georgia Baptist Convention for 23 years, working at Georgia Southern

College. The year he retired, I began working for the same organization, though at a

different college. Many of my best childhood memories revolve around my father's work.

I enjoyed attending meetings and events at the BSU when I was a child. The retreats were

always like mini vacations for me. I walked to his office from school almost every

afternoon during middle school and waited until he left for the day to go home. Growing

up, it was normal for us to have collegians or alumni in our home for dinner and for some

theological issue to be the center of our dinnertime conversations. Discussing and

questioning theological assumptions was always easy for me because it was normal

conversation in our family. My first job was doing yard work at the Baptist Center. My

childhood heroes were the students who were in the BSU where my father worked. They

taught me how to play ping-pong, checkers, and chess, took me on hikes, and were my

sitters when my parents had to be away.

My initial reactions emerge from core Christian beliefs about the nature of God

and humanity based in a gospel of unconditional love. While in seminary I discovered

that I held a mystical faith. I am often more comfortable with the questions raised by faith

and spirituality than with the dogmatic answers given by many teachers and pastors. The

spiritual practice of wordless meditation and contemplation is often more meaningful to me than vocalized prayers. While at seminary I was introduced to the works of Teihard de Chardin (1959, 1960, 1964), Macquarrie (1972), and Moltmann (1974, 1981, 1983, 1984; Moltmann, Meeks, & Runyon, 1979). All of these quite distinct thinkers helped name and form my perspectives as to the openness of God, the ongoing process of creation, and the Gospel of liberation. While in seminary, I also learned to read the Bible as a narrative, looking for the plots and themes that extend through the Christian scriptures. Those progressive ideas have somehow found a home within my conservative Baptist faith, beliefs, and practice.

The popular assumption is that Christianity represents a positivistic theological perspective. While I hold many traditional Christian beliefs, I am also a social constructivist. From those early dinnertime conversations through my current educative experiences, I have come to believe that each individual's perceptions and beliefs are constructed. Each person I encounter is the combined result of genetics, experiences, relationships, choices, and much more. While I may hold onto certain beliefs about the world and others, I recognize that each person's constructed reality is different from mine. This does not preclude me from being a successful campus minister or researcher, in fact, I feel because of my epistemology, I am perhaps a more attentive listener, seeking to hear each person's unique story and constructed worldview.

I have been fascinated with theories of human development since seminary. In earning my Master of Divinity degree, my emphasis was Pastoral Care and Counseling. In my later years of seminary, I wondered whether I should work in the field of collegiate ministry, education, chaplaincy, or pastoral care. The work of Piaget (1926a, 1926b,

1929, 1932, 1963), Erikson (1968, 1980), and Jung have been foundational for my understanding of others and myself. I am certified in administering the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, McCaulley, & Most, 1985) and use it often in my work counseling collegians and couples who are preparing for marriage. The faith development theories of Fowler (1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1995, 1996, 2001, 2004; Fowler, Nipkow, & Schweitzer, 1991), Loder (1980a, 1980b, 1989, 1998), and Parks (1980, 1986, 1991, 2000) have helped me to understand those with whom I work. In preparing for this research project, I have enjoyed exploring Kegan's (1980, 1982, 1994, 2000) theory of human development, McAdams' (1985, 1988, 1993, 1996) theory of narrative development, and the theory of emerging adulthood, initially discussed by Arnett (1994, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006a, 2006b) and expanded by many others (Barry & Nelson, 2005; Bynner, 2005; Nelson, 2003; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Smith & Snell, 2009).

The participants in this study were all former students in BSU at UGA with whom I still have varied degrees of contact. I either mentored each of these alumni during their collegiate experience or supervised them on the leadership team at BSU. As a result, I am personally invested in their lives and their faith experience and expression. I delineated the extent of my continued contact with each participant at the conclusion of his or her faith biography in chapter four.

Researching friends or close associates can be problematic and advantageous. There is a danger of assuming understanding of meanings or experiences expressed by participants during interviews (Seidman, 2006). More problematic can be relationships among supervisors and those supervised. Pastors, ministers, counselors, educators, and supervisors hold real and perceived power over those in their tutelage and in their care

(Doehring, 1995). The emotional dynamics involved with religious leaders and parishioners can be difficult to overcome for both the researcher and the participant. When I issued emails to inquire about participation in this project, I did not hear back from five alumni. I received their names from other participants in this study as potential members of the study. I was told none attend church. My role as a campus minister might have hindered their participation. Participants may also seek to make their stories sound better or worse than they actually are in order to appease the perceived need of the minister. While analyzing Anna's journal I could not decipher one of her entries, so I emailed her about it. It looked like the word was a name, but it was actually "DUI." She had been arrested for driving under the influence a month before our first interview, but she had not mentioned it in either conversation. In her email response she said the omission was not intentional and that she was willing to provide answers if I had any other questions.

At times, I had to remind myself during interviews that my role was researcher, not counselor. Many of the stories narrated by participants were heartrending for me to hear, transcribe, and analyze. Being a helper at heart, I found it difficult to listen to participants' stories and not ask healing questions designed to move the storyteller to deeper self-understanding and to a place of catharsis. Discussing these matters with peer debriefers helped me to maintain a balanced perspective as a researcher.

In researching known subjects there is also the danger of the minister manipulating the relationship to achieve his or her desired results. During the second interviews, five of the participants told me that the experience helped them better understand themselves. That was satisfying to hear, but it forced me to return to the

transcripts to see if I might have assumed the role of counselor or minister instead of researcher. It was helpful to be reminded of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) belief that the very act of participating in narrative research influences participants.

Presenting the stories in narrative form can also be problematic. Johnson-Bailey (2004) cautions, "when narrativists work with stories they must be aware of how power, the hidden companion, shapes views and relations with the world" (p. 128). Understanding my own subjectivity and positionality was essential while conducting the interviews and analyzing the participant's stories, for the stories were not just research data, but were the narratives of real people, telling some of the most intimate details of experiences. As noted earlier, this research was "holy" work (Mueller, 2006, p. 10) that required professionalism and extreme care.

Researching friends or associates can also have advantages. Because of my previous contact with the participants in this study, we already had a rapport from which to begin our conversations about faith matters. Because of our familiarity, we were able to quickly delve into matters of faith and relationship. When participants mentioned a college friend, I usually knew who was being discussed. I was also aware of many of the stories narrated during the interviews and was able to ask contextual follow-up questions. In each interview, I tried to be attentive for times when participants might be trying to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. On three occasions participants (Jennifer, Rebekah, and Thomas) asked, "Is that good?" I responded by saying that I was seeking to understand their story. If that was their story, it was good.

The role of researcher is one that I have come to enjoy. Researching collegians and alumni who were involved in the program of BSU has provided insight into our

current ministry and practice as well as into the faith development of emerging adults in

this new millennium. Continuing to practice reflexivity and to examine my positionality

will be essential to produce unbiased research.

APPENDIX B

TRANSITIONS IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Researchers	Participants / process	Findings
Transitions into college		
Aultman (2005)	12 males & 5 females / Participants were studied for 18 months beginning with the summer before their first year of college until the end of the first semester of their second year.	Using Schlossberg's theory of transition, the researcher found that students transition, self-regulate behavior, and adapt best in an environment where university personnel design a system attentive to the individual student, student's behavior and the environment of housing and learning during first year student life.
Bohnert, Aikins, & Edidin (2007)	54 females & 34 males / surveyed the summer prior to enrollment as freshman and again 10 months later.	Those involved in organizations on campus reported better friendship quality and lower levels of loneliness than those who were not involved.
Transitions during college		
Astin (1993a, 1993b)	25,000 students from 200 different colleges / Participants were surveyed in their first year (1985) and again in their last year (1989) of college to examine changes.	Measured were the broad categories of academic development, personal development, and satisfaction with their education. Students who spent significant time on academics while maintaining healthy cooperative learning (diverse peer group) interactions and relationships with professors should the most change and greatest satisfaction with their education.

Researchers	Participants / process	Findings
Baxter Magolda (1992)	101 participants, longitudinal - 5 annual interviews of collegians / Interviewed once a year for four years to identify differences between male and female collegians meaning-making.	Author presents the "Epistemological Reflection Model" and four domains of knowing: Absolute, Transitional, Independent, and Contextual. The later is the goal of a liberal arts education. No significant difference was found between males and females. Only 2% of seniors and 12% of fifth year students achieved Contextual knowing. Part two of the book includes advice from author and participants to educators each level of knowing.
Lefkowitz (2005)	125 females and 100 males, 18-25 years old / asked open-ended questions each year of college about changes in relationships, views of religion, and sex	Most changed were relationships with parents. The least change occurred in religious views. Changes were mostly viewed as positive by participants. Reported changes were more in beliefs than in behaviors.
Pascarella & Terenzini (2005)	3 decades of research; reviews over 2500 articles and reports / literature review: reports on the past 10 years of research on the impact and effect of education on the collegiate level.	Findings indicate that significant changes occur in cognitive development. However, more attention needs to be given to teaching methods, understanding that students today construct knowledge in a variety of ways. Involvement in extracurricular activities may advance or inhibit development. For instance, collegiate athletics inhibits intellectual development while promoting self-confidence and social capital. Involvement in a fraternity can be beneficial or destructive. Religious development changes in several ways, probably more in the way students think about religion or faith than in religiosity.

Researchers	Participants / process	Findings
Perry (1970)	Complete information on less than 100 males during 4 years of college (2 samples) / Studied two different groups of students at Harvard and Ratcliff over a period of 16 years.	His research resulted in the development of "the Perry scheme" which includes nine positions of intellectual "knowing." Students entering college arrive with a dualistic, concrete view of knowledge as right or wrong. As they mature and move through school they progress to a multiplistic perspective in which knowledge is uncertain and finally grow into a relativistic perspective in which contextual evidence may be used to justify knowledge claims.

Transitions from college to adulthood

Baxter Magolda (2004)	100 participants; 39 participants remained in the study to its conclusion.	Conclusions were drawn from a 16 year longitudinal study. Findings among all participants include: knowledge is socially constructed and is multifaceted; identity is vital to knowledge construction; and knowledge construction has a social element and is found to be mutual among peers. All participants had achieved self-authorship by age 30.

APPENDIX C

THEORIES OF DEVELOPMENT

Domains	Freud	Piaget	Erikson	Loevinger	Levinson
	Psycho-analytic	Cognitive	Psychosocial	Ego	Men's lifecycle
Infancy	Oral	Sensorimotor	Trust verses Mistrust	(1) Autistic (2) Symbiotic (3) Impulsive	
Early Childhood	Anal	Pre-operational	Autonomy verses Shame	(4) Self-protective	Childhood
Play age	Phallic		Initiative verses Guilt	(5) Conformist	
School age		Concrete operational	Industry verses Inferiority		
Early Adolescence		Early formal operational	Identity verses Diffusion	(6) Conscientious - conformist	Adolescence
Late Adolescence	Puberty			(7) Conscientious	
Young Adult (19-40)		Full formal operational	Intimacy verses isolation	(8) Individualistic	Early adulthood
Adulthood (40-65)			Generativity verses self-absorption	(9) Autonomous	Middle adulthood
Late adulthood			Integrity verses despair		Late adulthood

Influences

Kohlberg	Gilligan	Kegan		Schweitzer	McAdams
Moral development	Woman's moral development	Constructive-developmental	Orders of consciousness	Postmodern life cycle	Narrative development
Pre-conventional: (1) Punishment-Obedience		Incorporative	(1) Single point, (perceptions & impulses)	Childhood	Pre-narrative
		Impulsive			
Pre-conventional: (2) Instrumental relativist	Pre-conventional	Imperial	(2) Durable category	Pre-Adolescence	Narrative
			(3) Traditionalism: Trans-Categorical	Adolescence	
Conventional: (3) Interpersonal	Conventional	Interpersonal			
Conventional: (4) Law and order	Post-conventional		(4) Modernism: System (Self-authoring)	Post-adolescence	
Post-Conventional: (5) Social contract		Institutional	(5) Postmodern: Trans-System/ complex	Adulthood	
Post-Conventional: (6) Universal		Inter-individual		Old Age	Post-narrative

Influences

APPENDIX D

THEORIES OF FAITH DEVELOPMENT

Theory	Structure	Theoretical Basis	Features
Fowler's (1981) stages of faith	Cognitive-structural stage theory	Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Kegan	The theory presents an evolutionary, epigenetic, and irreversible six-stage model that spans the lifecycle of all adults. His theory is not limited to religion, but explores every individual's life-guiding, "Ultimate reality."
Slee's (2003, 2004) women's faith development	Processes and patterns of women's faith	Fowler, Gilligan (and other feminist, relational theorists)	A nascent pattern of women's faith development that includes the processes of alienation, awakenings, and relationality.
Oser's (1980) stages of religious judgment	Cognitive-religious stage theory	Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg	A six stage, structural-developmental theory of religious judgment that seeks an equal balance between human and divine interaction.
Loder's (1980b, 1989) transforming moment	Theocentric human development	Kierkegaard's stages in dialogue with Erikson's models	Reinterprets constructive-developmental models in light of Christocentric divine influence, presenting a view of development marked by moments of transformation in light of love and grace.

APPENDIX E

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Pseudonym	Grad Date	Age	Gender	Status	Children	College Affiliation	Present Affiliation
Anna	May 2003	27	Female	Divorced/ Single	0	Baptist	Non-D
Braxton	May 2002	30	Male	Married	2	Baptist	Non-D
Bryson	Dec 2003	28	Male	Married	0	SBC	Baptist
Carl	May 2003	29	Male	Single	0	SBC	n/a
Chad	Dec 2004	29	Male	Single	0	Baptist	Baptist
Chris	May 2002	30	Male	Married	1	SBC	Non-D
Emily	May 2002	29	Female	Married	2	Baptist	CBF/ Non-D
Heather	May 2004	27	Female	Single	0	Methodist	n/a
Jennifer	May 2005	28	Female	Married	2+	Non-D	SBC
Kate	Dec 2004	27	Female	Single	0	SBC	n/a
Lucy	May 2001	30	Female	Married	0	Baptist	Non-D
Rebekah	May 2005	27	Female	Single	0	SBC	Methodist
Stephanie	May 2004	28	Female	Married	0	SBC	PC USA
Thomas	2004, 2009	29	Male	Single	0	Methodist	n/a Methodist

Research Participant Demographics, Continued

Pseudonym	Post-collegiate Education	Job	Pilot	First Interview	Second Interview
Anna	MEd / Ldrship Cert.	Teacher	Y	6/18/09 4p @ Parkway BC	5/12/10, 6:30p @ Starbucks
Braxton	n/a	Advertising	N	5/25/10 5:30p @ Atl. Bread Co.	7/21/10 5:30p @ Cheeseburger
Bryson	Apprenticeships	Farmer	Y	7/12/09 8:30p @ Hotel	5/20/10:30p, @ His farm
Carl	Self-directed	Tour guide	*	5/28/10 5:30a 🖥	7/13/10 5:30a 🖥
Chad	Med	Teacher	N	7/1/10 11:30a @ McCalister's	7/27/10 11:30a @ Trapeze
Chris	On the job training	Sales	Y	6/18/09 12p @ Borders	5/19/10 12p @ Borders
Emily	MSW / MDiv	Social Work	Y	7/1/09 4p @ Starbucks	5/18/10, 4p @ Starbucks
Heather	n/a	Art Director	N	6/2/10 6:30p @ Manuel's	7/21/10 3:15p @ The Porter
Jennifer	n/a	Mom	N	6/14/10 6:30 @ her home	8/3/10 8:30p 🖥
Kate	Tech School / MBA	Sales	Y	6/30/09 7:30p @ Borders	6/10/10 3p 🖥
Lucy	n/a	Producer	N	5/27/10 5:25p 🖥	7/14/10 4:30p 🖥
Rebekah	Law	Lawyer	N	6/23/10 8:30a 🖥	7/22/10 8:30a 🖥
Stephanie	CFRE	Non-Profit	N	5/21/10 11a @ Mimi's	7/17/10 12:30p @ Maggiano's
Thomas	Biology, Anesthesia	Student	N	6/26/10 9a @ Cracker Barrel	7/25/10 11a 🖥

🖥 = Interview conducted using Skype, an internet video conferencing program.

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE INVITATION

Nathan C. Byrd, III

1311 Ferncreek Drive • Watkinsville, GA 30677

May 12, 2010

Dear _____:

Thank you for your willingness to learn more about my research project. As I explained, this project is a part of my graduate studies at the University of Georgia (UGA). My goal for the study is to gain understanding into faith development after a student's graduation from college. This investigation will be seeking the perspective of UGA alumni who were leaders in Baptist Student Union (now Baptist Collegiate Ministries). This information will better enable BCM campus ministers to meet the changing needs of collegians who will soon be making similar transitions when they graduate from the university.

I am seeking participants who will actively delve into an examination of their faith development since graduation. Participation in the study will be a reflective experience. If you choose to take part, I will conduct a 1-2 hour interview talking with you about the experiences that have affected your faith. I will ask you to bring an item with you to our first meeting that you feel represents your faith. This memento could be anything (a drawing, your journal, a conference program, a photograph, a book, etc.) that illustrates or was important in your spiritual journey. A few weeks later, after I have had time to reflect on your responses, I will interview you again seeking clarification and expansion of information from our first conversation. The process should prove informative to both of us as we seek to discover the many facets of spiritual development that have been a part of your experience.

Before the first interview begins, I will ask you to sign a document granting your permission to include you in this research. A copy of this consent form is included with this letter. It will provide you with more details about the study. Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Though I would appreciate your involvement, your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way affect your relationship with UGA, the BCM, BCM campus ministers, or the BCM Alumni Foundation.

If you are willing to participate, please contact me using the information below.

Sincerely,

Nathan C. Byrd, III

Enclosed: Consent Form

nathan.byrd@gmail.com • 706-340-3649

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM

An Exploration of Faith Development in Emerging Adulthood
[IRB 2009-10889-0]

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled *An Exploration of Faith Development in Emerging Adulthood* conducted by Nathan C. Byrd, III, a student at the University of Georgia. Contact information is listed below and I may contact him anytime with questions or concerns.

Rights of the Participant: My participation in this study is voluntary. I am free to refuse to participate or withdraw my participation at any time should I become uncomfortable. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

Purpose of the Study: I understand the purpose of this research project is to gain understanding into faith development during the transition from college into adulthood. This study will be seeking the perspective of UGA alumni who were leaders in Baptist Collegiate Ministries (formerly Baptist Student Union). Nathan's major professor, Dr. Wendy Ruona (wrouna@uga.edu, 706-542-4474), will supervise the research project.

Procedures: I understand that the researcher is conducting a narrative study of identity development involving matters of faith practice and belief. Examining development from a narrative perspective may illuminate how a person constructs his or her identity and makes sense of life experiences in light of the stories he or she recalls and/or tells. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that by initialing the line next to each activity I agree to participate in:

——**Interviews**: I understand that I will be participating in two digitally audio-taped interviews lasting 60-120 minutes that will occur at locations negotiated between the researcher and me. The second interview will be a follow-up on the first, seeking clarification and expansion of information from our first conversation. In this meeting, I will have an opportunity to discuss the interpretations of the researcher's analysis. I also understand that I may be contacted by telephone or email after the second interview to provide further clarification of data or interpretation of data analysis.

——**Mementoes**: If I deem them applicable, I agree to provide personal journals (or portions of journals), weblogs, Facebook notes, artwork, programs from conferences, photographs, books, or other documents or objects that may represent or illustrate my identity development or faith development since college. I may decide which documents, portions of documents, or artifacts to provide, and I understand that providing any documents or artifacts is voluntary.

Discomfort/Stresses: The discomforts or stresses that may be faced during this study include possible psychological or spiritual anxiety related to discussing personal matters.

Risks: No risks are expected.

Benefits to me: There will be no direct benefits or financial compensation for this study.

Confidentiality: I understand that my individual identifiable information will be kept confidential and used in a manner that will protect my identity. My name and any traceable identifiers will be removed from transcripts before reporting data or results (unless doing so would compromise the reporting of the data or results, in which case I will be contacted to gain my approval. If my

approval is denied, the data will be removed). I understand that I can choose or will be given a pseudonym and any quotations made from my interviews or discussion of my documents or artifacts will be attributed to the pseudonym.

I understand that the interviews will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. The recordings will be preserved on a flash drive in a secure location in the researcher's home. These will be deleted when the study is completed (in at least five years). Transcriptions will be stored in password-protected files. Transcriptions will also be printed and stored in a locked file box in the researcher's home with the flash drive. Copies or photographs of artifacts will be stored with the above materials.

Use of data: I understand that data and analysis from this study may be used in the researcher's classes, for publication, to improve the future ministries of the BCM, and in presentations in seminars and research conferences.

Sincerely,
Nathan C. Byrd, III

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of Researcher   Signature of Researcher   Date

Nathan C. Byrd, III, MDiv
Baptist Collegiate Ministries
450 South Lumpkin Street
Athens, GA 30605
Phone: (706) 340-3649
Email: natebyrd@uga.edu

Please sign both copies, keep one copy, and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be addressed to: Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX H

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Pseudonym: _____ Date/Time_____ Place: _____

Demographic Information

To be completed by each participant

Name:
Pseudonym (choose a name by which you will be known in the research project):
UGA Graduation date:
Age:
Gender:
Relationship status (dating, married, partner, etc):
Religious/denominational affiliations: ▪ Growing up ▪ In college: ▪ Currently:
Other education:
Leadership Positions held in BSU/BCM:
A bit about your family:
Current job/title:

Pseudonym: _____ Date/Time_____ Place: _____

Narrative Interview Guide

Questions	Contextual issues	Probes
Probe all *Godtalk*, clichés, or perceived "Sunday school answers"		
1. Tell me the story of your faith journey.	**Context**	
2. I asked you to bring something that represents your faith journey. What did you bring? Tell me about it.	**Context**	What else did you consider? If you could have brought several items, what would they have been?
3. Tell me about the people who have served as spiritual heroes for you.	**Context**	Parents/siblings? Ministers/teachers? Peers? Authors?
4. Tell me about the people who have served as spiritual anti-heroes.	**Context**	Parents/siblings? Ministers/teachers? Peers?
5. How have your religious beliefs and practices changed in the past 10 years?	**Context**	
6. How do you think your beliefs and practices will change in the next 10 years?	**Context**	How do your foresee family, job, location, etc. affecting your faith/practice?

Questions	Contextual issues	Probes
Probe all *Godtalk*, clichés, or perceived "Sunday school answers"		
7. Tell me how you came to your current occupation. What prompted you to look for a job doing _____?	**Context**	Were there people who /events that influenced your decision? What have you discovered about yourself/life at work?
8. Tell me about the spiritual highpoints of your life.	**Context**	This could lead into question (#10) below about "place."
9. Tell me about the spiritual low points (*nadir* experiences) of your life.	**Context**	What was the hardest part of growing up? What has been the toughest part of the transition from college to the real, grown-up world?
10. Many people associate spiritual experiences with a particular place - Tell me about the most spiritual place you have been?	**Context**	
11. Reflect on everything we have talked about today. After you have lived a long, full life, what do you want to be said of you at your funeral?	**Context**	Alternate: Reflecting on everything we have talked about, after you have lived a long, full life, what do you want your obituary to say about you?

If above questions do not get at Data, ask these questions:

• Tell me about your most wonderful experiences with God, the church or Christians.	**Context**	

• Tell me about your worst/most uncomfortable experiences with God, church or religious folks.	**Context**	
• Is faith / practice similar to or different from parents (family of origin)? Probe similarities & differences.	**Context**	
• How does faith influence worldview (including politics, interpretation of events, etc.)	**Context**	

Fieldnotes:

APPENDIX I

GRAPHICAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Legacy?
- Obituary?
- How do you want to be remembered?
- What about your faith/spirituality do you want to pass along to your children?

How have beliefs/practices changed in the past 10 years?
- How does your faith/practice differ from your parents'?
- How is your occupation affected by your faith?
- How does your faith/spirituality affect your worldview?

Spiritual Places?
- Spiritual activities?

Experience most/least engaged with faith/spirituality?
- Highpoints?
- Lowpoints?

Tell me the story of your faith? (with a beginning, middle and end)
- Heroes?
- Anti-heroes?

What do the words "faith" & "spirituality" mean to you?
- Faith
- Spirituality

Tell me about your artifact?

APPENDIX J

BRYSON'S ARTIFACT: LOLA KOI

APPENDIX K

EMILY'S ARTIFACT: CHRIST OF THE BREADLINES

Christ of the Breadlines, A lithograph by Fritz Eichenberg (1950)

APPENDIX L

HEATHER'S ARTIFACT: FRANKLIN FAN
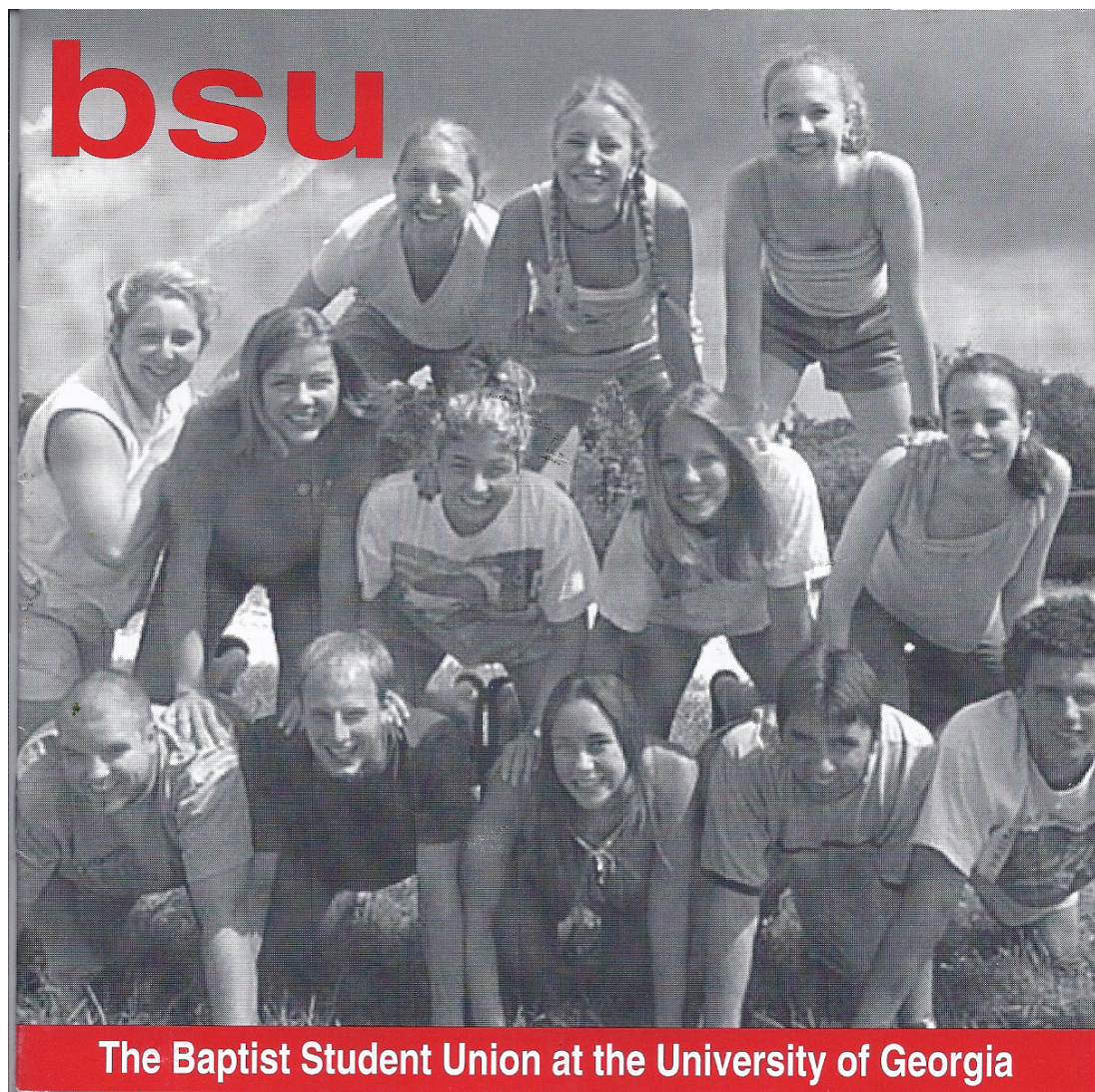
APPENDIX M

JENNIFER'S ARTIFACT: CANOE AND VASE

APPENDIX N

KATE'S ARTIFACT: BROKEN CANDLE

APPENDIX O

STEPHANIE'S ARTIFACT: BSU BROCHURE

APPENDIX P

THOMAS' ARTIFACT: THE KEY