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Abstract

This dissertation examined how students of diverse spiritual or religious beliefs or worldviews at a rural, public college interpreted, made meaning of, and drew upon their spirituality in relation to other aspects of their identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual identity), focusing particularly on the intersections of students' multiple marginalized identities. It was a single-site, qualitative study involving 20 participants attending a rural, mid-sized, predominantly-White northeastern public university. The researcher used semi-structured, in-person interviews, gathering and analyzing data using symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) with the critical stance possible from applying the lens of the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The study provided evidence of the considerable influence of context, in this case geography (rural setting).

Results produced five findings of note which serve to enhance educators' understanding of rural, public college students' spiritual identity development. One, those students identifying with a faith tradition ascribed a great deal of importance to the possibility for affiliation with others of like beliefs at college. For some, affiliation concerns affected both their choice of college and their spiritual identity exploration while attending college. Two, the students did not look to the College to provide venues for spiritual expression, largely navigating their exploration without reinforcement from student affairs, faculty, or other arm of the college. Three, some students, seeking connection, community, predictability, and identity with others sharing a common history, culture, and/or set of beliefs (i.e., intersection of similar multiple categories), formed their own organizations such as gospel choir or chapter of Hillel. Particularly, Jewish respondents did not perceive the College or surrounding area as offering a

culturally-familiar atmosphere or space within which to feel a part, and African-American participants did not perceive either as offering a culturally-familiar space within which to worship. Students identifying as gay selected places to worship based solely on those institutions' professed acceptance of the students' sexual identity.

Four, students drew on their spiritual or religious understanding to negotiate everyday college life as well as to test their beliefs and assumptions about controversial issues. They used practices such as prayer, meditation, or singing praises for comfort in negotiating everyday life and stressors. A number of Protestant students perceived that non-Christian students looked first to forms of substance abuse to cope with daily college stressors. Finally, in college classrooms, many students perceived resistance to discussion or acceptance of spirituality or religion, a hindrance that often led to increased tension rather than enhanced understanding.

IS FAITH ON THE CAMPUS TOUR? RURAL, PUBLIC COLLEGE STUDENTS'
EXPLORATION OF SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

By
TAMARA DURANT

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Higher Education Administration program

Syracuse University
December 2014

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To God from whom all blessings flow (Ken, 1674)

To my husband, Dennis, and my parents, Russell and Barbara Reed, for their unconditional love and knowledge of the beginning of all wisdom

To three phenomenal stepsons – Kristopher, Jonathan, and Nathan - and one incredible daughter, Brandi, for love, patience, acceptance, and fun

To Timothy Eatman, Dawn Johnson, and, especially, Cathy Engstrom, for hours of guidance

To supervisors and colleagues at Northern State for their support and patience

Against the Wind

Well those drifters' days are past me now
I've got so much more to think about
Deadlines and commitments
What to leave in, what to leave out

Against the wind
I'm still runnin' against the wind
I'm older now but still running
Against the wind
Well I'm older now and still running
Against the wind

Bob Seger & The Silver Bullet Band

Seeger, Jarvis, Brennan, 1980

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In December, 2011, a student wrote a letter (first two paragraphs follow) to the campus minister at Northern State (a pseudonym for the site of this research) and gave permission to include it in the minister's column in the student newspaper:

I am not a very religious student or affiliated to any one religion, however, I do feel I am spiritual and there are others on campus who are concerned with there not being an open chapel for them to practice their religions or beliefs freely on campus. There are a limited number of churches and chapels in our region, but a large number of minorities that find it difficult to practice in this small community. If there will be a committee regarding this issue, I am willing to join and participate. There is a new student union being built on campus. Would it be possible for a significant sized chapel to be placed on campus in either the new building or the old student union for the campus to recognize the variety of religious backgrounds that our student body derives from? Through this structure we may openly recognize memorials to upstanding individuals, display healthy signs of grief in loss of members to our campus body, recognize, build understanding and tolerance for other faiths and beliefs, as well as focus on the spiritual and moral upbringing of our student body. (p. 13)

That this student took the time to craft a letter speaks to the importance she placed on exploring her spirituality and on a space within which to do so. The issues of exploration of spirituality/religion and of space – as help or hindrance to that exploration– were examined in this study. She outlined some of the difficulties faced by students who held membership in multiple groups which influenced their spirituality, students who were not members of the predominantly White, rural culture of Northern State in the town of Northburg. She noted that their opportunity to worship in the manner to which they were accustomed was negatively impacted and suggested this impact was felt by a number of students. The intersection of participants' identities and its influence on participants' spirituality and religion and opportunities to express their faith were also focal points of this research.

Newman (2010) has suggested that many students of the millennial generation, like the author of the newspaper editorial, might be more comfortable with the descriptor spiritual as opposed to religious because of a belief that it absolves one of:

complicity in the evils perpetrated by every religious institution on earth. We escape 'organized religion' with its stultifying conformity, its routinized prayers, its pointless quibbles over dogma, its oppressive 'we-they' mentality. We skim the spiritual cream off the top, leaving the bucket of sour milk behind. (para. 1)

While some participants showed preference for one term over another, in general, a student's spirituality is understood by educators as that individual's worldview, guiding learning and interactions (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986, 2000, 2011; Tisdell, 2003).

Moreover, Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward (2006) have claimed that the term worldview has become nearly synonymous with one's concept of the ultimate meaning of life.

Historically, a remarkable amount of scholarship has been devoted to studying the broader concept of college student development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) since the American Council on Education's 1937 landmark report, *The Student Personnel Point of View*. This seminal document acknowledged the importance of research on the college student and challenged practitioners to guide and educate the "whole student." It outlined the objectives to be met in order to attain an effective educational program and included the goal of supervision, evaluation, and *development of the religious life* and interests of students. Today, the term *spirituality* is more frequently associated with contemporary research on student spiritual identity development than the phrase *religious life* (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken & Echols, 2006; Dancy, 2010; Stewart, 2009, 2010; & Watt, 2003), and, as noted (Newman, 2010), may be more palatable to some who eschew organized religion. My operational definition of spirituality for this study was *a way of*

seeking meaning and purpose that exceeds the immediate which may or may not be deepened by religious beliefs or practices, and, when recruiting students to participate, I asked for students who would describe themselves as spiritual, religious or seeking meaning and purpose beyond or outside of themselves in order to be as inclusive as possible. To reflect contemporary usage, I generally used the term spiritual in place of religious or religion when communicating with students and for the most part continued that practice in this document unless referring specifically to a term used by a participant, another researcher, or a particular faith tradition or sect. (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of definition of terms.)

This study gives voice to 20 students who described moments in their movement toward defining, establishing, and making meaning of their spiritual/religious identity in relation to other components of their identities. The critical element of spiritual identity is seldom the focus of attention for staff and faculty at public institutions (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Collins, Hurst, & Jacobsen, 1987, Parks, 2011). It is my hope to underscore the need for increased understanding of as well as increased attention to spaces and conditions supporting public college students' spiritual and religious exploration.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this research was to explore how college students of diverse spiritual beliefs or worldviews at a rural, public institution interpret, make meaning of, and draw (or do not draw) upon their spirituality in relation to other aspects of their identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation). For a number of students, their spiritual identity development may be a critical aspect of their overall development (Chickering,

Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986, 2000, 2011; Tisdell, 2003). I applied the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) which allows that humans construct their world based on their individual perceptions and interpretations of what they conceive that world to be (Benzies & Allen, 2001). That is, based on social interaction, people attach meaning to symbols such as language and then act on the basis of the meaning that they derived (Benzies & Allen, 2001). In order for me to understand students' feelings or actions I must understand what meaning they attach to the symbols involved which have developed through interaction. For example, one participant discouraged another Northern State student from joining the gospel choir because, in his experience (or "interaction") singing gospel music necessitated passion for the meaning of the words not just for the rhythm and beat, and he did not believe that her worldview as an atheist would provide that passion. To him, singing gospel meant (or was "symbolic" of) worship and experiencing a passion brought about by the meaning of the songs' words.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) cautioned that no inquirer should go about the business of inquiry without being clear about which paradigms guide the approach. I chose to use a qualitative design, as details as to how students constructed and made meaning of their spiritual identities would be more fully available through allowing students to describe themselves and their spiritual identities in their own words. I was interested in uncovering students' understandings of their spirituality and analyzing those conditions that promoted and those that hindered this exploration. I employed the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) as the overarching paradigm to guide my research. Because the construction of one's

spirituality does not occur in a vacuum, analysis of the relationships among identities permitted me to consider how students' spirituality both influenced and was influenced by the other dimensions of their identities, such as race or gender (Naples, 2009), that is, to view the merging, collision, or divergence of identity components. To study one aspect of a person's identity would be a partial and inaccurate picture of the individual's lived experiences, as "social categories are not independent and unidimensional, but rather multiple, interdependent and mutually constitutive" (Bowleg, 2013, p. 755).

Student spirituality is more about reviewing and reworking beliefs than outward manifestations of religiosity (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). What does this reconstruction look like? Do students attending rural, public colleges feel supported in this process? This study will provide critical information to add to the understanding of students' exploration of spirituality, their opportunity to make meaning at their rural college, and the way in which various components of their lives intertwine, influence, and are influenced by the process. This research contributes to the still sparse body of literature seeking to better understand how rural college students practicing diverse expressions of spirituality make meaning of their spiritual identities amongst multiple dimensions of identity.

Increased Interest in Spirituality and Religion

American college and university students are increasingly interested in - and expecting to explore - their spirituality in the collegiate setting, specifically, the role spirituality or religion plays in their lives during that time (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, 2007; Dancy, 2010; Davidson, 2000; de la Huerta, 1999; Kim & Seidlitz, 2002; Love, 1997; Patton & McClure, 2009; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Saggio &

Rendon, 2004; Stewart, 2009; Stewart & Lozano, 2009; Watson, 2006; Watts; 2003). Higher education is a fundamental, influential force in the lives of students moving toward adulthood (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research has shown that higher education is positively related to student intellectual and moral development (Astin, 1993, 1978; Cruce, Wolniak, Seifert, & Pascarella, 2006; Gilligan, 1981; King & Kitchner, 1994; King, & Mayhew, 2004; Kohlberg, 1976; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, 1991; Perry, 1970; Pike & Kuh, 2005). Various researchers have identified college as a time for students to explore and even challenge beliefs cultivated by family and heritage and to investigate other spiritual and religious viewpoints (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Fowler, 1981; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Parks, 1986; 2000, 2011). A number of students expect that the colleges they attend will encourage their expression of spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

Student affairs as a profession is beginning to increase attention on the role of spirituality in student life (ACPA, 2006; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). While Collins, Hurst, and Jacobsen as early as 1987 called for the adoption of principles and strategies to address spirituality in student development, the first edition of a leading textbook for student development graduate students, *Student Development in College* (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito), as late as 1998, paid extremely scant attention to spiritual development, only mentioning Fowler's (1981) theory as an example. Parks' (1986) theory of faith development was not included. Perhaps as a testament to students' emerging interest in spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011), the increasing diversity of college students (Education Trust, 2012; Gallup, 2012), or both, the more recently released second edition of that same book devoted a full chapter to faith

development (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). And, in 2006, the Association of College Student Personnel's (ACPA) *Statement of Ethical Principles and Standards* affirmed that student development is a major responsibility of the student affairs profession and noted the complexity of spiritual identity development.

Concurrent with students' and student affairs professionals' growing interest, there is burgeoning interest in spirituality and religion among some higher education researchers (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, 2007; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006; Love & Talbot, 1999; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Schwadel, 2011; Stewart, 2007, 2009; Subbiondo, 2011; Tisdell, 2003) and scholars of other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, counseling and social work which inform higher education (Davidson, 2000; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Johnson & Hayes, 2003; Martin & Martin, 2002; Miller, 2003; Schwadel, 2011; & Uecker, J.E., Regnerus, M.D. & Vaaler, M.L., 2007). Beyond understanding that students construct knowledge through that which is rational and cognitive (e.g., reading) and affective (e.g., relationships with others), some researchers have explored how students construct knowledge through the symbolic or spiritual (Tisdell, 2003), using "multiple ways of knowing" (Palmer & Zanjonc, 2010). Yet, as will be outlined, an insufficient number of studies have been dedicated to understanding students' spiritual identity exploration in relation to their other identity components.

Statement of the Problem

A student's spirituality can be one of the lenses through which to learn, interact with others, and view the world (Fowler, 1981; Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 1986; Tisdell, 2003). Yet, students identifying as spiritual or religious at rural institutions of

higher education embody a “cultural contradiction” (Chase, 1995, p. 12). That is, their spirituality may be a critical component of their identity and they are technically free to hold any certain faith or worldview while attending the institution, but they may or may not feel that there are spaces or conditions conducive to free discussion or exercise of that faith at their institutions. For example, an African-American male student is powerful as both a male and as a person who identifies as Protestant in the predominantly-Protestant Northburg. Yet, as a member of a racial group that has experienced racism within the local and broader cultures, he simultaneously experiences oppression. The manner in which he is accustomed to worshipping, while Protestant, is much different than that of his peers at Northern State, and he may not find a space on or off campus in which to express his spirituality. This is especially critical given that several scholars, as will be outlined, have noted the centrality of spirituality to the process of identity meaning making (present throughout all aspects of daily life) for some students of color (Dancy, 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009; Saggio & Rendon, 2004; Stewart, 2010; Watson, 2006; Watt, 2003).

Too few studies have been dedicated to understanding students' spiritual identity development, especially studies including those students attending rural, public, non-sectarian schools, those searching for spiritual meaning, or those students exploring or practicing diverse (non-majority, e.g., pantheism) expressions of spirituality. The latter is of increasing importance given the pluralism of today's college students' religious and spiritual affiliations within America, the most religiously diverse nation in the world (Bryant, 2006). Scholars have pointedly called for more qualitative research to fill the gap in identifying what events serve as catalysts for students' spiritual development

(Bryant, 2007; Cartwright, 2001; Collins, Hurst, & Jacobson, 1987; Love & Talbot, 1999), specifically at public institutions (Maryl & Oeur, 2009) as well as what constitutes contemporary college student spirituality (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006).

Extant studies of students of various cultural backgrounds have found that spirituality is a core component of students' identities (Dancy, 2010; Patton and McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2009; Watson, 2006; & Watts, 2003). Students' spiritual identities are often intertwined with their culture, race, gender, and sexual identity (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, 2007; Dancy, 2010; Davidson, 2000; de la Huerta, 1999; Kim & Seidlitz, 2002; Love, 1997; Patton & McClure, 2009; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Saggio & Rendon, 2004; Sorrentino, 2010; Stewart, 2009; Stewart & Lozano, 2009; Tisdell, 2003; Watson, 2006; Watt, 2003), with spirituality sometimes serving as a means by which students understood and interpreted their myriad identities (Saggio & Rendon, 2004; Stewart, 2009). However, the research to date on how an individual student's identity intersects with that student's spirituality has overwhelmingly focused on one aspect of identity, such as gender (Bryant, 2007), instead of how multiple identities might intersect with a student's spirituality. For many students experiencing this intersection of race, culture, and spirituality, spirituality was a means of support, doing resistance, and meaning making and was present throughout multiple aspects of daily life (Dancy, 2010; Kim & Seidlitz, 2002; Saggio & Rendon, 2004; Stewart & Lozano, 2009; Stewart, 2009, 2010; Watson, 2006; Watt, 2003). Some researchers have concluded that ignoring students' spirituality in college may negatively impact their cultural identity (Dancy, 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009; Watson, 2006).

Colleges may not be intentional about this critical aspect of students' development (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Parks, 2011). Studies by Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006), Collins, Hurst, and Jacobson (1987), and Parks (1986) have found that students identifying as spiritual at today's public colleges are provided little means by which to explore spiritual and moral questions about what is fair or right. Public college administrators, in particular, may be uncertain about supporting students' efforts in spiritual exploration (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken & Echols, 2006) given that avenues for spiritual identity development may not always be apparent or even available on public college campuses (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Parks, 1986), whether owing to the modern university's emphasis on rational empiricism - or worldview based on the preponderance of scientific evidence (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Parks, 1986), prevailing cultural norms relegating spirituality to the personal realm (Collins, Hurst, & Jacobsen, 1987), or faculty uncertainty about introducing the topic (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Diamond, 2008; Speck, 2005). These three factors potentially influencing student exploration of spirituality at public college campuses –rational empiricism, cultural norms, and faculty uncertainty - are explored in the following sections.

Influence of Rational Empiricism on Exploring Spiritual Identity.

Cultivation of students' intellectual and moral development was a primary consideration of America's early colleges, and religion occupied a central place in higher education (Thelin, 2004), affecting even publicly-funded institutions (Stamm, 2003). Collins, Hurst, and Jacobson (1987) noted the irony of the eventual absence of the academy's attention to spirituality and pinpointed the role of the public college:

It is a paradox that in contemporary higher education spirituality is treated as taboo. Historically, colleges and universities were sponsored by churches, and religious and spiritual themes prevailed in campus communities. The advent of public institutions of higher education may have been the event that caused legal issues of separation of church and state to be addressed and [the] important role of spirituality to be abandoned too quickly. Similarly, it seems ironic that institutions ignore spirituality although they are immersed in the human condition that deals daily with spiritual issues. Societal and cultural themes run through each person's life, themes that reflect spiritual being and include birth, death, marriage, justice, reconciliation, goodness, and badness. (p. 275)

There are no doubt complex reasons for the eventual and slow shift of the academy away from religious and spiritual matters and affiliations, including such notables as changes to the curriculum between approximately 1800 and 1940 (Hartley, 2004) and the advances of scientific inquiry leading to the embracing of what some educators like Chickering, Dalton, and Stamm (2006) and Parks (1986) referred to as rational empiricism (worldview based on the preponderance of scientific evidence). However, if students today attending public colleges "immersed in the human condition" deal daily with spiritual issues, this developmental concern may not be sufficiently addressed. Collins, Hurst, and Jacobson (1987) questioned why colleges and universities had successfully addressed sometimes controversial issues such as feminism, sexual preference, and racism yet remained inattentive or wary regarding spiritual issues. A more forceful challenge was later proffered by Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken and Echols (2006):

...any serious educational effort to foster the holistic learning and development of students in college must include serious attention to the religious and spiritual lives of students. The evidence is clear that most college students are engaged in a search for meaning, purpose and authenticity and look to higher education institutions to support them in these efforts and to create educational environments that are welcoming to their concerns about faith and spirituality. (pp. 16-17)

Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, and Echols (2006) concluded that while the patterns of contemporary student spirituality are multifaceted given students' increasing diversity,

such forms of spirituality are not yet well understood or documented. Similarly, Bowman and Small (2012) noted that while the relationship between college student demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity) and other student outcomes (e.g., cognitive development) has received appropriate research attention, religious affiliation and its many diverse forms has received much less attention. They offered that “researchers and practitioners alike believe that college students’ religious identities are underexamined” (p. 491).

Influence of Changing Cultural Norms on Exploring Spiritual Identity.

Bartlett (2003) boldly maintained that in the modern university, the only guidance provided to young adults questioning how to live is a simple and insufficient instruction to “be tolerant.” Echoing this, during her study of student religious practices at Knox College, Hulett (2004) reported a prevailing ““send students off campus for their spiritual needs’ mindset” (p. 46) from faculty. Parks (1986) suggested that though the shift in the modern university to an emphasis on scientific inquiry as opposed to religious character was important to combat proselytizing, it was ultimately limiting:

The academy relinquished some forms of hypocrisy and elite moralism and arrogant impositions of unselfcritical assertions of Truth. Modern scholarship has made important progress as a result of its now more self-conscious methodologies. Yet wherever a strict dichotomy between the objective and the subjective has obtained, we have also exchanged wisdom for knowledge and moral commitment for method. Therefore, the tenets of modern scholarship have led also to the muting of the professor, the impoverishment of the vocation of higher education, and the abandonment of the young adult searching for a fitting orientation to ultimate reality – a faith. The young adult has no guide; the professor has become a mere technician of knowledge; higher education can articulate no orienting vision, and discrete and isolated academic disciplines, therefore, disclose only limited aspects of truth. (Parks, 1986, p. 136)

As Stamm (2003) bemoaned, higher education today may not incorporate knowledge based on faith or experience - resulting in the church becoming the guardian of faith and

spirituality and the university the keeper of knowledge. Regardless of opinion as to its appropriateness, American higher education norms mirror the prevailing cultural norms confining issues of spirituality to the personal or private realm (Collins, Hurst, & Jacobsen, 1987).

Public colleges do not have some of the (increasingly relaxing) overt ties to denominational heritage (e.g., mandatory chapel attendance) sometimes present at private sectarian colleges. While this prevents the subtle or not-so-subtle designation of non-Christian students as “other” (Seifert, 2007), it also often precludes the designation of a space or structure for spiritual observation that would otherwise be provided via a chapel or similar space at a sectarian school. Regardless of allocated space or conditions to support or hinder their explorations, many students will continue to explore, evaluate, test, and define their spiritual beliefs because such work is essential to their process of establishing identity (Parks, 1986). Students who perceive their campus’ out-of-class climate as supportive of their social and non-academic needs more frequently engage in deeper learning activities and report a deepened sense of spirituality (Kuh & Gonyea, 2005). Because, as part of current cultural norms, student affairs practitioners and campus ministers/faith leaders have assumed many of the traditional roles of counselor, advisor, and spiritual life guide that faculty once held (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006; Lucas, 2006), sharing with faculty in this responsibility and charge. Importantly, faculty and student affairs practitioners are not called to indoctrinate students; instead, they are to help students to make commitments, to take positions, seek authenticity while remaining open to change (Braskamp, Trautvetter & Ward, 2006).

Beyond the academy, knowledge, consideration, and understanding of spiritual identities and orientations are a very public, indeed, global and cross-cultural concern. As Chickering (2006) cautioned, such issues in a post-September 11, 2001, world are front and center in public and political forums. America is a multi-ethnic and multi-faith nation amongst a backdrop of what he called a beleaguered planet on which many persons are experiencing life as more stressful and less meaningful. Because nations have become interdependent, Americans must in turn increase their knowledge and sophistication about diverse worldviews if the nation is to sustain a civil, pluralistic democracy. As such, he argued for greater attention to students' affective domain, that is, their sense of purpose and meaning, integrity and identity, and spiritual growth.

Individuals turning to the disciplines of sociology and political science for assistance in sorting through the influences of diverse worldviews in political and social spheres may be surprised by the dearth of analysis, at least when searching using religion as a keyword. A study examining the last decade of publishing in leading journals found that only 1.34 percent of political science articles contained religion as a primary topic; while better in comparison, a limited 3.51 percent of sociology journals in that same time period included articles focusing on religion (Jaschik, 2012).

If educators agree with Chickering's (2006) conclusion about the need for a more sophisticated knowledge of religious diversity and spiritual orientation, students should be provided with the conditions in which to be interrogating issues of purpose, identity, and meaning. Students at public colleges - institutions not adhering to or espousing any faith tradition - should have the opportunity to interrogate the role of spirituality in their individual lives and development. Love and Talbot (1999) argued that many aspects of

spirituality are already inherently a part of the academy's discourse given that academe's postmodern perspective is assigning a central role to values, assumptions, and beliefs in the construction of knowledge. Because postmodernism eschews any exclusive claim of positivism and the scientific method, it may have carved out a new opportunity for colleges to embrace the subjective and to incorporate spirituality as an area of inquiry (Hartley, 2004). As such, this may be an opportune time for colleges to address students' spiritual identity development

If colleges viewed the issue of spirituality as one of student welfare, as asserted by Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken and Echols (2006), college faculty and professional staff would understand that students "pay a price in psychological wholeness and wellness when they are required to have separate public and private [spiritual] personas in order to function successfully in the higher education setting" (p. 18). Astin, Astin and Lindholm (2011) asserted that disregard of students' spiritual selves by colleges encourages "fragmentation and a lack of authenticity" (p. 7).

Influence of Faculty and Student Affairs Professionals' Concern on Exploring Spiritual Identity.

According to the results of an on-line study of 3000 (43 % response rate) professors (Fritschler & Smith, 2009) whose disciplines were not specified, a majority of respondents indicated that the risk-averse culture of most colleges prompted them to be concerned about reprisals and accusations of indoctrination or intolerance and to skirt controversial topics involving spirituality or religion. Another study of 1,700 collegiate scientists revealed that they preferred to adhere to the idea of "nonoverlapping magisteria" (Ecklund, 2011), that is, the contention that science and religion are two

separate ways of discovering truth. Faculty surveyed and interviewed understood that students needed to be equipped to deal with the overlaps particular to the sciences, such as embryonic-stem-cell research, but were uncertain as to what aspects of religion or spirituality were acceptable to discuss in the classroom. Therefore, they reportedly avoided it even when their students broached the subject. About 20 percent of faculty in the study would promote some method of allowing students to grapple with the ethics and values of religious teachings “alongside” science course work. As a consequence of the concerns noted, exploration of issues about which students may have spiritual or religious questions may not be a common classroom focus.

Faculty may have questions about the legal implications of the presence of the topic of spirituality in the public college classroom (Lee, 2008). Or, some educators or Student Affairs professionals may feel a lack of preparation regarding broaching issues of spirituality, may knowingly or unknowingly adhere to higher education’s default emphasis on rational empiricism, or may believe that the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America precludes any discussion at public institutions of topics remotely considered to be related to spirituality (Speck, 2005).

The permissibility of such speech at a public college revolves around the notion of “space.” Because this study examined conditions, spaces or forums promoting or hindering public college students’ spiritual and religious exploration, it was important to note that students’ religious speech cannot be excluded from the limited or open forums or spaces designated at public institutions. In 1967, Justice Brennan, writing for the Court in *Keyishian v. Board of Regents* 385 U.S. 589, recognized the college classroom

“space” as the “marketplace of ideas.”¹ Numerous counts of subsequent case law have upheld the notion of student right to free inquiry, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion in public institutions.² The courts have also helped to provide a general notion of the boundaries of freedom of speech and, specifically, religious expression in public higher education.³ Applicable case law has indicated that public college students have a right to free inquiry, study, and training amidst exposure to a robust exchange of ideas. Students should be free to speak about and listen to a wide variety of ideas in the pursuit of meaning. Expression of dissent is permissible, if non-disruptive, as it allows students participation in the marketplace of ideas.

In summary, students’ spirituality may be a vital aspect of their identity, intertwined with other identity components, but they may not feel free to explore it in all campus spaces. Despite increasing student and scholar attention to student spirituality – studies to determine, for example, whether college erodes or preserves beliefs or whether a religious identity helps adherents to maintain personal and social distinctiveness in a multicultural America - there is insufficient research on public college students’ spiritual identity development. Particularly missing are qualitative studies - studies of students at rural institutions practicing diverse expressions of spirituality and of the relationships among students’ multiple identities (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation). Yet, faculty and student affairs practitioners cannot be student centered, guiding the whole student, if

¹ Students as future leaders would be properly trained through “wide exposure to that robust exchange of ideas which discovers truth,” through diverse viewpoints as opposed to any “authoritative selection.”

² *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* 393 U.S. 503 (1969); *Healy v. James* 408 U.S. 169 (1972); and *Widmar v. Vincent* 454 U.S. 263 (1981). Further, in *Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia* 515 U.S. 819 (1995), students’ freedom of inquiry and freedom of religious expression became even more clearly linked. This ruling could readily be viewed as a ruling in defense (and promotion) of student freedom of inquiry, and, again, most specifically of religious expression.

³ *Alpha Delta Chi-Delta Chapter, et al. v. Reed, et al.*, No. 09-55299 (9th Cir. 08/02/11); *Axson-Flynn v. Johnson*, 356 F.3d 1277, 2004; *Brown v. Li*, 308 F.3d 939, 2002; *Morse v. Frederick*, 127 C. St. 2618, 2007; and, *Salehpour v. University of Tennessee*, 159 F.3d 199, 1998.

they do not understand and attend to students' interest in, experiences concerning, and perceptions about exploring their spiritual development (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006).

Research Questions

Given the inductive nature of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009), I conducted interviews that were exploratory in nature to elicit students' meaning making process around spirituality during the college years. I examined the saliency of students' various identities, how students' spiritual and other identities intersected (Crenshaw, 1989), and how they described and experienced these intersections. My research questions included:

1. How do students experience spirituality or religion in their lives prior to, starting at, and continuing in the College?
2. How do aspects of their identities (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation) intersect with their spiritual or religious identity?
3. What college conditions, spaces, or forums promote or hinder their exploration of spirituality or religion during college?
4. How does a student's spirituality or religion help to shape the individual's overall sense of self in college?

Overview of Study

To explore these questions, I conducted a single-site, qualitative study involving a total of 20 participants – two graduate and eighteen undergraduate full-time college students attending Northern State, a rural, mid-sized, predominantly-White northeastern public university. Northern State is located in Northburg, a town without public

transportation situated 100 miles from the nearest urban center. According to 2000 Census data, the population density for the county in which Northburg resides is 41.6 people per square mile, a very small amount as compared to the state's figure of 401.8 people per square mile. Persons of color constitute 4.9 percent of the county's population as compared to a statewide 11.1 percent (Educational Needs Index, 2012). Students and staff alike joke that living in Northburg means that one is "centrally isolated." The town's average snowfall is 68.3 inches compared to the state and country's averages of 59.2 and 25 inches, respectively; further, the area experiences an average of 161 days of sunshine annually compared with the national average of 205 (<http://www.bestplaces.net/climate/city>).

I am employed at Northern State in the capacity of director of a student academic services division. Because Northern State is a public institution, it is non-sectarian. Choosing a public college as a site afforded me access to students from a greater variety of faith traditions than would have been gained by a similar study at a religiously-affiliated institution. As detailed in Chapter 3, Northern State's students' religious preferences (Catholic, 28.70%; Christian/Protestant, 30.40%; Jewish, 2.50%; Muslim, .25%; other, 5.55%; and, none, 32.60%) closely mirrored national rates. Also, choosing to conduct the study at a public institution might serve to inform the discourse about college student spiritual identity development in a country in which 51 percent of colleges and universities are public, non-profit institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

The participants, who ascribed to a wide variety of worldviews and were of different races, genders, ethnicities and sexual identities (see Table 1 in Chapter 3), were

recruited through purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009). Largely, I recruited students through advisors to campus faith-related organizations and at a ministerial-sponsored panel discussion, explaining that I wished to speak with students who would see themselves as actively involved with the group being advised or who might categorize themselves as “searching for meaning” (i.e., weighing whether they believed in a higher power or entertaining the tenets of particular faith traditions). Using semi-structured, in-person interviews, I gathered and analyzed data using symbolic interactionism (students’ own perceptions of events) with the critical stance possible from applying the lens of the multiple identities model (how components of identities interrelate). The American College Personnel Association’s (ACPA) Commission for Spirituality, Faith, Religion and Meaning (CSFRM) notably included the concept of intersectionality as a competency in its competency model (Kocet & Stewart, 2011); while a study of intersectionality would differ from one of multiple identities in that it would focus examination on macro issues of power and privilege and relations between dominant and oppressed groups, this was a testament to the degree of importance the association attached to student affairs practitioners recognizing and understanding that students concurrently hold membership in multiple cultural groups which in turn influences their spirituality.

Role of the Researcher

People’s perceptions are driven by their interests (Schilbrack, 2010). In order to bracket my biases, I have had to examine my positionality throughout this study’s data collection and analysis. I view the world through the lens of a middle-aged, White female with a mid-western American, Christian heritage. I am a first-generation college student of middle-class blue-collar roots transplanted in the northeast from Ohio. Being a

Christian is a salient part of my identity. My spirituality is the primary process through which I make meaning, or how I make sense of what happens in my life. I draw upon my spirituality to negotiate daily life, that is, as a foundation for the ways in which I interact with others, make decisions, or choose goals to pursue. For example, Christianity's founding principle of treating others as you would like to be treated would be the primary reason why I would "practice random acts of kindness" whereas treating others well for sake of campus civility would be a secondary or tertiary reason.

I have worked in higher education for all of my adult life and, of course, am very familiar with it from the standpoint of having been an undergraduate and graduate student. I have never been demonstrative about my faith (what I wore or said). I have always been a Christian, but my actions as an undergraduate many times belied it according to any traditional concept of Christianity. I recognize the conscious and subconscious advantages of Christian privilege (Seifert, 2007; Schlosser, 2003) that exist as a dominant social ideology in such entities as work and academic calendars. As a middle-aged doctoral student, however, I have often felt like the "other" in the dominant discourse of higher education, both as a student and an employee. I enjoy privileges but also understand that my identity is different, for example, from what is expected for doctoral students (Christian, grandmother); it shatters the "background expectancies" (Chase, 1995, p. 14) extant in the vast majority of higher education.

Being different is seldom comfortable and rarely cool or chic, especially when those differences are sometimes the object of critique. As Villenas (1996) noted, the problem discourse "concern[s] my own rearing...my own beliefs and those of my community" (p. 722). In some ways, having salient identities seemingly differing from

other doctoral students allowed me to identify with undergraduate students' descriptions of difficult intersections at college. In other ways, it reminded me that they may suspect me and my intentions as an authority, because I am unknown and have identity components (e.g., straight, White, administrator) that differed from some of theirs (Rankin, 2003; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). I needed to remember that students took a risk in trusting me with their feelings and experiences, because often they were the "other" to me.

As a doctoral student, I began to wonder what it would be like to be a traditional-aged student who identified as spiritual or religious today in higher education. Did they feel like I did sometimes, that is, alienated, straddling multiple worlds? I began to be particularly interested in the experience of students at a rural, public institution, because such a college would presumably be more accessible to students from first-generation and middle-class backgrounds similar to my own. In carrying out this research, I acknowledged that my perceptions were a product of who and what I was, but, instead of attempting to prove the ideological innocence of those perceptions, advanced that they were no less real, that no one's perceptions were neutral or without ideological baggage (Schilbrack, 2010). While this did not and should not free one from employing critical examination of one's perceptions of truth and reality, perceptions were precisely what was at issue in this research; students' perceptions were the very focus of the study.

Significance of Study

Some theorists believe that faith is humanity's ultimate concern (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986). One's faith, spirituality, religion, or worldview equates to one's meaning making – peoples' attempt to interpret their experiences meaningfully (Fowler, 1981;

Love & Talbot, 1999; Parks, 1986; Stewart, 2009). This process of interpretation constitutes spiritual development, the internal, psychosocial process of seeking wholeness through identity development and the cognitive process of developing direction and purpose (Love & Talbot, 1999). Many college students have a deep interest in participating in this process, that is, in exploring spirituality, meaning, and purpose (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, 2007; Dancy, 2010; Davidson, 2000; de la Huerta, 1999; Kim & Seidlitz, 2002; Love, 1997; Patton & McClure, 2009; Poynter & Washington, 2005; Saggio & Rendon, 2004; Stewart, 2009; Stewart & Lozano, 2009; Watson, 2006; Watts, 2003). Indeed, student development and faith development theories suggest that students' faith and spirituality are part of the developmental process (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986). Young adults especially must test, explore, and construct their own meaning with the achievement of identity as a key way to mark the threshold of adulthood (Parks, 1986).

This study is important because it addresses what is a considerable concern of and influence on many students. Schwadel (2011) advanced that education influences students' beliefs, including religious and spiritual beliefs, but does not automatically promote declines in religious and spiritual beliefs, participation, or affiliation. A majority of American college students identify themselves as spiritual and claim spirituality as a central aspect of their identity (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Kuh and Gonyea (2005) found that institutional size and selectivity had no or only trivial effect(s) on students' spiritual engagement, and students who frequently engaged in spirituality-related practices were more likely to also engage in a more diverse set of collegiate activities. Further, research has indicated that spiritual growth enhances students'

education by improving academic performance, psychological well-being, leadership development, and satisfaction with college (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bowman & Small, 2012; Byron & Miller-Perrin, 2009) and is significantly associated with high self-esteem, competencies for healthy growth, equanimity, charitable involvement/social activism, accepting others as they are, promoting racial understanding, and low anti-social behavior (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Knox, Langehough, Walters, & Rowley, 1998).

This study is timely. Subbiondo (2011) declared that we are entering the “postsecular age” (p.30) in American higher education, a trend in sharp contrast to the academy’s traditional insistence on objective reality as the singular area worthy of scholarly research. Universities may be more accepting of the subjective (Hartley, 2004; Love & Talbot, 1999), and colleges more ready to embrace pluralism in all its forms (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006) including spirituality, in both practice and teaching.

This study will not focus on only one aspect of identity but on how multiple identities might intersect with a student’s spirituality. Instead of considering one dimension of identity at a time for each of the 20 participants, multiple dimensions were analyzed for each student along the themes generated from the data, examining how dimensions interconnect and form a student’s unique way of making meaning.

Research to assist in understanding what spirituality means to students from diverse religious affiliations or worldviews is scant (Bowman & Small, 2012; Bryant, 2007). Both Bowman and Small (2012) and Bryant (2006) noted that research on the perspectives of students identifying as adherents to non-majority types of spiritual

expression within the context of higher education suffers great inattention and have called for more studies of such students' experiences and the role of their campus climates throughout their college years. This study is significant because it addresses these gaps by examining how a student's multiple identities (e.g., biracial, female, lesbian) interact with the individual's non-majority spiritual or religious identity (e.g., Muslim or agnostic).

This study is critical because it contributes to the gap in scholars' and practitioners' understanding of students' spiritual and religious identity development. If undergraduate and graduate faculty wish to include spirituality in program curricula (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Diamond, 2008; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010) and if higher education and student affairs graduate programs are to prepare new professionals to assist students with concerns about spirituality (Love & Talbot, 1999; Strange, 2001), they must first understand students' perceptions about spiritual identity exploration while in college. This study responds to the call for more qualitative research on the nature of events that promote the changes that contribute to students' spiritual development (Bryant, 2007; Cartwright, 2001; Collins, Hurst, & Jacobson, 1987; Love & Talbot, 1999), specifically at public institutions (Maryl & Oeur, 2009), and sheds light on the forms and patterns of contemporary college student spirituality (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006).

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 provides an overview of relevant literature, and Chapter 3 describes the theoretical influences and methods used for this research. Chapters 4-6 comprise the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 explores how students made or began to make meaning of

their spirituality or worldview while in college, connecting to sources for guidance and exploration. Chapter 5 illustrates how students navigated (intentionally) to and at college and how they drew upon their spirituality or worldview to cope with everyday college stresses. Chapter 6 traces how students used spiritual meaning making to negotiate controversial issues during college. All data chapters illustrate ways in which students' identities shaped or were shaped by their multiple identity components. Finally, Chapter 7 presents some conclusions from the data, trends in higher education toward support of students' negotiation of spiritual identity, and implications for pedagogy and student affairs practice.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter begins with a review of key related terms used in the literature followed by arguments made by some education scholars as to why the topic of spirituality and spiritual introspection should be included in the modern university's discourse. Then, following research outlining national trends in professed affiliations and outward religious practices, I present an overview of key quantitative and qualitative research exploring the increase of college student interest and growth in (enhancement by) spirituality and how that interest is manifested by students of differing worldviews, beginning briefly with the larger quantitative studies in order to provide the broad brushstrokes with which to describe that interest. I then highlight smaller qualitative studies which drill down to examine the relationship of certain identity components on spirituality (e.g., if a LGBTQA student's sense of spirituality emerged or stalled depending on experience with organized religion) and close with evidence as to how students' spiritual meaning making is informed by their other identity components. Overall, this literature review provides arguments for the salience of the current study.

Definition of Key Terms

In my review of the literature on spirituality and religion, one common discussion thread was the use and definition of related terms (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). This informed how I constructed my interview questions and data analysis process. For example, as mentioned, with an eye toward being as inclusive as possible to students' varying beliefs and definitions, I used the term spiritual in my initial e-mails to them requesting participation so as to encompass the widest possible set of beliefs.

Because terms such as *faith*, *religion*, and *spirituality* are frequently used interchangeably, most researchers took pains to define their interpretation of constructs. Terms do not always equate, and I was mindful that use of different terms could potentially lead to misinterpretation of results. I identified what terminology researchers employed in order to aid in interpretation.

Faith, according to Fowler (1981), refers to that which gives meaning to and has a centering power in one's life, and faith development is the activity of finding significance and composing what one believes to be ultimately true (Parks, 1986). Fowler and Parks (1986, 2000) researched and defined the process of faith development, which in essence is a process of meaning making defined more broadly by Love (2002) as, "making sense out of the activities of life, seeking patterns, order, coherence, and relation between and among the disparate elements of human living. It is the process of discovering and creating connections among experiences and events" (p. 358). Fowler, Parks, and Love distinguished faith development theory from cognitive development theory because of what they perceived as its more ultimate scope; that is, one is attempting to find the meaning and purpose of life's big picture.

The term *religion* is typically associated with an individual's commitment to a supernatural power expressed through ritual and celebration both individually and within faith community (Bryant, 2007). The etiology of the word derives from the Latin verb *religare*, to tie or bind, which thus implies an obligation, a binding to others of like beliefs to hold each other to shared commitments. Also, it represents the merging of heart, mind, and will in oneness with the sacred. Beliefs are expressed through sacred

texts and symbols (music, objects), and doctrine and dogma emerge as philosophical reflections on religious experiences (Love, 2002).

Hill and Pargament (2003) asserted that the meaning of the term *religion* is evolving such that it is becoming “reified into a fixed system of ideas or ideological commitments” (p. 64). While traditionally the term connoted a common belief system (i.e., What religion are you?), it is progressively beginning to represent “a set of principles and practices, a code of conduct and doctrine or dogma” (Bryant, 2007, p. 835).

Conversely, the term *spirituality* is increasingly used to refer to that which is personal and subjective within the religious experience. Multiple definitions of *spirituality* exist within the literature, including the following samplings: the basic human drive for meaning and purpose (Canda, 1989); the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than one’s own ego (Palmer & Zajonc, 2010); and, engagement with life’s “big questions” (Parks, 2000). Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011), touching on meaning, purpose, and a sense of connectedness, provided a definition which included their belief that personal qualities such as equanimity exemplified highly spiritual people.

In short, there is a growing comfort with using the term spirituality as opposed to religion or religious, as people began to connect the term with the personal or inward as opposed to the public or outward manifestation of belief (Parks, 2000). Hill and Pargament (2003) went further to suggest not only greater comfort with the term spirituality but a polarization of America along the terms, with religion representing all that is institutional, formal, outward, doctrinal and inhibiting and spirituality

encompassing what is individual, emotional, inward, and unsystematic. This concern was reflected by Newman (2010) who asserted that some people default to the term as a way of distancing themselves from anything unappealing or malevolent inferred by association to the term religion.

Studies (Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Cook, 2000; Overstreet, 2010) shed light on the perceived distinction by college students between the terms religion and spirituality and their preferences. Cook (2000) asked sixteen college students at a large southwestern university to use concept mapping to indicate their perceptions of what the designations spiritual person and religious person meant. The students included many positive character traits in describing both religious and spiritual people. However, when describing spiritual people, the students emphasized internal characteristics such as intellect and intellectual activities (choosing descriptors such as introspection, wisdom, discerning thought) and inner peace (contentment and serenity). When describing religious people, the students also named internal traits but elected to add more external, physical descriptors (clean appearance and well-groomed). The students characterized religion as something external to the self to be accepted, agreed upon by consensus, and “put on,” whereas spirituality was viewed as an active, individual, internal but dynamic state.

Overstreet (2010) also found evidence that students may not equate religion with spirituality. Her qualitative study of 20 students at a Catholic university produced results further supporting the idea that many students associate readily with the notion of being spiritual - with probing their identity and authenticity, with defining and refining their beliefs - but distance themselves from other forms of institutionalized religion. The

researcher noted that such questioning and searching are consistent with faith development theory (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986) in that a young adult is seeking increasing autonomy and complexity and less dependency when defining a worldview.

In their ethnography of the practice and teaching of religion at four U.S. college campuses (described in more detail later in this chapter), Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield (2001) learned that the undergraduate students with whom they spoke preferred to use the words *spirituality* and *spiritual* rather than *religion* and *religious* when describing their attitudes and practices, as the former connoted a quest or journey, something current and unfinished, while the latter indicated something fixed and inherited such as the doctrine or dogma of a particular faith tradition. All three studies cited found evidence for students' preference of the term spirituality over religion.

I was cognizant of Teasdale's (1999, as cited in Chickering, Dalton & Stamm, 2006) distinction regarding what it means to be spiritual as opposed to religious: "Being religious connotes belonging to and practicing a religious tradition. Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality" (p. 7). I began my study using these terms, definitions, and distinctions as a guide instead of fixed definitions so as to remain open to the meanings ascribed to them by my study's participants and to avoid a false binary in which religion represents all that is organized and negative, and spirituality represents all that is individual and positive (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003). I explored the meanings participants attached to the terms and their preferences in the interviews and attempted to use terminology with which they were most comfortable and familiar.

Interest in and Benefits from Spirituality

This section presents some of the ways in which college student spirituality mirrors the national trend of decline in general religious orientation and affiliation (Gallup, 2010) while it simultaneously reflects a majority belief in God or higher power and an interest in personal spiritual exploration (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; and Mayrl & Oeur, 2009). The quest or spiritual exploration/journey metaphor, researchers note, is often used by college students to describe spiritual introspection; students employ descriptive words and phrases such as an inward search for purpose, meaning, fulfillment, depth, wholeness, or authenticity (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006). Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) reported that by the conclusion of their junior year, a full eight in ten undergraduates reported being somewhat engaged in a spiritual quest which suggests that the questions of meaning and purpose are of interest to students.

Roof (1999) found the concept of spiritual quest or journey (search for meaning and purpose) surfacing in the three-phase series of interviews, surveys, and field observations of 1,599 baby boomers (ages 37 to 53) which he coordinated using a research firm for assistance. Starting in 1988, the firm first randomly sampled households in California, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Ohio, and reported a 60 percent response rate to telephone interviews. In 1989 and 1990, 64 participants were interviewed in face-to-face meetings. Respondents' answers represented to Roof a qualitative shift or cultural transformation from unquestioned beliefs and religious, institutional loyalties to what he described as a more open, questing mood or culture. He observed a growing disenchantment with organized religion and a trend toward turning

inward in search of meaning and strength, from respondents both participating and not participating in an organized religion.

A second phase followed up between three to nine months later with calls to 536 of the 1,599 original participants asking 120 questions, some of which had been asked in the initial call. Of those 536, 409 were interviewed again in 1995 and 1996. While Roof did not provide a breakdown of respondents by race, he indicated that a majority of respondents were female (59%) and had reported being raised Catholic (35%) or liberal protestant (23%) as opposed to conservative Protestant, Black Protestant, Jewish, other, or no religion.

Roof (1999) concluded that for Americans in previous decades their sense of religion and spirituality was centered mainly in denominational belonging and socially-defined beliefs. In contrast, he determined that Americans were increasingly seeking a personal religious or spiritual meaning, a phenomenon he termed a “quest culture.” While no longer a society of unquestioned, unitary faith and practice, American culture, Roof (1999) maintained, was far from experiencing a loss of faith; instead, the spiritual quest or search for meaning pervades American society. It is not about belonging (e.g., to a church body); it is about believing (Hamer, 2004).

This trend of a departure from unitary practice of faith toward an individual quest was echoed when comparing two Gallup polls. Two decades ago, a Gallup poll reported that 58 percent of Americans in 1992 believed religion (term specifically used by the researchers) to be very important, and 29 percent thought it fairly important to them. In 2010, these numbers had decreased somewhat to 54 percent and 26 percent, respectively. Similarly, 90 percent of those surveyed in 1992 identified a particular religious

preference (e.g. Catholic, Mormon); by 2010, that number had dropped to 82 percent with 14 percent responding that they had no preference and 4 percent undesignated. However, a 2011 survey revealed that 92 percent believed in God. While it seems that the nation is experiencing a decline in general religious orientation and traditional religious affiliations and overt manifestations, the vast majority of Americans maintain a strong belief in God or a higher power, with Roof (1999) and other scholars of education supporting and studies of college student spirituality reflecting these same trends (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009), that is, increased interest in a quest or journey, something current and unfinished, as opposed to something fixed such as the doctrine of a particular faith tradition.

Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) conducted a seven-year study utilizing data from the 2000 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey. As Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) investigators at the University of California, they examined the role that college played in facilitating the development of students' spiritual qualities. As an addendum to the CIRP, in 2004, the researchers surveyed 112,232 freshmen newly enrolled in 236 public and private (religiously and non-religiously affiliated) colleges and universities and then followed up in 2007 with 14,527 (40% response rate) of the students at 136 institutions as they were completing their junior year (administering the College Students' Beliefs and Values Survey – CSBV). They also conducted personal interviews with students, facilitated focus groups, and surveyed and interviewed faculty at the participating colleges. In designing the CSBV survey the team used a broad definition of spirituality which included how students made meaning of their education and their lives, how they developed a sense of purpose, the value and

belief dilemmas that they encountered, and the role religion, the sacred, and the mystical played in each of their lives (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm). The intent was to design the survey such that irrespective of spiritual or religious background, belief, disbelief or familiarity, students could respond meaningfully.

Nearly half (48%) of entering freshmen indicated on the CSBV that it was essential or very important that the college they attend encourage their personal expression of spirituality and three-fourths stated that they believed in God (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). On the posttest, juniors reported a substantial increase in spiritual quests (inward searches for meaning) when their faculty encouraged and showed support for such exploration. While four-fifths of juniors indicated that they were searching for purpose and meaning in life and three-fourths agreed that religious/spiritual beliefs helped develop their identity, a third indicated that religious/spiritual beliefs had been strengthened by new ideas encountered in class, with over half the juniors reporting that their professors did not provide opportunities to discuss the meaning or purpose of life. Two-thirds claimed that their religious/spiritual beliefs provided them with strength, support, and guidance. A full four-fifths indicated that they had an interest in spirituality, and two-thirds indicated that their spirituality was a source of joy for them. Lastly, three-fourths reported feeling a sense of connection with God or a higher power that transcended personal self (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). It is unclear what if any part of the college environment contributed to students' spirituality.

While Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) did not provide a breakdown of what percent of the 236 institutions represented public entities, they noted that students at religiously-affiliated institutions may have been more inclined to complete a survey on

spirituality. The researchers found that the most religiously engaged students (e.g., praying, attending services) were those enrolled at evangelical colleges with 90 percent of entering freshmen reporting regular attendance at religious services. Only 39 percent of entering freshmen at public colleges and universities attended religious services on a frequent basis.

If educators are to understand today's students' spirituality, they must look beyond traditional means of affiliation or worship to what constitutes how students make meaning and define purpose. What is the influence of higher education on college students' religious and spiritual beliefs? Schwadel (2011) traced social theory, citing Comte (1865), Durkheim (1915), and Weber (1922) forward to Swatos and Christiano's (1999) view of secularization - or decline in religion as an outgrowth of greater levels of education. He summarized the assumption of modern social thought that education is detrimental to religion (term specifically used by the researchers), that is, erodes religious belief given the influence of science and society's increasing reliance on rationalization.

Using the nationally-representative 1998 General Social Survey, Schwadel (2011) analyzed the effects of education on adult Americans' (aged 25 years or older) religious beliefs, activities, and affiliations. (The survey used the terms religion and religious.) This 90-minute, face-to-face survey of randomly-selected adults included demographics and opinions on widely-ranging matters and is made available for sociological research. The 1998 survey had a response rate of .76 and included 1,537 participants (Roper Public Opinion Archives, 2012). While the sample contained respondents that were older than traditional-aged college students, the findings provided evidence that the influence of education on religious beliefs is complex and more about reconstruction than erosion.

Overall, instead of finding that highly educated Americans disaffiliated from religion, he found that greater levels of education were associated with those individuals seeking affiliation with denominations or places of worship which would promote beliefs more in accord with a pluralist worldview:

Highly educated Americans are likely to disregard beliefs and doctrines – such as biblical literalism and exclusivist religious views – that conflict with the culture and knowledge imparted through educational institutions. Alternatively, highly educated Americans are as likely as other Americans – and in some cases more likely than those with less education – to espouse many common religious beliefs and to participate in standard religious practices that do not conflict with the culture or content of educational institutions. (Schwadel, 2011, pp. 176-177)

Prior to Schwadel's work and findings, a number of researchers in higher education examined the influence of education in particular on college students' religious and spiritual beliefs. In their meta-analysis of research on college students during the 1970s and 1980s, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found declines in students' traditional religious affiliations and general religious orientations during the students' college years. College had a liberalizing effect on students whose religious views, in turn, became less dogmatic and more accepting of others' views. A student's religious beliefs became more individualized. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found very few studies from the 1990s and early twenty-first century which examined the effects of institutional characteristics (e.g., public) on a student's religious (term specifically used by the researchers) values. They reported some limited evidence that church-related colleges may help to maintain their students' evangelical commitments more than those not church affiliated.

Again, findings citing declines in traditional religious affiliations could easily be presumed to be a reflection of changes in societal norms or validation of the

aforementioned secularization theories (increasing erosion of beliefs). However, a summary of findings from the 1990s described how students' religious values "may not so much increase or decrease as become reexamined, refined, and incorporated in subtle ways with other beliefs and philosophical dispositions" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 285), a conclusion supported by Schwadel (2011) and other researchers (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; & Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). That is, while their professed affiliations or outward religious practices or behaviors may wane, few students report a diminished saliency of spirituality.

Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003) examined how students' first year of college impacted their spirituality and religiosity. Also using the 2000 CIRP data, their sample consisted of 3,680 freshmen students who had responded to the survey as well as the HERI-developed "Your First College Year" survey distributed to 50 randomly-sampled American four-year colleges and universities. A majority of respondents were female (58.9%). The authors provided the following other demographic information regarding the sample: Protestant (45%), Roman Catholic (30.4%), Jewish (1.8%), Buddhist (1.1%), Islamic (0.4%), other religion (5.9%), no religious affiliation (15.3%); White (73.8%), African-American (11.3%), American Indian (2.1%), Asian American/Asian (9.7%), Latino/a (9.7%) and other (3.3%). Latter percentages exceed 100 percent, as students could choose more than one category. Institutional types represented in the sample included public universities (29.6%), private universities (34.3%), public four-year colleges (34.3%), private non-sectarian four-year colleges (12.2%), Catholic four-year colleges (3.9%), other religious four-year colleges (7.6%), and public Black four-year colleges (3.6%). They found that although students became less religiously active in the

first year of college (e.g., attending religious services, praying/meditating, discussing religion), students reported being more committed to a goal of integrating spirituality into their lives (percentage responding that this goal was essential or very important rose by 5.6 and 4.5 percentage points, respectively, over the course of participants' first year of college). The educators noted that many students continued to value spirituality after one year of college though were less willing to describe themselves as spiritual.

Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler (2007), using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development along with 17 other agencies, mined data from two waves of in-depth interviews of American students, 20,745 adolescents in grades seven through 12 in 1994 and 1995 followed by 15,197 of those same students in 2001 and 2002. While they did not provide a demographic breakdown of participants, the 132 participating schools in the first wave were described as nationally representative with respect to size, ethnicity and type (e.g., public). Over 99 percent of respondents in the 2001/2002 group were between ages 18-25. While they found that attendance at religious services waned for 70 percent of the latter group interviewees, only one in five indicated that religion had diminished saliency in their lives, and one in six noted a desire to disaffiliate from religion. The researchers found that young adults who do *not* attend college exhibited the most extensive disaffiliation from religion while a majority of college students in the study (86%) reported maintaining their religious affiliation (i.e., adherence to a particular faith tradition).

Mayrl and Oeur (2009) synthesized findings on studies of college student spirituality and religion (e.g., a 2008 Harvard University Institute of Politics telephone

poll asking whether college students identified with a denomination), ethnographic studies on college campuses (e.g., a 2007 longitudinal, largely qualitative study by Clydesdale of the religious identities of teens before and after their freshman year), national data sets, and the 2000 CIRP survey conducted by HERI. They determined three major topics of research: studies focused on what college students believed and how they practiced their faith; research examining how the college experience affects students' religious beliefs and practice; and, how students' religious commitments affected their college experiences. In general, making conclusions on the analyses of other studies, they found that the research indicated most students reported an affiliation with a religious tradition, were interested in spirituality (defined broadly such as belief in the sacredness of life), and believed in God. College attendance did not lead to an erosion of belief among most students, and indeed the researchers found indications that students were more "religiously engaged" than had previously been thought (e.g., affiliated with a religious tradition). But, like Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), they found students reported becoming less religious on traditional religious indicators (e.g., praying).

Instead of promoting a weakening or erosion of beliefs, Mayrl and Oeur's (2009) synthesis of findings suggested to them that college may have the effect of preserving students' beliefs, and they proposed two possible explanations: Students' beliefs are unaffected by the college experience (maintained but ignored like vegetables that are good for you but that can be reserved for use later in life, as suggested by Clydesdale, 2007), or the content of their beliefs is transformed or reconstituted such as when students work on integrating spirituality with their other beliefs. In keeping with other researchers' conclusions (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schwadel, 2011; & Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 2007), they determined that students' commitment to religious values while attending college is less about increases or decreases of outward demonstrations but more about maintaining or refashioning beliefs.

In addition to student interest in spirituality, some researchers noted benefits to students. That is, spirituality had a beneficial effect on some student outcomes, and spiritual growth was positively associated with satisfaction with the college experience. Based on measures of spirituality and religion, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) looked at whether changes in religiousness and spirituality over the first three years in college played a beneficial role and concluded that students' spiritual growth enhanced their education by improving, for example, academic performance. One of their measures of spirituality was equanimity (extent to which a student feels at peace or is centered). When students showed significant growth in equanimity, their grade point averages tended to improve (i.e., 63% of those who increased their equanimity level after beginning college were able to maintain at least a B+ average compared to only 42% of those whose equanimity declined). Students' spirituality and religiousness played a similar role in their psychological well-being and leadership development and was associated with high self-esteem, competencies for healthy growth, charitable involvement/social activism, accepting others as they are, and promoting racial understanding. Students' spiritual quests (interest in searching for meaning/purpose) increased during college, with juniors more likely than freshmen to report a desire to develop a meaningful philosophy of life, to seek beauty, become a more loving person, and attain inner harmony; however, Spiritual Quests, specifically, had a negative effect

on well-being and satisfaction likely owing to the cognitive dissonance students may experience amidst their search (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011).

Affiliated benefits were also noted in other studies. Briefly, Knox, Langehough, Walters and Rowley (1998) assessed the “religious/spiritual orientation” of 235 undergraduates from three public colleges in the southeastern United States. Using a religiosity scale measuring such variables as church attendance and belief in God plus a measure of intrinsic spirituality which included such factors as being aware of a higher power and deriving meaning from religion, the researchers found that students having higher religiosity/intrinsic spiritual orientation scores were significantly more likely to have higher self-esteem (e.g., a sense of pride in one’s identity), more assets for healthy growth (e.g., competencies to thrive on one’s own), and fewer engagements in anti-social behaviors. Over a decade later, Byron and Miller-Perrin (2009) surveying 103 students at a private, Christian, liberal arts college in California found that students’ strength of faith/spirituality (e.g., “My relationship with God is extremely important to me”) fostered their life purpose (e.g., “I have goals that I am working toward”) which in turn improved their sense of confidence and well-being (e.g., “I have confidence in my abilities”).

Like Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011), Kuh and Gonyea (2005) in their research based on the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data outlined how students at faith-based colleges are more engaged in spiritual practices (including internal beliefs and external manifestations such as church attendance, religious discussion, participation in religious groups, prayer) than students at non-sectarian schools; institutional size and selectivity had no or only trivial effect(s) on students’ spiritual engagement. On the NSSE, students responded to questions asking how often they

participated in activities to enhance their spirituality (worship, meditation, prayer) and the degree to which they felt their institution encouraged them to attend campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events). The researchers found that students who frequently engage in spirituality-related practices are more likely to also engage in a more diverse and enriching set of collegiate activities such as exercise, cultural events, and performing acts of community service.

Summary of today's students' approach to spiritual exploration and starting point.

While students attending faith-based colleges may engage in more spiritual practices, the evidence presented has suggested that regardless of institutional type students attend, their commitment to religious values while at college is ultimately more about introspection, reconstruction, and refinement, about incorporating religious values with other beliefs toward a worldview, and less about increases or decreases of faith or outward demonstrations and practices (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Maryl & Oeur, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; & Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 2007). And, studies of college student spirituality reflect the national trend of a decline in general religious orientation and affiliation (Gallup, 2010) but a majority belief in God or higher power (Gallup) and interest in spiritual exploration (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; & Mayrl & Oeur, 2009).

Students' exploration of spirituality is not without its critics. For example, Bartlett (2003) questioned the use of the term spirituality, suggesting it is:

...well-intentioned lip service...[a] convenient catch-all for any fellow feeling but it doesn't count for much when students need it the most: Because it encompasses all religious convictions, 'spirituality' drains away all that is particular to and most profound in each [faith tradition] (p.106).

Further, to Bartlett, today's students are "souls without longing," a "whatever" generation, suffering from ennui. While students may possess a belief in God, this gives no indication of the place the belief occupies in the student's life or of any obligation. He further indicted academe for not providing sufficient opportunity for students to pursue the Socratic exhortation to "Know Thyself," to interrogate the causes of their malaise against the backdrops of politics, religion, progress, Nihilism, and the American Dream. He critiqued the academy for not allowing for the possibility that one way of life might be more valuable or fulfilling than another. Bartlett asserted that this relativistic tolerance amounts to today's dogmas.

It may be daunting for rural, public colleges to provide opportunities for students to explore the big questions when those questions and issues must be unpacked using such heavily charged terms. While the term spirituality may indeed act as a handy catch-all, it provides a starting point for students to conduct the systematic interrogation Bartlett (2003) proposed.

Spiritual diversity.

The literature provided a good deal of evidence of college students' involvement and interest in spiritual quests. However, these quests are undertaken in a variety of ways. This section will present both quantitative and qualitative studies of non-traditional spiritual journeys.

Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken and Echols (2006) researched forms of college student spirituality, using sources varying as widely as the HERI 2005 CSBV data (longitudinal sample of 14,527 students at 136 institutions) and doctoral dissertations to student blogs and concluded that some students conduct a spiritual search within the

context of a religion (a faith tradition) using sacred texts or prayer, whom they dubbed “religious seekers,” while others, “secular seekers,” may search outside of the strictures of a faith tradition to focus spiritual awareness utilizing secular practices such as meditation or labyrinth walks. As America is the most religiously diverse nation in the world (Bryant, 2006), researchers must be mindful that college students’ religious and spiritual affiliations will reflect this pluralism.

Current faith development theory may not be broadly applicable to diverse populations. For example, Small (2008) studied the spiritual development of 21 atheist, Christian, Muslim, and Jewish college students at a large, research university in the Midwest. After conducting interviews and focus groups, she found that the students’ trajectories for developing worldviews varied which led her to question the applicability of faith development theory (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986) to students of marginalized faiths. She noted that Christian privilege leads researchers to ignore how members of different religious groups pursue different spiritual goals. For example, Muslim students in her study referenced the significance of peers in helping to secure one’s place in the Muslim community, a goal not shared by students of other beliefs. Jewish students in her study found breaking with normative Jewish behavior acceptable; however, this tacit permission to diverge from traditional behavior was not shared, for example, by Christian students in the study. She posited that extant faith development theory, based on Christian perspective using Christian research participants (primarily Fowler, 1981), was insufficient and proposed faith frames unique to each religious or non-religious group studied.

Bowman and Small (2012) utilized the HERI 2005 CSBV data to study the perspectives of students of non-majority religions (those not of a Christian worldview). The scholars noted that research on the perspectives of students with non-traditional spiritual expressions within the context of higher education suffers great inattention and have called for more studies of the experiences of these students and the role of the students' campus climates throughout their college years. Bowman and Small (2012) found that students who did not identify with any religious affiliation had, compared to their mainline Christian peers, reduced hedonic (obtaining pleasure/avoiding pain) well-being, indicated by positive mood and relationships, and eudaimonic (living life to the fullest through positive relationships and purpose) well-being, indicated by academic and social self-confidence, cooperativeness, and understanding of others. For students of non-majority religious affiliation (those identifying with a non-Christian religion such as Islam or Buddhism or a tradition that is not generally perceived as part of mainstream Christianity such as Seventh Day Adventist), engaging in religious activities and attending a school with an inclusive religious climate was associated with larger gains in the students' well-being, strengthening the argument for attention to colleges' level of support of all students' spiritual or religious exploration and expression.

Exploring six different non-majority (i.e., non-Christian) worldviews, Buddhism, Hindu, Islam, Jewish, Unitarian-Universalist, and non-religious ("no religious preference") using the HERI 2005 CSBV data set, Byrant (2006) examined the following characteristics: demographics and self-perceptions; forms of religious practice; attitudes and values; spiritual beliefs; spiritual goals; spiritual questing; views on spiritual development; attitudes toward pluralism and scientific epistemologies; and, experiences

with spiritual struggles. Her analyses revealed several patterns. She recognized that the degree to which students identified and acted upon spiritual convictions varied considerably across groups, with Muslim students (99%) reporting the most religiously devout beliefs and behaviors (e.g., fervency of belief in God, commitment to prayer, and religious attendance) followed by Hindu students (81%), Jewish (approximately 60%), Unitarian-Universalist (37%), and Buddhist (32%). Interestingly, over one-fourth of non-religious students believed in God, indicating that this category does not equate to atheist. Nearly 100 percent of Muslim, 95 percent of Hindu and 80 percent of Jewish students claimed the same faith as their parents while Buddhists, Unitarian-Universalists, and students with no religious preference were more apt to define worldviews independent of their parents' faiths. Integrating spirituality or religion into one's life was of greatest value to Muslim students (45 %) followed by Jewish students (25%) and non-religious students (13%).

Students of non-majority religions, Bryant (2006) found, were less conservative politically as compared to their evangelical Christian peers. Of religious minorities, Unitarian-Universalists, Jewish, and non-religious college students claimed the most liberal attitudes (accepting of casual sex and supportive of abortion rights and same sex marriage) as distinguished from Muslim students whose viewpoints on those same issues were more conservative. For example, 75 percent of Unitarian-Universalists agreed strongly that same sex couples should have the right to legal marital status, but just 18 percent of Muslims felt similarly. When given the opportunity to classify the relationship between science and religion as either one of conflict, independence or collaboration, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Unitarian-Universalist students perceived science and

religion as unrelated entities whereas non-religious students perceived conflict between the two and indicated that they would align with science. Muslim students at times saw science and religion as collaborative entities but more often perceived conflict, and 23 percent reported that they would side with religion in that event compared to four percent or less of other groups. This study particularly informed my research, as participants discussed how they negotiated these same controversial issues by drawing on their respective worldviews.

Bryant (2006) noted that the answers of students of non-majority worldviews varied when asked to identify the “ultimate spiritual quest” for their lives, with 32 percent of Buddhist and 28 percent of Unitarian-Universalist students indicating interest in such a quest but defining it as seeking self-discovery. Twenty-nine percent of Muslim students indicated that the ultimate quest would involve pursuing God’s plan for their lives, while more Jewish and non-religious students suggested that they would be less inclined to describe themselves as undertaking spiritual quests (31% and 47%, respectively). The researcher found that although Jewish students (60%) are more likely than non-religious students (25%) to believe in God, both groups were the least likely inclined of the six worldviews to believe in life after death (19%, 17%, as compared, for example, to Muslim students, 59%), to consider spiritual/religious beliefs to be central to their identity (18%, 9%) and approach to life (8%, 5%), and to strive to integrate spirituality into their lives (25%, 13%). Bryant suggested that spirituality seemed less relevant to these students’ experience when compared to other religious minorities but noted the possibility that non-religious and Jewish students could simply be averse to the term spirituality.

Mayhew (2004) also studied students of disparate worldviews. He conducted a phenomenological study of how eight students of differing worldviews (e.g., agnosticism, Buddhism, atheism, Roman Catholicism) made meaning of their spirituality or religion. Using in-depth interviews and photo-elicitation (participants took and assembled mini-albums of photos to represent their understanding of spirituality), he sought to develop a description of spirituality based on the experiences of these students who attended one of two different comprehensive research universities, one in the Midwest and one on the West Coast. In describing and representing (by photos) their spirituality, students identifying as agnostic or atheist used mostly cerebral images, projecting spirituality as a mental product or exercise. Evangelical Christian, Roman Catholic, and Muslim students described their spirituality or religion in terms of their respective relationships with a higher power and those significant individuals who assisted them with their understanding of their beliefs. Jewish, Hindu, and (again) Muslim students attributed their conception of spirituality or religion in large part to their family, that is, family experiences of spirituality and how that helped to shape their understanding. Finally, the Buddhist students presented spirituality in terms of nature, describing a life energy or constant spiritual movement that represents the meaning of life. Common to all eight perspectives, the researcher determined, was the idea that “spirituality is the human attempt to make meaning of the self in connection to and with the external world” (Mayhew, 2004, p. 647). Mayhew’s study was helpful to my research, as I noted if or how participants described their relationships with a higher power and what role if any family members played in molding their spirituality.

Focusing on a single, underrepresented religion, Peek (2005) studied 127 second-generation Muslim Americans who were attending a university in either New York or Colorado. Through focus group interviews, individual in-depth interviews, and participant observation, Peek (2005) determined religion as being the most salient source of personal and social identity for the participants. A religious identity helped adherents to maintain personal and social distinctiveness amidst a very multicultural America. Moreover, it helped the students to preserve cultural and ethnic delineation plus offered community networks, economic opportunities and educational resources. Peek noted that the students moved through three dynamic and on-going stages of religious identity development: religion as ascribed identity, as chosen identity, and as declared identity. College specifically served as a space and time in which students could explore, critically reflect upon, and make choices about their religious identity. Her interviewees reported that college enabled them to further construct, or choose, a Muslim religious identity. All the participants asserted the importance of connecting with other Muslims in college, and most did so through the Muslim Student Associations (MSA) which offered settings for not only social events but for opportunities to “collectively examine specific aspects of the religion of Islam and the meaning of being Muslim....a safe environment for discussing and practicing beliefs and, ultimately, constructing religious identities” (Peek, 2005, p. 228).

The students, identified through the MSAs, were self-described as highly religious in that they reported praying five times daily, fasted during Ramadan, were actively involved in religious organizations, bore Muslim first and last names, and abstained from alcohol or eating pork. Both genders claimed to dress modestly. Ninety percent of the

women wore the hijab (loose clothing with headscarf draped around neck and covering bosom), and two women wore the niqaab (covering the hair, neck and face, leaving only the eyes visible). Because Peek conducted this research a few short years after September 11, 2001, she noted that many of the students believed that outside of safe environments such as the MSA, their religion was viewed negatively by others, and they "felt a need to both explain and demonstrate their faith more strongly than before" (Peek, 2005, p. 232). Because one participant in my study struggled with an ethical issue focusing on women in business wearing the hijab and two participants in my research identified as Muslim, were recruited through the Northern State MSA, and described the saliency of their religion as a personal and social identity, Peek's particular findings helped to inform my study.

This section has thus far outlined the handful of studies examining the spirituality (in ways relevant to this study) of any students from non-Christian backgrounds (Bowman & Small, 2012; Bryant, 2006; Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken & Echols, 2006; Mayhew, 2004; Peek, 2005; Small, 2008). Still fewer studies include those students' experiences at a public institution (Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Jones, 2008), the final topic to be explored in this section.

One of these latter two studies, noted earlier, was Cherry, DeBerg, and Porterfield's (2001) ethnography of four institutions – a Lutheran, liberal arts college, an historically-Black college, a Roman Catholic college, and a large state research university. Observing worship services and meetings of religious groups, interviewing students, faculty, and campus ministers, listening to the views of campus administrators and dissenting voices, examining syllabi, bulletin boards, and use of campus spaces, and

sitting in on “religion courses,” the authors conducted what they called a “close, first-hand inspection” of how American undergraduates understood, talked about, and practiced religion during their college years.

At the large, public state school that they dubbed West University, the proportion of students participating in religious activities was predictably smaller (given that the other three schools in the study were denominationally-affiliated), but those students who did participate in the singing, games, joking, faith-sharing, prayers, food, and occasional lecture, did so with what the authors observed as considerable enthusiasm as compared in particular to their counterparts at the Lutheran and historically-Black colleges. While there were traditional religious observations at West, such as formal Shabbat services at the Hillel Jewish Student Center and masses at the Newman Center attended by nearly 1,200 students, the researchers also noted the presence of small, informal Bible studies conducted by groups within the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and suggested that these informal environments provided opportunities for the creation of intimate communities at the vast, somewhat impersonal university.

The other study of particular note regarding informants from diverse spiritual expressions was conducted by Jones (2008). He produced a phenomenological study exploring the spiritual development of 16 undergraduate students of a range of spiritual backgrounds attending a large, public, predominantly-White, Pacific Northwest university. The researcher used a social-ecological framework (Moos, 1979) which allowed for consideration of the interrelation of a student’s personal and environmental factors when examining how development occurs. He analyzed how the students’ backgrounds, personal characteristics, and environments influenced their behavior and

found evidence that the students struggled to integrate their spiritual life with the campus climate and curriculum. They had difficulties engaging in authentic dialogue, felt like minorities on campus, lacked mentoring relationships, and struggled to fulfill their passions or purpose after graduation. While Jones studied the spiritual identity development of public college students from a range of spiritual backgrounds, unlike my research, he did not interrogate how their spiritual identity related to other aspects of their identity. Also, the study was not diverse demographically by race. As such, it is not clear how public college students made meaning of their spirituality in relation to other elements of their identity.

Broadening the Campus Conversation: Including Spirituality and Religion

As established, a majority of American college students identify themselves as spiritual and claim spirituality as a central aspect of their identity (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). In a review of theories and research on cognitive development and spirituality, Cartwright (2001) noted a commonality amongst a number of diverse spiritual orientations:

Different faith traditions offer various conceptions of Powers beyond the self: some monotheistic, others polytheistic, or even atheistic. However, most faith traditions share the notion that individuals relate in some fashion to an External Power whether it is referred to as an Ultimate Being, a Higher Power, God, Gods, Fate, or natural energy. (p. 213)

Even with student interest and growth in spirituality amidst an increasingly religiously diverse student body, should spirituality be included in the modern university's discourse? Love and Talbot (1999), as noted above, argued that many aspects of spirituality are already inherently a part of the discourse given that academe's postmodern perspective is assigning a central role to values, assumptions, and beliefs in

the construction of knowledge. Subbiondo (2011) declared that we are entering the “postsecular age” in American higher education, a major movement prompted by such trends as widespread service learning, spiritual perspectives introduced by a renaissance in Asian studies, and contemplative practices inspired by an increasing interest in meditation and yoga. These aforementioned scholars have predicted that the study and practice of spirituality will become an unquestioned, accepted part of the palette of student developmental concerns to be addressed by faculty and student affairs professionals. As Love and Talbot (1999) have argued, student affairs professionals need to understand the critical role that such values as faith, hope, and love play in students’ understanding of truth, for example, and in their overall developmental processes.

Sorrentino (2010) found “religiously involved” students to be open to discourse with “people of other faiths” with certain provisions. Inviting nearly 800 students of the 1,600-member student body of a college in the northeastern United States to participate, the researcher received 212 student responses to his survey. He then conducted interviews with 92 of the students in fifteen focus groups to determine the concerns (and how to best meet the concerns) of a student body of increasingly diverse worldviews as they considered interacting with people holding different worldviews. The only demographic breakdown the researcher included was of students’ faith traditions and spiritual expressions, noting the wide variety represented in the sample (e.g., Jewish, Muslim, Taoist, Protestant, agnostic, atheist). He determined three main findings:

- (1) [R]eligious students have a commitment to a set of beliefs, regulations, symbols, rites, and practices and want these particularities to be respected, appreciated, guarded, and understood in multifaith interactions.
- (2) Provided the first condition is met, religious students are eager to learn about and from the faith of others. This is especially true in informal settings and multifaith dialogue, as opposed to multifaith services.
- (3) Multifaith events are valued

primarily for their educational benefit, cultural expression, and potential to deepen relationships. (p. 80)

If students are ready to engage in exploration of a variety of religions and worldviews and if spirituality is to be intentionally included in the discourse, is there sufficient research from which faculty and student affairs professional can draw to incorporate issues of faith and spirituality into curricular and co-curricular forums? Unfortunately, in a population in which 92 percent believe in God (Gallup, 2011), spirituality is a nearly neglected variable in research on human development (Hill & Pargament, 2003). One oft-cited reason for this dearth of research is the lack of global measures of the non-rational issue of spirituality (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Hill & Pargament, 2003). How does one measure spirituality? Lacking standard measurements, reliability and validity suffer. Yet, given the diversity of today's college student population, a narrow interpretation of spirituality and religion would be limiting and misleading. Perhaps the idea of seeking a global measure of such a complex phenomenon is itself flawed. Scholars may lack global measures of the non-rational issue of spirituality, but ignoring the critical variable in student development provides an incomplete picture of the developmental process.

Spiritual Development - the Search for Meaning

As outlined by Love and Talbot, (1999), spiritual development involves the internal, psychosocial process of seeking wholeness through identity development and the cognitive process of developing direction and purpose through meaning making. Spiritual elements are extant in student development theory, and the following first two portions of this section provide brief examples of this. Both psychosocial and cognitive (including moral development) theories recognize not only the existence but the

importance of a student's exploration, testing, and integration of spiritual/religious values and beliefs in the journey toward individuation and self-authorship. The third and fourth portions outline the two leading faith development theories. In the fifth and final portion of this section, I outline research on the intersection of race, gender, sexual orientation, and spiritual development.

Chickering's identity development theory.

Broadly, application of psychosocial and social identity theories allows scholars to examine the process of students' overall and identity development, a primary task for traditional-aged college students. They focus on students' work and journeys toward answering the questions, "Who am I?" and "What is my purpose and role"? Chickering (1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) proposed seven vectors or major highways on which students travel toward individuation. That is, a student's movement through and resolution of the key developmental issues inherent in each vector contribute to the individual's growing sense of identity (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Part of the vector entitled *establishing identity* includes defining self as a member of a religious or cultural heritage. Similarly, *developing integrity*, another vector, requires the personalizing of one's unclear and untested values and beliefs acquired from parents, church, school, media or other. Exploration of and even challenges to these values and beliefs are necessary in order to test beliefs and assumptions. When one no longer experiences discrepancies between values and actions, one has congruence and authenticity, key components of integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The theorists noted the disequilibrium experienced by a student moving from a literal interpretation of morals and religious teachings to questioning to commitment. This and other

psychosocial and identity theories acknowledge a student's exploration of spiritual identity as an appropriate developmental task.

Chickering's (1969) seminal work is instructive but must be used understanding the context within which it was generated. The initial data were collected between 1959 and 1969 from small private colleges and thus best reflect identity development issues of middle-class students from a decade differing significantly from the present one. Though the revised theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), summarizing the research of other theorists plus including the basic precepts of the original work, was more inclusive of diverse student populations, the researchers acknowledged that more study was warranted regarding the current interrelationships of class race, age, gender, culture, socio-economic status, and other aspects of development (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

Baxter Magolda's epistemological reflection model.

Spiritual components are also present in cognitive-structural theories, those theories which illustrate the nature and process of change in individuals – that is, how students make meaning of their world. Students interrogate their beliefs (including those traditionally related to spirituality such as faith, love, and hope) as part of development. Baxter Magolda (1992) grounded her study of students' ways of knowing on William Perry's (1970) work which contended that people try to make sense of their experiences, to interpret their experiences meaningfully, and to find orderliness in them. Conducting longitudinal interviews with students, Baxter Magolda focused on patterns of knowing and reasoning in students' cognitive development. She proposed four "knowledge states" to describe levels of reasoning exhibited by students and reported gender-related (but not exclusive) patterns within the first three stages. Her 2004 follow up study with 39 of the

original interviewees concentrated on the students' "self-authorship," their ability to make meaning of their experiences by collecting, interpreting, and analyzing then reflecting on their own beliefs in order to form judgments. This in turn impacts a student's emotion, affect, and actions.

Cognitive-structural theories like Baxter Magolda's (1992) acknowledge that a student's exploration of spirituality involves development from concrete thinking or, in this context, unexamined belief toward the capacity and interest to "consider knowledge grounded in context, deriving judgments from personal experiences, evidence from other sources and from the perspectives of others" (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Wade, 2006, p. 20). Moral development theories (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Kohlberg, 1971) delineate how with each stage, a student uses a different basis by which to determine what is the fair or right way to resolve an ethical dilemma. Students learn that faculty and other authority figures may disagree and begin to understand the possibility that they can learn in ways beyond accepting inherited beliefs and ideas.

Baxter Magolda's (1992) work emphasized the importance of a student's exploration, testing, and integration of beliefs on the journey toward individuation and self-authorship. Her theory was based on a five-year longitudinal study of 101 traditionally aged, middle-class college students, three of whom were students from underrepresented groups, at a highly-selective, public, midwestern college in the 1980's. As such, her theory may or may not be currently applicable to LGBTQA students, to students of color, or to students of lower socio-economic status (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010).

Fowler's faith development theory.

In 1981, Fowler introduced his theory of faith development, a seminal work for research on college student spirituality. In his description of the stages of faith development, Fowler related how Ernest Becker (1968, as cited in Fowler, 1981) called humans *homo poeta*, or man the meaning maker. Unlike animals, humans do not live by food, instinct, or sex alone but, instead, search for meaning. People need a purpose, a way to make sense of things.

Basing his definitions and perspectives on the works of Tillich (1957) and Niebuhr (1957), Fowler (1981) defined faith as humanity's ultimate concern(s), those values that have a centering power in people's lives. These may or may not be connected to or expressed through religion or belief. People's real worship or devotion is directed toward that with which they are ultimately concerned; that is one's faith, because that is what gives one's life meaning. He maintained that humans are "endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith" (Fowler, 1981, p. xiii).

The theorist noted that people are engaged in issues of faith in their earliest relationships with those who care for them in their infancy. Grounding his theory in both his extensive interviews with over 350 participants and in the work of Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg (fellow instructor at Harvard in the 1960's), Fowler (1981) explained that faith develops through humans' experiences of trust (or mistrust, if betrayed) with those with whom they are close. As such, faith is a universal phenomenon, present and often challenged well before individuals are religious or even irreligious. Consistent with Piagetian theory, Fowler held that conflict and adversity can provide impetus for the development of faith as individuals are challenged to look beyond their current

understandings. Agnostics and atheists as well as those with deeply held doctrinal beliefs are often concerned with what makes life worth living.

The theorist acknowledged the risk involved in opening oneself to look at faith as a human universal yet believed in examining “the dynamics of doubt” (Fowler, 2004, p.409). If one seriously examines the faith experience of people with religions and beliefs different from one’s own or even the faith patterns of those who do not claim adherence to any religion, one risks potential confusion or even a crisis of faith. Yet, importantly, he maintained that a lively faith development required such self-examination and a readiness to encounter the faith perspectives of others. One’s individual faith is, again, paradoxically interactive and social, requiring community. It shapes and is shaped by language, ritual, and nurturing. This notion of exploration of and challenge to one’s values and beliefs is reminiscent of both Chickering and Reisser (1993) and Baxter Magolda’s (2004) contentions that such tests are necessary in one’s development toward authenticity and integrity.

Before he described the stages of faith development, Fowler (1981) distinguished the term faith from those of religion and belief. He borrowed Smith’s (1963, as cited in Fowler, 1981) view of religions as “‘cumulative traditions’” that can be constituted by texts of scripture or law plus visual symbols, oral traditions, music and other. Faith is ignited by these elements. Deeper and more personal than religion, faith is one’s way of *responding* to the power as perceived through the cumulative traditions. He described belief as “‘the holding of certain ideas’” (Smith, 1963, as cited in Fowler, 1981). Religious belief means translating experiences in relation to concepts. One may have belief in a concept but not faith, as faith is the loyalty to or trust in the concept. One’s

life and character are shaped by that stable loyalty and commitment. He provided the example of a university having its principle of unity in a shared commitment to knowledge (the belief) and truth. The administration, faculty, students, and trustees keep faith in the search for knowledge; truthful sharing of knowledge constitutes the centrally held value.

Fowler (1981), with the assistance of doctoral students and research staff persons, conducted and analyzed 359 audio-taped and transcribed interviews of persons in Boston, Chicago, Atlanta and Toronto between 1972 and 1981, the results of which provided the basis for formulation of his faith development theory. Using a lifespan perspective, he described six stages of faith development that are constant or fixed though individuals may progress at varying rates and may not progress to the more advanced stages at all.

Fowler (1981) conducted interviews of people he described as being between the ages of 6 and 61+ with 40 percent of participants between the ages of 13 to 30. Students, especially female students at the time the interviews were conducted (between 1972 and 1981), were encountering the height of the women's movement and would have experienced a very different socialization process than today's students. While Fowler's sample was equally divided by gender, some (Broughton, 1986; Nelson & Aleshire, 1986) have criticized his research methodology, claiming that the denominational makeup was biased (45% Protestant, 36.5% Catholic, 11.2% Jewish, and 8.2% other faiths) as was the ethnicity (97.8% White). Other criticisms pointed to his reliance on the work of White, male psychologists thereby calling into question whether his theory truly encompassed the developmental processes of women (Anderson, 1994) and, specifically, African-American women (Watt, 2003). Some offered the critique that his theory may

not define faith in a form that can be inclusive of the dynamics of faith in multiple traditions (Fowler, 2004; Small, 2008). Others questioned even first the existence of and, if so, then the possibility of attainment of a Stage 6 faith, (*Universalizing faith* where one sheds concerns for self and order and pursues a disciplined and tangible devotion to universalizing compassion), as all of Fowler's examples were of deceased individuals such as Gandhi and King whose historical significance was more a matter of moral and political significance than religious (Broughton, 1986). Finally, Cartwright (2001) contended that this theory and others like it provide only descriptions of individual behavior at different developmental levels and no explanation of formal mechanisms for spiritual change.

Parks's faith development theory.

In her initial year of doctoral work, Parks (1986) studied under Fowler at Boston College, his faith development theory creating the context for her inquiry which was to become another landmark work on college student spirituality. (Though he left Boston College, Fowler continued to serve as Parks's advisor.) To develop her theory, Parks drew not only on the work of Fowler but on multiple developmental theorists such as Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Kegan, and Perry. In her dissertation (1980), she expanded Fowler's (1981) Stage 4 to include two distinct stages.⁴

Concurring with Fowler (1981), she began with the premise that faith is integral to human beings, a human universal, and also made the distinction between faith and belief. Faith for Parks was "one's conviction of the ultimate character and meaning of

⁴ She recognized late adolescent students who did not fall neatly into either Fowler's Stage 3 or 4 because they had not resolved issues of trust, need, and confidence (and were operating in dependent faith), having not yet reached an inner-dependence by the senior year. It was this recognition and acknowledgement that prompted her to extend Fowler's theory by adding a stage she called *young adult* between his Stages 3 and 4.

existence” (Parks, 1986, p. 21). Faith is meaning making in that it is “the activity of seeking, composing, and being composed by a meaning both ultimate and intimate” (p. 42) conceived through a process of working out developmental concerns posed as what Parks termed the “big questions.” Through meaning making, one is seeking pattern, order, form and significance. This notion is reminiscent of Perry’s (1970) as well as Baxter Magolda’s (1992) assumption that people try to make sense of their experiences, to interpret their experiences meaningfully, finding some sense of orderliness in them.

Parks (1986) greatly emphasized the dynamic, searching motion of faith development as journey, employing journey as metaphor for development and quest (Parks, 1986, 2000, 2011). Faith is not static but something that undergoes change, that develops. Like Fowler (1981), she applied the lens of developmental psychology, reviewing the way in which an individual moves from equilibrium through disequilibrium toward a new equilibrium. Grounding her insights in her dissertation results, her extensive work with students (in positions such as residence director, director of student activities, professor, and chaplain, among others), and her colleague’s experiences with students, she narrowed the emphasis of her theory to young adult development. She (1986) described three strands of development: form of cognition (knowing), form of dependence (affect), and form of community (social). Within each strand or form of development are stages of increasing complexity that contribute to one’s understanding and development, from adolescent to young adult to adult and, finally, mature adult, with development in large part mirroring that described in the models proposed by Fowler (1981) and Perry (1970, 1981).

Through exploration of forms of community, Parks (1986) was able to address the influence of the interpersonal, social and cultural contexts of students' faith development, highlighting the "tension between the desire for agency and autonomy and the desire for belonging, connection, and intimacy" (Love, 2001, p. 9). The developing adolescent will experience two forms of community - conventional and diffuse. The conventional community is that homogeneous group to which one belongs owing to birth, socio-economic status, or other circumstance of relation; the world is divided into the "we" of the conventional community and "they." When adolescents expand their sense of community, exploring and experimenting with truths, perspectives, and relationships other than those of the conventional community and eventually determining that any sort of perspective is as good as another, they experience the diffuse stage of development. The young adult who has become more open to an expanded idea of community but who has at the same time necessarily lessened his relationship with the conventional community becomes ready for the compatible, mentoring adult or group that resonates with the new, emerging self. There is a need for an ideological belonging and challenge and support for the young adult who is both gaining strength yet is still fragile. Finally, the adult also seeks a compatible community yet remains open to others whose perspectives differ.

Like Fowler (1981), Parks' (1986) conclusions were based largely on analysis of research on Christian students, and she too relied heavily on Perry (1970) and Kohlberg (1976); as such, she was also subject to feminist critique in that the theory was based on work grounded in the scholarship of White, male psychologists primarily studying White, male participants, thereby neglecting women's experiences. Anderson (1994) suggested

that a lack of clear agreement in general on definition of terms such as spirituality, faith, and religion could affect students' understanding and researchers' interpretation of the meanings of experiences. Another critique leveled at Fowler and even Parks was their emphasis on cognitive structuring at the expense of significant enough attention to affective and social domains. Watt (2003) contended that African-American women might be more apt to develop their spirituality through feeling instead of cognition. That is, the expressive and relational aspects of worship and experiencing the ultimate depend more on affect than cognition. A further limitation for Watt (2003) was a lack of reference to how ethnic culture might impact faith development. While Cartwright (2001) did not explicitly mention Parks, her critique of theories of spiritual development - that they provide only descriptions of individual behavior at different developmental levels and no explanation of formal mechanisms for spiritual change - would conceivably extend to Parks' work, as well.

Race, gender, culture, sexual orientation and spiritual identity.

A key intent of this study was to examine the ways in which students' spiritual identities affected and were affected by their various social and cultural identities. The following section will note how, broadly, various identity components are interconnected with spirituality.

Race and culture.

Both the psychosocial process of spiritual identity development and the cognitive process of developing direction and purpose are interpreted through culture. Religious beliefs are part of culture. Researchers addressing religious pluralism must be mindful that religious particulars vary between and within traditions (Sorrentino, 2010). Tisdell

(2003) commended Fowler (1981) for expanding Piaget and Kohlberg's contributions to our understanding of how people know, learn, and reason by including the role of imagination and symbolic and unconscious processes (i.e., how you make meaning of a flag). Yet, she suggested that he (and by implication, Parks, as well) mirrored higher education's neglect of the symbolic processes that are often uniquely cultural:

Typically higher education has focused on knowing through rationality. But learning and constructing knowledge is also embedded in people's growth, development, and new experiences. Further, learning and constructing knowledge are rooted in, but not limited to, people's culture of origin...knowledge will ultimately be expressed through culture. (Tisdell, 2003, p. ix-x)

More recent research has examined how individuals' spiritual development is informed by their culture, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation and how their spirituality assists in their meaning making. Moreover:

Research has documented the continuing importance of religion in preserving cultural and ethnic traditions, supporting the adjustment of first-generation immigrants to a new host society, and providing a source of identity for the second generation...although religion is often a significant aspect of ethnic culture, it is difficult to establish the exact relation between the two – whether religious affiliation is essential to the ethnic community or if religious orientation is ancillary to ethnic identity. (Peek, 2005, p. 218)

Drawing on their study of 198 college students between ages 18 and 23 from a Catholic University in the northeastern United States, Chae, Kelly, Brown, and Bolden (2004) concluded that the students' ethnic identity was positively correlated with their spirituality - manifested both as an internalized, intrinsic orientation ("means") and as an external, outwardly-observable practice ("ends"). Their sample consisted of 108 women and 90 men and included 42 students identifying as Latino American, 44 as African-American, 47 as Asian American, and 65 as White. In addition to demographic questions, students responded to three questionnaires, one designed to elicit students'

notion of ethnic identity and the remaining two focusing on the intrinsic aspects or means of students' particular spiritual or religious practices (e.g., connectedness to a higher power) and on the extrinsic goals or ends driving students' spiritual or religious involvement (e.g., having an active sense of purpose). The scholars' findings indicated that ethnic minorities may be more likely to espouse an intrinsic spiritual or religious orientation than would the dominant culture and that, further, ethnic identity and spiritual ends are inextricably interconnected for ethnic minorities. They posited, for example, that because approximately 70 percent of Korean-Americans are members of the ethnic church, their spirituality is deeply ingrained in their way of life and sense of being, so not only acknowledging this on an individual level but partnering with the church and clergy would be appropriate responses when working with many Korean-Americans.

In his study of 212 university students described earlier, Sorrentino (2010) noted that for many students identification with the culture and sharing the same cultural background as fellow faith adherents was quite important, even for students who were not actively practicing their faith. He provided the example of a Hindu student who appreciated being in the temple with like believers but also enjoyed just getting together and sharing food with other immigrants from India who understood the cultural challenges faced by first-generation immigrants. Also, he found that a student's religion provided a sense of community and predictability and, as such, comprised an aspect of identity. He included the account of how a student who attended a Catholic mass at the campus chapel enjoyed the service because the prayers and rites were similar to those of the Roman Catholic church she attended at home. The experiences allowed her to feel a part of a larger community.

Parks (1986, 2000, 2011) emphasized the importance of community to young adults' spiritual development. In Stewart's (2010) review of the literature on the intersection of race and spiritual development, she noted that while recent scholarship has acknowledged and drawn new attention to how spirituality provides young adults with networks of community and with a site for engaging questions about purpose, integrity, values, and beliefs, a deep sense of spirituality and community has long existed as part of the African-American culture's meaning-making and relational systems. She cited the African cultural worldview which seeks to "balance spiritual and material realities; recognizes the existence of the Divine; and finds meaning and purpose through connection to the past, present, and future generations" (p. 10). She briefly traced the influence through the Civil Rights Era in which the Black Church and "spiritually defined concepts of social justice and redemption" (p. 11) such as sacrifice, salvation, and deliverance became the foundation for resistance and call for change. Thus, noted Stewart, for African-American students, both (racial and ethnic) cultural identity and spiritual identity have co-existed and will continue to co-exist as salient features in development. Her notion was underscored by Kuh and Gonyea's (2005) finding that African-American students tended to participate more often in spirituality-enhancing activities and reported the greatest gains of any racial group on the National Survey of Student Engagement in spirituality, practical competence and intellectual skills.

Other research bears witness to Stewart's (2010) conclusions (Dancy, 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009; Watson, 2006; Watt, 2003). While not presuming an essentialist experience, scholars noted the relationship of spirituality and identity meaning making for many African-American college students. Analyzing the data

gleaned from four focus groups of 48 total African-American college women, Watt (2003) asserted that spirituality was central to the process of identity development of many African-American college women. While spirituality can include observance of a shared set of beliefs and practices, Watt (2003) used a broader definition, suggesting that spiritual development is “the process one engages in to search for meaning” (p. 33) which may or may not include religious practices. Because African-American women “exist in a culture where being female and being black are both devalued” (p. 32), these college women may have drawn upon their spirituality to change their definition of self from external to internal, that is, they sought to define themselves instead of adopting an externally-imposed image of self. Watt (2003) suggested that practicing religious or spiritual rituals may help an African-American college woman to connect with the higher being and her inner strength enabling her to better cope with and endure the academic and social pressures associated with college life, most specifically isolating and racially hostile stressors.

In their qualitative study of the intersection of spirituality with race and gender in 14 African-American college women, Patton and McClure (2009) detailed how the students used spirituality to successfully navigate college, that is, how they understood life experiences plus how they negotiated issues and struggles. The women’s responses to interview questions often exhibited the connection between spirituality and culture or race. For example, one student described how she was more comfortable worshipping in a Black church because she could do so in a fashion more representative of her racial and cultural heritage. Referencing Parks (2000), the researchers noted that college is a critical time for spiritual development in young adults, a time when they begin to take

ownership for their spiritual experiences and question and explore their long-standing beliefs. However, the authors asserted that colleges currently assign inadequate resources to such programming and activities even while, as their study indicated, spirituality is an important component of diversity.

Studying the intersection of spirituality and identity in African-American male college students, Watson (2006) indicated that many adhered to the tenets of one of the branches of Christianity yet suggested that the relationship of spirituality and the notion of freedom is the overriding locus of African-American consciousness, destiny, and identity. He inferred that the students' personal relationship with God could not be constrained despite whatever oppressive social political conditions existed. This "resistant soul force" (Stewart, 1999) was available regardless of time, place, or circumstance. Watson also noted the social function of spirituality that created ethos and culture and served as the catalyst to consciousness and identity formation.

He surveyed 46 African-American male college students attending one of three private, historically Black colleges in the southeastern United States. As each college was affiliated with a religious denomination and all three were located in the Bible Belt (informal name for areas in the Midwest and South comprised predominantly of Protestants), the researcher somewhat predictably discovered that a majority of the students surveyed affirmed some higher power in their lives and found spirituality through religious and spiritual activities (e.g., time to meditate, pray or sit and reflect on life experiences; attend service at a place of worship) to be important to them and their purpose in life.

He cited the applicability of Fowler's (1981) conclusion that faith development requires one to reflect on one's own existence and process of development so as to begin to self-define and self-construct roles and relationships with ideas and others. (I would add Baxter Magolda's, 2001 & 2004, notion of self-authorship and Parks,' 1986, idea of the young adult seeking and composing ultimate and intimate meaning as also lending support to the importance of self-reflection in spiritual development.) Watson (2006) emphasized the importance of self-reflection to the holistic development of African-American male college students, as he felt it was through such places of consciousness, faith, and connection to God that they could best find strength to cope with stresses such as racism and the culture's negative stereotyping of African –American males.

Watson (2006) repeatedly lamented the lack of affirmation of students' spirituality in the culture of most institutions of higher education, opining that with the exception of religiously-affiliated schools, students are stigmatized or shunned for demonstrating this critical aspect of their lives. (While he located this opinion in his conclusion section, it is a cautionary conclusion, as his study only included students from religiously-affiliated schools.) He ended his discussion with the warning that ignoring the spiritual aspects of African-American males in college does a disservice to the authenticity of their cultural identity.

Watson's (2006) final concern was echoed in the 2010 qualitative study by Dancy of how spirituality influenced 24 African-American male college students' identities and college experiences. The students, ranging in ages between 18 and 24, were drawn from twelve colleges in the nineteen southern and southern-border states. Dancy gathered data using face-to-face interviews. As with Patton and McClure (2009), Stewart (2009),

Watson (2006), and Watts (2003), Dancy found that his study's participants identified spirituality as a core component of their identity, as an anchor and a means by which they understood the other components of their identity. For example, a student explained that lessons learned in church influenced him as to how to be a man and how to be a critical thinker. The students viewed spirituality as a source of both support and dependency, the latter only one of two sources the students viewed as appropriate for dependency for African-American men (with the other being reliance on other African-American males). The students acknowledged that though their spirituality anchors their other identities, tensions exist among identities. One student described the public perception of African-American Christian men as being destined only for a vocation of pastor or clergyman. This conflicted with his vision of becoming a lawyer, as friends and family questioned how his African-American Christian identity would reconcile with what they perceived as a profession requiring a deceitful, corporate persona. Another student described the tensions that existed between identifying as an African-American male while also identifying as gay. He reported that both the Bible and his African-American community provided messages rejecting his sexual identity though he very much embraced what he twice referred to as "his good, strong Christian foundation" (Dancy, 2010, p. 426).

Dancy's (2010) participants noted a significant disconnect between being spiritual and being religious. The students credited spirituality rather than the church or religious participation as most essential to their identity formation, meaning making, and persistence in college. Some participants specifically differentiated between spirituality and religion, citing spirituality as involving a process of personally and critically analyzing as opposed to religion which was viewed as a process of blindly accepting

someone else's interpretation of doctrine. The researcher noted that all 24 of the students stressed that spirituality, faith, and creed are important aspects of the diversity of higher education and of the retention of diverse students in higher education. Dancy asserted that an issue this critical to African-American men's identity, development of critical thinking, and academic and post-collegiate progress cannot be neglected by colleges and universities.

As a means of illustrating the complexity of race and spiritual development among African-American college students, Stewart (2009) conducted a qualitative study of how 13 African-American college students from three Midwestern colleges (one public, predominantly-white; one public, historically Black; and, one private, sectarian, historically Black college) perceived and made meaning of the multiple facets of their identities. Stewart found that for the majority of participants, spirituality was the means by which they understood and interpreted their myriad identities. That is, for all participants, critical components of their identity (e.g., race, gender, sexuality, and age) were perceived as external manifestations of an inward spirituality. The students determined that their "core identity was best labeled as 'spirit' instead of as any single or combined external identity facet" (p. 263). While other social and cultural identities were salient, spirituality was perceived as the core from which those identities were evidenced, a perception that spanned the religious, faith, and spiritual differences of the participants. Twelve of the 13 students made a distinction between spirituality and religion, with religion being identified with tradition, doctrine, and culture while spirituality was equated with a one-to-one, constant relationship with a divinity. Stewart's study indicated that some African-American college students perceived their identities as spirit

evidencing through other components of their identities, that spirituality was a key component in the lives of the students in that it served as a means of support, coping, and resistance, was incorporated as an aspect of identity and identity development, and was a source of meaning making.

In their discussion of the intersection of race, culture, and religion, Stewart and Lozano (2009) offered several examples from different cultures to illustrate how religious identity was not a separate identity facet but was, instead, one aspect of how people made meaning of their racial/ethnic identities. One such example was the ceremonial pow-wows and sweat lodges of American Indian culture which are used to represent the indigenous people's spiritual connection with the earth, the Great Spirit, and community. In fact, a separate study of persistence among American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) revealed that spirituality was one of the three most important influences on the participants' persistence to graduation in college. Relating that only about 47 percent of AI/AN students completed their freshman year and 75 percent of all AI/AN students dropped out prior to completing a baccalaureate degree, Saggio and Rendon (2004) conducted a study of 29 students enrolled at a small, religiously-affiliated college with a nearly 80 percent AI/AN population. The students cited family support, spirituality, and validation as critical elements of their continuing enrollment. Spirituality was especially important in that "it is an integral value that pervades all aspects of life. Whereas Western Eurocentric thinking often bifurcates spirituality and daily living, Native thinking views religious life as a part of one's identity" (p. 225). Reflective of the aforementioned research on spirituality in the lives of African-American students, the sacred or spiritual was considered present throughout all aspects of daily life.

Stewart and Lozano (2009) noted the wide variety of religious practices and attitudes about spirituality within Asian cultures, commenting that for “those within the Polynesian triangle, the interconnection of religion, spirituality and culture is embedded” (p. 25). In a related study of 113 Korean college students with varying or no religious affiliation (Buddhist, 5%; Catholic, 13%; Protestant, 31%; no religious preference, 48%; and, other, 3%), Kim and Seidlitz (2002) found that spirituality moderated the effects of both daily and major life difficulties and concluded that “spirituality may be an important resource in transcending or ameliorating stressors, regardless of individuals’ association with an identifiable religious group” (p. 1386). Because 48 percent of students surveyed had no religious affiliation, the researchers stressed the importance of distinguishing spirituality from religion.

For their study, Kim and Seidlitz (2002) administered questionnaires measuring perception of spiritual purpose, God’s presence in one’s life, and daily stress as well as affect and physical symptoms to 113 college students in an introductory psychology course in Seoul, Korea. Results indicated that having a spiritual purpose and believing in God’s presence in life provided this cohort of Korean college students with a broad perspective of life and its difficulties, allowing them to be less distracted by problems and less likely to overemphasize them. The authors posited that the students were perhaps able to view life’s stressors as meaningful and useful episodes in preparation for the larger context of life. Positive responses to difficulties may have provided strength and confidence which in turn guarded against future anxiety or despair. Maintaining one’s spirituality, one becomes less vulnerable to outside stressors, thereby freeing mind and body to additional spiritual growth and fulfillment which further reinforces commitment

and direction to life. The researchers concluded that boosting spirituality would be one way to effectively help students adjust to the daily stressors of life.

The Día de los Muertos or Day of the Dead celebration was another example Stewart and Lozano (2009) provided to demonstrate that religious identity was not a separate identity facet but was, instead, one aspect of how people make meaning of their racial/ethnic identities. Some Latinos of Mexican heritage use the day to simultaneously honor deceased loved ones and recognize death as a natural part of life. Indigenous rituals are combined with Catholic beliefs and practices to form a celebration that also acknowledges the spirit of resistance and the history of colonialism and oppression endured by Mexicans under Spanish colonizers. The authors suggested that many Latino/a college students drew a parallel to their own struggles as they confronted racism, financial hardships and marginalization as they pursued higher education.

As Stewart and Lozano (2009) stressed, though students may share an overarching identity such as “Christian,” their experiences can be radically different. A Mexican-American Catholic college student may identify as a Christian but not experience Christian privilege; instead, the student may experience cultural marginalization even while sharing the same general faith tradition as a roommate:

...Notions of religious privilege have little meaning for people of color who consider themselves Christians when they have been ostracized and marginalized by whites who are also Christians. Most often, what others casually assert as Christian privilege is, in the experiences of people of color, actually white privilege and racism...Martin Luther King Jr. said that Sunday morning at eleven o'clock is the most segregated hour in the United States (Stewart & Lozano, 2009, p. 17).

Broadening to all faith traditions, Kuh and Gonyea (2005), analyzing responses to the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement, found that Hispanic and Latino students

reported worshipping less than other racial and ethnic groups yet still indicated that they had deepened their sense of spirituality during college to a greater degree than did Whites. Further research examining why is indicated.

In summarizing this section thus far, studies of students of various cultural backgrounds have found that spirituality is a core component of students' identities (Dancy, 2010; Patton and McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2009; Watson, 2006; &Watts, 2003), and for some the means by which they understood and interpreted their myriad identities (Saggio & Rendon, 2004; Stewart, 2009). For many students in this intersection of race, culture, and spirituality, spirituality was a means of support, doing, resistance, and meaning making and was present throughout multiple aspects of daily life (Dancy, 2010; Kim & Seidlitz, 2002; Saggio & Rendon, 2004; Stewart & Lozano, 2009; Stewart, 2009, 2010; Watson, 2006; Watt, 2003). These findings were particularly relevant to my study, as several participants were students of color and several identified with non-majority faith traditions yet were conducting their identity development at an institution and in a community that was rural and predominantly-White and Protestant.

While a student of color can choose whether to participate in and associate with a particular faith tradition, that individual cannot choose membership in the "social group" that equates to being a certain race complete with all the accompanying barriers that entails (Young, 1987). Students of color at predominantly White institutions may feel like strangers or guests receiving hospitality (Ahmed, 2009). The student that desires wholeness and an answer to the question, "Who am I?" does so in the midst of what can be an oppressive and hostile environment that tends to compartmentalize spirituality and education (Stewart, 2002). In the process of negotiating multiple roles amidst this

isolation, students of color may use spirituality to help them find meaning which in turn shapes their identities; through this process, they are better able to cope with external, and sometimes hostile, pressures (Stewart, 2009, 2010; Watson, 2006; Watt, 2003).

Stewart (2002) asserted the importance of students transcending societal compartmentalization and fragmentation of faith and education. This wholeness is the core of spirituality:

...issues of faith and spirituality are ultimately issues that involve seeking coherence and wholeness among the myriad identities, responsibilities, and relationships that all human beings possess. Identity integration or wholeness is supported as a spiritual concept that is related to faith and the commitments that are made to certain roles, relationships, and concepts, and that is deeply relevant to the development of young adults. (Stewart, 2002, p. 582)

Some researchers concluded that ignoring students' spirituality in college may negatively impact their cultural identity (Dancy, 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009; Watson, 2006). In my study, I examined whether participants' ethnic and cultural identities were intertwined, influenced their spiritual identity, or were the means by which they interpreted and understood their multiple identities.

Gender.

Citing gender differences in women's moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1982), ways of knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, et al., 1986) and identity formation (Josselson, 1987), Bryant (2007) posited that gender differences would also exist between men's and women's spiritual characteristics and patterns of development, especially during the transformational college years in which one is exposed to the "big questions" (Parks, 2000, 2011) that challenge one's beliefs. Like Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2010), Bryant (2007) used a sample of 3,600 respondents from both the HERI 2000 Cooperative CIRP Freshmen Survey as well as the 2004 CSBV which surveyed a subset of those same

entering students three years later. Students attended a wide variety of institutional types. Again, the CSBV explores issues of meaning, purpose, and spirituality including spiritual/religious practices, spiritual orientation, compassionate behavior, spiritual quest, and attitudes toward religion/spirituality. Her sample was 53 percent female and predominantly Protestant (48%; 1% Islamic; 2% Jewish; 31% Roman Catholic; 4% other; 12 % no religious preference) and White (84%; 5% Black; 4% Asian; 4% Latino/a; 2% American Indian; 2% other).

Bryant (2007) studied gender differences and similarities across multiple dimensions of spirituality plus investigated how student characteristics, institutional environments, and college experiences were associated with men's and women's commitment to integrating spirituality into their lives and their self-perceived levels of spirituality. Bryant found gender differences across multiple spiritual and religious constructs as well as unique patterns of change for college men and women.

First, data from the combined surveys indicated that women were more spiritually and religiously inclined than men, significantly so on measures of charitable involvement, equanimity (e.g., feeling good about the direction in which one's life is headed and feeling at peace/centered) and religious skepticism. Like Bryant (2007), Buchko's (2004) study of 344 undergraduates at a private, mid-western university noted a strong relational component to women's spirituality: "Women's religious faiths appear to reflect greater daily connection with God through prayer, more assurance of God's presence and activity in their lives, and more emotive connection with God as evidenced by more frequent feelings of reverence or devotion" (p. 95). Also, Kuh and Gonyea (2004) using data from the NSSE determined that female students were slightly more

likely (3%) to “participate in activities to enhance their spirituality” (p. 24) such as worship, meditation or prayer than were male students. Bryant (2007) cautioned that such differences may reflect, for example, women’s inclination to say they are spiritual, religious, or compassionate because they believe it is a trait they should exhibit or, conversely, men’s hesitation to describe themselves as spiritual or compassionate because of perceived societal pressures or expectations to the contrary.

Second, Bryant (2007) found that activities such as discussions of a spiritual nature (e.g., with friends or in a classroom setting) and charitable involvement were positively associated with spiritual development (self-rated plus degree of importance students attributed to integrating spirituality into their lives) in both men and women as indicated by the “universally powerful ways in which they expose students to diverse viewpoints, different ways of life, and new perspectives on the world and social issues” (p. 843). She concluded that spontaneous, extracurricular, and more formal classroom discussions about the topic of spirituality/religion as well as community or college sponsored charitable involvement are valuable ways to engage both genders spiritually, an argument for attention to providing spaces and conditions for such discussions.

Bryant’s (2007) third finding revealed that religious identity (as defined, for example, by identification with a world religion, sect or denomination) is more strongly linked to men’s spirituality than to women’s. She specifically found that Christian religious identity was the conduit through which many men expressed their spiritual selves and suggested that it provides a sense of structure amidst elements that are nebulous and undefined. More women, the researcher proposed, may have historically

experienced greater oppression and disillusionment with religion and may have adapted by identifying as spiritual without so readily adopting a particular religious identity.

The study's fourth major finding was that hours per week spent studying and doing homework plus majoring in one of the scientific fields were both negatively associated with men's spirituality. Bryant (2007) questioned whether men became more entrenched than women in the scientific culture which may be antithetical to spirituality. While they did not note a gender difference on this factor, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) also indicated that religious engagement (an external measurement reflecting behaviors such as attending services or praying) was affected by a student's major field of study; specifically, they found that majoring in agriculture, engineering, and the social sciences was associated with a larger than average decline in religious engagement.

Bryant's (2007) fifth significant finding was the importance of peer group effects on women's spirituality. Women who were involved in a campus religious organization; who attended church, temple or other site of worship; and who had many close friends with similar religious beliefs became increasingly interested in and committed to integrating spirituality into their daily lives and were more likely to define themselves as spiritual in relation to others. The effect on men was similar just not as strong. Bryant noted that Parks (2000) had interpreted gender difference in development using Chodorow's theoretical contribution: "For males, therefore, a central task in becoming a self is separation or differentiation, going forth and heading out. In contrast, for females the task of becoming a self requires identification with, attachment, and connection" (p. 49). Bryant concluded that the women's investment and attachment to others with similar beliefs impacted their spiritual self-perceptions. Further, she suggested that future

studies of the five findings would best be examined qualitatively in order to better dissect the complex strands of meaning that constitute spirituality in the lives of women and men. Bryant's findings, particularly how activities such as discussions of a spiritual nature were positively associated with spiritual development, informed this research in that participants recounted how they grappled with spiritual and religious issues through conversations with others both inside and outside of the classroom.

Sexual orientation.

Faculty and staff must recognize that LGBT students comprise one population of students for whom the topic of spirituality or religion can be a source of distress (Gold & Stewart, 2012; Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005), most especially in how the students reconcile religious teachings about same sex affection. This distress was evidenced in two of my participants' narratives. Helping students to negotiate the questions, "Am I okay?" and "Am I normal?" is a familiar role for not only parents but for college counselors and other faculty and student affairs advisors. But, the situation becomes more complicated when the student is struggling with developing a positive gender identity (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). These struggles may be further compounded for students attempting to reconcile their spirituality and sexual orientation. Why does this aspect of identity take on such significance for LGBT students? In short, one's faith tradition may hold that it is neither "okay" nor "normal" to have a same-sex affection identity.

If faith is a human universal (Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986), and LGBT students experience rejection by their faith traditions, their spirituality is not simply an issue or concern but a "lived dimension and transformative worldview" (Davidson, 2000, p. 410).

That is, it is not an esoteric, theological argument to consider, but a daily reality impacting decisions, direction, and, indeed, one's worldview. Decisions and direction revolve around that most salient part of one's identity, because it is that aspect that has come to compromise or even sever one from one's faith. Students may perceive that the very institution that helps family members and co-congregants find meaning has rejected them because it has rejected a significant aspect of their identity. While many LGBT students may feel rejected by religious denominations, they do not necessarily in turn reject spirituality (de la Huerta, 1999; Love, 1997). Many continue to seek out and participate in institutional forms, particularly, of Judaism and Christianity (Davidson, 2000).

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual men and women have historically been denied acceptance to the world's three largest monotheistic religions – Islam, Judaism, and Christianity (Davidson, 2000), providing a unique and generally painful additional developmental burden not borne by their straight peers. The degree of tolerance within sects or denominations of the religions varies but a position of acceptance and inclusion would be the exception (Davidson, 2000). Western institutionalized religion and heritage primarily draws from the Judeo-Christian tradition, that is, those values and beliefs common to Jews and Christians as derived from common sacred texts. There are passages condemning same-sex relations (e.g., Leviticus 18:22; 20:13) in the Pentateuch (within the Torah), known as the Five Books of Moses to Jews and the first five books of the Old Testament to Christians. Other books (i.e., those comprising the remainder of the Old Testament and the whole of the New Testament) recognized as sacred texts by

Christians also contain passages that are often interpreted as condemnatory (e.g., Romans 1:24, 26 - 27).

Because the union of a male and female is considered a fundamental basis for Jewish family life, “traditional opinion dictates an historical prohibition of sexual acts between same-sex partners as sin” (Davidson, 2000, p. 412). While the more progressive Reform and Reconstructionist movements may grant a more accepting interpretation, Orthodox Jews would maintain that same-sex sexual acts are sinful (Davidson, 2000).

The Roman Catholic Church upholds sex as moral and good within heterosexual, monogamous marriage where the theoretical potential for procreation exists (Davidson, 2000). Like a number of protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic Church now distinguishes between the person having the inclination (the person identifying as LGBT) and the sin (sexual acts between same-sex partners) in that the inclination is not regarded as sin (although something to be avoided given its tendency toward sin), but the act or behavioral expression is. The Protestant denominations will range from full acceptance to qualifying acceptance to clear rejection of the perceived sinner and sin (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005). While not as wrenching as outright rejection, qualifying acceptance is problematic for the LGBT man or woman, as church affirmation may be only available through celibacy or disingenuous heterosexual marriage (Davidson, 2000).

As in Christianity, sexual relations outside of marriage is a sin according to Islamic doctrine. While the Koran does not include a passage specifically condemning same-sex affectional orientation, Islamic doctrine considers sexual acts between two males akin to adultery, and Shiite fundamentalists both condemn sexual acts between

males and impose severe penalties (Davidson, 2000). And, finally, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, perhaps better known as the Mormon Church, is condemnatory toward same-sex affectional orientation, and persons participating in such sexual acts face excommunication (Davidson, 2000).

An LGBT student negotiating spiritual identity may be denied the emotional support and positive reinforcement ordinarily given by built-in support systems such as social institutions, religious communities, and family that are so critical to a developing identity. Such a student may feel like an outsider, like someone who is “not okay.” While members of every marginalized group in American society face challenges in their identity development, for nonheterosexual people, Love, Bock, Jannarone and Richardson (2005) contended, it is an even greater challenge, because most families and society in general do not provide role models or any approximation of visible socializing experiences to foster identity. Instead of working on establishing identity, students may become more adept at hiding who they are while peers are meanwhile practicing and enhancing their communication and self-disclosure skills. Suppression or denial, in turn, delays the development of an authentic identity that integrates the students’ sexuality into their overall self-concept (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007).

One of the studies in the very limited body of research on the spiritual identity development of students identifying as LGBT is a qualitative study of seven lesbian and five gay college students by Love, et al. (2005) who found that the students’ sense of spirituality emerged or stalled depending upon their experiences (or lack of experiences) with organized religion. A strong sense of spirituality was emerging for those students who had reconciled being gay or lesbian with being a religious or spiritually grounded

person; they experienced no dissonance between who they were as sexual beings and who they were as spiritual beings. Paradoxically, however, the researchers found that the religion that had rejected the individual had eventually served as the means by which the student worked through the challenges toward reconciliation. That is, students who had a religious background, had attended church camp, and had been raised in what they classified as a loving environment associated with religion, drew upon the tenets and structures of the religion to reconcile their sexual and religious identities.

Communities in which to construct identity are vital to the spiritual development of young adults who depend on outside authority for expression and confirmation. “The emerging, fragile self is intensely dependent upon such a community of confirmation to complete the act of imagination that constitutes ... faith” (Parks, 1986, p. 160). The task of finding this critical community is even more difficult for students with multiple identities. “‘Gay’ does not always imply white and atheist” (Poynter & Washington, 2005, p. 42). Students of a racial minority may not identify with an LGBT community they perceive as predominantly White, leaving them to individually contend with racism and religious intolerance from the majority LGBT community and from disfavor based on their sexual orientation from racial minority heterosexual social and religious groups. In short, the struggle to resolve conflicts of spiritual and sexual identity can have far-reaching effects on physical, spiritual, and mental well-being (Gold & Stewart, 2012), and, as such, needs to be part of the conversation provided for by public colleges. This literature was informative given that a number of this study’s participants reported grappling with how same sex relationships were viewed within the faith tradition with

which they identified, and two students identifying as gay attempted to reconcile religious teachings about same sex affection within the strictures of established churches.

“Expanding our Ontology”

Both theory and research suggest that students are actively involved in finding meaning outside of themselves. Spiritual development is meaning making. Astin, Astin, and Linholm (2011) studied the amount of attention that colleges and universities devoted to their students’ “inner” and “outer” lives. They focused on the colleges’ roles and concluded that students’ inner development of self-awareness, empathy, caring, and social responsibility received scant attention, an ironic finding considering that a liberal education is grounded in the concept of introspection.

Astin, Astin, and Linholm (2011) noted that in order for students to answer the “big questions” (e.g., “Who am I? What are my most deeply felt values? Do I have a mission or purpose in life? Why am I in college? What sort of world do I want to help create?), students must have the capacity to see themselves clearly and honestly, to understand their feelings and actions. In the absence of this understanding, students cannot be expected to become responsible citizens, educators, or mentors.

Given college students’ and scholars’ emerging interest in issues of spirituality and opportunities to conduct exploration of spirituality and worldviews (Astin, Astin & Lindholm 2011; Bryant, 2007; Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Stewart, 2007, 2009; Schwadel, 2011; & Subbiondo, 2011), postmodernism’s acceptance of the subjective (Hartley, 2004; Love & Talbot, 1999), and colleges’ embrace of pluralism in all its forms (Braskamp, Trautvetter, & Ward, 2006), higher education may be poised for a shift in posture toward spirituality, in both practice and

teaching. Palmer and Zajonc (2010) contended that a philosophy of education that advocates for the exploration of life's purpose is not a return to the past but is, instead, a movement toward the future:

By expanding our ontology to embrace the interconnectedness of reality and its multiple dimensions, by extending our epistemology to include contemplative, aesthetic, and moral knowing, by recognizing the ethical dimensions of our way of knowing, we can grow the exploration of purpose beyond the humanities to all aspects of curricular and co-curricular life. (pp. 122-123)

Application of the Literature to the Data

This study responded to the call for more qualitative research on the nature of events (that promote the changes) that contribute to students' spiritual identity development (Bryant, 2007; Cartwright, 2001; Collins, Hurst & Jacobson, 1987; Love & Talbot, 1999) and helped to illuminate the forms and patterns of contemporary college student spirituality (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken & Echols, 2006), owing to the dearth of research to understand college students' diverse spiritual and religious identities in relation to other multiple identity components. Research to assist in understanding what spirituality means to students from non-majority religious affiliations is particularly scant. This study served to fill these gaps while giving further voice to the limits of research on how students' identity components interact to influence their spirituality or religion in a rural, four-year public college context. Addressing these gaps in an effort to better understand students' spiritual identity development will become increasingly critical given the pluralism of today's college students' religious and spiritual affiliations.

Throughout the data chapters, I highlighted the psychosocial (affective, expressive and relational) aspects of students' spirituality as called for by Watt (2003) as well as the cognitive (search for meaning and purpose). I acknowledged and illustrated

the multiple identities of students and how their spiritual identities might intersect with other aspects of their identities (e.g., gender). The first data chapter examines how students made or began to make meaning of their spirituality or worldview while in college. Chapter 5 highlights how some students navigated to Northern State based largely on interest in potential opportunities to affiliate with like believers and then looks at how students used the tenets of their spirituality or worldview to cope with everyday stresses. Chapter 6 illustrates how students drew upon their spirituality to negotiate some controversial issues of this era. All data chapters explore ways in which students' identities shaped or were shaped by their multiple identity components.

Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore how college students of diverse spiritual beliefs or worldviews at a rural, public institution interpreted, made meaning of, and drew (or did not draw) upon their spirituality in relation to other aspects of their identity (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation). The following research questions framed this study and guided data collection:

1. How do students experience spirituality or religion in their lives prior to, starting at, and continuing in the College?
2. How do aspects of their identities (e.g., race, gender, and sexual orientation) intersect with their spiritual or religious identity?
3. What college conditions, spaces, or forums promote or hinder their exploration of spirituality or religion during college?
4. How does a student's spirituality or religion help to shape the individual's overall sense of self in college?

Chapter 3 begins with an explanation of the theoretical frameworks undergirding the study. The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) is explained as a framework for interpreting students' multiple dimensions of identity followed by symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) which in essence allows that one's interpretations of any phenomena are based on previous interactions. Next is a section describing the benefit of combining the use of the RMMDI and symbolic interactionism. This is followed by an accounting of the research site, participants (Table 1), and means of participant recruitment (including an amalgamated definition of spirituality). I then

present the interview process used and a description of coding analysis. The chapter closes with sections describing the trustworthiness and limitations of the study.

Theoretical Influences

Reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity.

The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) was first introduced by Jones and McEwen (2000) as a way to identify the saliency of multiple identities within the context of students' family backgrounds, experiences, future planning, geographic regions/backgrounds, and/or sociocultural conditions (McEwen, 2003). The researchers suggested that one cannot understand, for instance, a student's spirituality in isolation from that individual's other socially-constructed identities but must instead understand it in relation to other identity dimensions. By way of example, one of this study's participants chose to identify as a non-denominational Christian in her senior year owing to a small Northburg church's acceptance of her identity as a lesbian. Thus, her identity as a non-denominational Christian was interdependent with her identity as a lesbian.

Jones and McEwen (2000) posited that every person has a figurative core containing that person's unique characteristics. As represented in the graphic design of their model, an individual's core is depicted in the center of intersecting circles representing race, class, gender, culture, religion, and sexual orientation. Identities that are more salient appear as dots placed on concentric circles closer to the core. Each concentric circle intersects with each of the other concentric circles, suggesting that the identities occur simultaneously around the core rather than existing in a vacuum. A person's identities should be considered in total as compared to considering only a single identity at a time (McEwen, 2003). The process of looking at multiple identities requires

the researcher to see identities as dynamic and evolving and to notice that some aspects of students' identities may be developing or may be more significant than others during different points in time.

The model provided one of the first portrayals of the intrapersonal domain of development, that is, relationships among any one individual's various social identities (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) but did not examine the connection between the individual's multiple social identities and meaning making capacity. In their revised model, or the RMMDI, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) illustrated that connection by first accounting for context - the contextual factors (peers, specific historical moment, stereotypes, campus climate) influencing a student's understanding. These contexts are drawn as arrows moving toward the intersecting concentric circles. The arrows first pass through a filter or screen which represents one's meaning making capacity. Thus, the meaning making filter lies between context and identity.

The filters of persons with less complex meaning making are depicted as having wide openings allowing for more external influences to pass through and affect one's concept of self as compared to relying on internal definitions. The filters of those persons with more complex meaning making capacity are shown as less permeable, filtering out much of the external influences and thus signifying that they rely less on external conceptualizations of their identity and more on internal self-authorship.

With the inclusion of meaning making in the model, researchers can conduct a much more comprehensive interrogation; that is, I was able to examine how students' concepts of social identity (exemplified by psychosocial theorists such as Chickering, & Reisser, 1993), meaning making (e.g., cognitive-structural theories - Baxter Magolda,

1992), and spirituality (e.g., faith development theories - Fowler, 1981; Parks, 1986) worked together. The RMMDI permitted interrogation of the complexities and multiple dimensions of a student's life by incorporating meaning making, providing consideration not only of *what* relationships students perceived (and their degree of saliency) among their social identities, but also *how* they came to perceive them as such. Thus, in my analyses, I first discerned what relationships were important to students and then how those relationships rose to prominence. For example, one participant, "Evan," assigned equal saliency to his identity as gay and his identity as a member of the Unitarian-Universalist Church, in this case because it embraced his other salient identity. Further, I considered what factored into the student's choice of a denomination; what does he question, and what does he take for granted (e.g., as a White male, he can enter any local church and be in the majority).

Another participant, "Keisha," as a student of color had a very different experience in Northburg churches. As a member of the Gospel Choir, gospel music as a form of praise in the urban, Black Church tradition to which she was accustomed was most important to Keisha. She enjoyed playing the tambourine in whatever fashion she wished during worship services at her home church. Compared to what she described as the lengthy and boisterous services of her home church, Northburg's Baptist churches seemed very quiet, the music and services brief. As a person of color, she would have been a very visible minority in a Northburg church; as a boisterous worshipper, she would not have felt welcomed. To ignore such potential lived experiences of multiple oppressed locations would be to continue to fail to account for "neglected points of intersection" (McCall, 2005, p. 1780). Instead of examining separate elements of

identity, analysis of multiple dimensions of identity permitted me to recognize those aspects of identity most salient to each student's spirituality at the time of the interview in the context of public higher education. I looked at what they said and stressed and how some students faced "multiple marginality" (Crenshaw, 1992), that is, an African American female seeking a less-subdued, conventional and rural, Northern Baptist worship service. The interviews generated data which generated themes of things stressed, some more prominently than others, which I then analyzed.

As a more general example of the theme of multiple marginality, Northern State is predominantly White, and though females dominate in numbers, the college clearly operates within the larger American society within which males are dominant. Thus, a Black female experiencing sexist behavior from Black male peers at college might feel "doubly burdened, subject in some ways to the dominating practices of both a sexual hierarchy and a racial one" (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 404). In analysis, I had to remember that students may be making what amounts to forced choices as to what identities are salient at the time. For example, Keisha at first chose the closest semblance to the Baptist tradition with which she was familiar though a very visible minority in the service. There are pressures exerted on students in situations of multiple marginality, that is, Keisha must choose one thing at the expense of another. I tried to acknowledge that pressure when it surfaced.

While Jones and Abes (2013) concluded that there are no formulaic ways by which one must apply their model, it was imperative to highlight saliency of identities and how students' multiple social identities do not exist independently. Identity dimensions intersect with each other and must be understood in relation to each other.

Intersectionality is a metaphorical term originally coined by Crenshaw (1989) and refers to a state in which various social and cultural identities interact, holding that classical modes of oppression as well as means of privilege and dominance within society such as those based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion or disability do not act exclusive of one another. When more than one of these forms of oppression inter-relate, or intersect, multiple forms of oppression can result (Crenshaw, 1992).

I captured the complexities of students' everyday lives and their identities, illustrating their social locations and how they made meaning in their lives (micro). To a much lesser extent, I portrayed how these social locations were situated in larger social systems of power and privilege (macro) to begin to understand the complex interplay between disadvantage and privilege (Lutz, Herrera Vivar, & Supik, 2011). The advantages of one group (race, class, gender, sexual orientation) are dependent on the disadvantages or restrictions of another, but:

[e]veryone is situated, not just people of color, working-class and poor people, women, and gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people. The lives of Whites, the middle and upper classes, men, and heterosexuals are equally shaped by their social location along these dimensions. (Weber, 2010, p. 11-12)

I actively tried to not commit "intersectional disempowerment" (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 406), that is, further oppressing by essentializing (assuming the existence, for example, of a monolithic women's experience or Black experience, Harris, 1990) one aspect of the student's identity against the norm. To illustrate, "Ruhi" and "Azzam" both claim Islam as a salient feature of their identities, but what it meant to them on a daily basis differed, so I could not assume they felt similarly about all matters.

I had to listen for the "interpretive structures" (Crenshaw, 1992, p. 410) the students used to reconstruct events, considering what was left in while understanding that

I would not know what was left out. For instance, when describing his youth in India, Mike noted that he was in the minority as a Christian who spoke English in an area in which ninety percent of the population was Hindu and did not speak English. What he “left in” when speaking about life in India was how he felt actively discriminated against, told that he must think he is better than others because he is Christian and spoke English. As he continued to describe his journey, Mike continued to structure his story to illustrate how he felt marginalized in both India and then America. In sum, I listened to what the students said and tried to present quotes and analyses of those quotes that reflected what was important to the students both singularly and as a group.

Symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionists (SI) believe that humans construct their world based on their individual perceptions of that world and structure their external world by how they conceived that world to be (Benzies & Allen, 2001) though the world exists separate and apart from the individual’s perceptions of it. Because a central tenet of SI is the idea that everyone is a meaning making person (Gusfield, 2003), I chose to employ SI to help me to better understand how students constructed their perspectives. A three-pronged conceptualization of the core principles of SI includes the notions:

- (1) That people act toward things, including each other, on the basis of the meanings they have for them; (2) that these meanings are derived through social interaction with others; and (3) that these meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds. (Blumer, 1969, as cited in Snow, 2001, p. 367)

People attach subjective meanings to symbols (e.g., language). One’s world is interpreted through the use of symbols in the process of interaction; one then acts on the

basis of the meaning that is derived from that symbolic interaction (Benzies & Allen 2001). Gusfield (2003) provided a succinct example of how given any one event, the meanings connoted or denoted by the language chosen to describe it arise from our individual interpretations which are based on our previous interactions: “I am firm, you are stubborn, he is pig-headed” (p. 124). In order to understand another person’s behavior, a researcher must understand the meaning the other attaches to the symbol or symbol system involved, a meaning developed through interaction with significant others in relation to multiple reference groups (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). For example, farmers, physicians, and fashion models would ascribe very different meanings to the phrase “ideal weight” (Milliken & Schreiber, 2012).

If I am a symbolic interactionist, I believe, in short, that I am a product of my environment, and my environment is a product of me. This is a dynamic process of both change and continuity. Examination of this phenomenon in participants’ lives is disseminated throughout the data chapters. Because SI recognizes that humans are continuously undergoing change and construction (Stryker, 2002) and are non-deterministic yet predictable in some ways (Benzies & Allen, 2001), the perspective is an appropriate one by which to examine a phenomenon of change such as student development, specifically spiritual identity exploration, as relevant to this research.

Changes occur within the constraints present in the characteristics of the individual and his environment (Benzies & Allen, 2001). This view of *constraints* as influencing change or development lays a useful foundation from which to examine intersectionality in students’ lives, or the ways in which dominant external forces (e.g., racism) shape or constrain students’ spiritual identity development. Further, because SI

holds that human experience is socially organized, that is, “the organization and content of self reflect persons’ participation in society” (Stryker, 2002, p.224), it is appropriate to include an examination of the intersections of the many groups in which members participate. People hold positions within groups (e.g., leader of the Gospel Choir), and those positions shape and are shaped by social interaction.

Bringing Two Lenses into Focus

Employing both RMMDI and SI permitted me a unique focal point. The combination offered a perspective from which to analyze not only students’ multiple roles, and the interaction therein, but also their perceptions of those roles – their construction and combinations.

Naples (2009) suggested that it is insufficient to assert that one’s research is intersectional; rather, to succeed, one must specify what makes it intersectional, discuss why the chosen methodology is applicable, and outline which aspects of intersectionality are to be featured as well as which are less central to the analysis. Students’ spiritual identities are often influenced by the other dimensions of their identities, such as race or gender (Naples, 2009). It would be potentially misleading to study one aspect of identity without consideration of other components which merge, collide, and diverge with spiritual identity. Dominant perspectives in both the academy and media generally interpret complex lives in isolated and limited ways, attending to a single dimension, such as gender (Weber, 2010). For example, feminists of color first critiqued analyses of women’s concerns that excluded race, class, and sexuality, asserting that the experiences of middle class White women were not universal to all women (e.g., hooks, 1987). This study is intentionally and necessarily intersectional.

Framing the study using a model examining multiple identities was one approach among a myriad of possibilities, but it embraced the intricacies, offering one “angle of vision on the complex processes” (Naples, 2009, p. 574) involved. In order to enhance that angle, I overlaid SI, a particularly productive methodology to employ, as it permitted me to tease out and present examples of how students construct their world based on their individual perceptions of that world, perceptions critically influenced by gender, race and other characteristics. Importantly, SI acknowledges the multiple role involvements of humans, that is, intersectionality: “...persons are typically involved in multiple groups and so occupy multiple positions tied to multiple roles” (Stryker, 2002, p. 223).

The primary components brought into the frame of analysis in this study were race, gender, and sexuality and, to a lesser extent, class and geographic place of origin. Their primacy was a result of the preeminence given to them by the participants. The analysis was done at the micro or individual level; however, where germane, I pointed out possible macro ties, that is, ties to larger, social, structural dimensions shaping intersections (e.g., a participant identifying as a secular Jew from an major metropolitan area’s measured and carefully-considered response to an anti-Semitic remark spoken unabashedly in majority-Protestant Northburg). I tried to recognize that individuals have agency and while influenced, are not wholly determined by static or rigid systems (Naples, 2009) of racism, sexism, and the like. Social life is “too irreducibly complex – overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures – to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions” (McCall, 2005, p. 1773).

Finally, analyzing themes generated from the data, I examined how dimensions interconnected and formed a student’s unique way of making meaning. For example,

Keisha's racial group membership as well as her identity as a spiritual person both played a role in what she perceived as isolation in her freshman year. Controlling stereotypes about how a person of color and/or a spiritual person ought to act affected her involvement with others on her residence hall floor and subsequently prompted her to interrogate her own spirituality.

Setting

This single site, qualitative study involved a total of twenty participants - two graduate and eighteen undergraduate full-time college students attending Northern State, a rural, mid-sized, predominantly White northeastern public university with an enrollment of nearly 4,500 students of which approximately 11 percent were graduate students. I secured institutional review board approvals from both Syracuse University and Northern State to conduct the study.

I am employed at Northern State, a public, non-sectarian institution, in the capacity of director of a student academic services division. Choosing a public college as a site afforded me access to students from a greater variety of faith traditions than would have been gained by a similar study at a religiously-affiliated institution. Again, I hope that conducting the study at a public institution will serve to inform the discourse about college student spiritual identity development in a country in which 51 percent of colleges and universities are public, non-profit institutions (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

Using data from the 2011 CIRP institutional profile report for Northern State, I aggregated religious preferences for students entering the institution in the years 2009-2011. While these years do not encompass all this study's participants' entering years, the

data provided a reasonably accurate representation of Northern State's students' religious preference upon enrolling. Based on CIRP's method of combining religious preferences, I collapsed Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox to a single category entitled "Catholic" (28.70%). Baptist, Church of Christ, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, United Church of Christ/Congregational and other Christian became "Christian/Protestant" (30.40%). "Other" included Buddhist, Hindu, Latter Day Saints (Mormon), Seventh Day Adventist, other religions not specified (5.55%), and no specification was "none" (32.60%). Northern's figures for entering freshmen students identifying as Catholic, Jewish (2.5%), Muslim (.25%) and other (again, 5.55%) closely mirrored national rates of freshmen entering in 2010. Given the geographic isolation of Northburg, this was somewhat surprising but may have been explained by students' interest in particular majors the school offers. While the largest number of Northern's students identifying a religious preference indicated some form of Protestantism (i.e., nearly one third - 30.4%), a larger 42 percent of freshmen entering students nationally in 2010, for example, identified as Protestant. Thus, Northern State, while predominantly Protestant, had fewer Protestants on average than other American universities. Also, while nationally 32.6 percent of students indicated no religious preference, only 21.9 percent of Northern State students did so.

Northern State is situated in a county with higher average unemployment (8.1%) and poverty (15.1%) rates than the state in which it is located, (5.9%) and (10.9), respectively. Median family income (\$38,500) in the county trailed the state (\$48,600) as did the county's population growth which was negative (-6.08) compared to the state

(.83). Finally, persons of color represented 4.9 percent of the county's population as compared to a statewide 11.1 percent (Educational Needs Index, 2012).

At Northern State, women comprised 60 percent of the student population, and ten percent of enrolled students were from underrepresented groups. Two state (Educational Opportunity Program and Collegiate Science and Technology Program) and one federal TRiO (Student Support Services) programs were specifically designed to assist students of color and students from low-income families. The Office of Accessibility Services served students with disabilities. In recent years, Northern State established a small Spiritual Life Office staffed six hours a week by a faculty emeritus volunteer director who held the title of Campus Minister and worked to connect students to places and groups for fellowship, offered one-on-one counseling, and strove to educate the campus community on how to overcome adversity and religious discrimination. While there was no chapel or central gathering place for fellowship of students of like faith traditions, the college counseling center offered a meditative labyrinth walk for students who wished to avail themselves of the contemplative experience it might offer.

Data Collection

This section will outline participant recruitment and the use of purposeful sampling and will describe the participants and the interview process used.

Participant recruitment.

I chose to conduct a qualitative study because I wanted to explore how students interpreted, made meaning of, and expressed their spirituality in the social context of a public college. Because the aim of my inquiry was to gain insight into students' perceptions, a qualitative design would best provide rich insight into the meanings and

purposes students assigned (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative sampling strategies do not have as their focus a concern with achieving representativeness; instead, the goal is to reflect the diversity within the group or phenomena being researched (Barbour & Barbour, 2003). I employed non-probability, or purposeful, sampling techniques because I did not want averages or opinion. Instead, I sought the information-rich insights I could gain from a sample identifying as spiritual, religious, or searching. Types of purposeful sampling I used included “unique” (Merriam, 2009), in that I targeted a phenomenon of interest, and “snowball” (Merriam), in that I utilized referrals from participants.

Some themes that developed from my research emerged initially from an earlier pilot study I had administered during Fall 2010 for which I initially interviewed seven students. To recruit the respondents, I e-mailed advisors (see Appendix A) of 21 different church and faith-related organizations listed in the *Religious and Spiritual Groups* brochure available via the Ministerial Association (MASS) of Northburg and verbally communicated with the advisor to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Association (LGBTGA) who attended the Unitarian-Universalist church to request nominations of student participants. I stressed the importance of their consideration of a broad representation of gender, race, and class year when referring students and explained that students that would see themselves as actively involved in the faith tradition represented by or affiliated with the group being advised or who might categorize themselves as “searching for meaning” (i.e., weighing whether they believed in a higher power or entertaining the tenets of particular faith traditions) were welcome to participate.

In my invitation to students to participate in the study, I used the term spirituality, because I wanted to employ a term that would encompass students who were religious, spiritual, or seeking – in short, a term with which most students could connect. The word spirituality defies precise definition (Hicks, 2003; Speck, 2005), and individuals define spirituality idiosyncratically, as “foundational to any definition of spirituality is the worldview from which the definition arises” (Speck, 2005, p. 9). Allowing that, in preparation for this study, I loosely adopted an amalgamation of two definitions that I felt would be inclusive of students adhering to a variety of religious or spiritual expressions as well as to those searching.

I examined the following sources to compose the definition. First, Bento (2000) described spirituality as “the experience of the transcendent, or the quality of transcendence, something that welcomes, but does not require, religious beliefs” (p. 653). This definition connotes a basic notion to actively seek or experience that which is beyond the earthly, material universe. The second portion of my composite definition of the term spirituality included “all forms of reflection and introspection in which the primary goal is to explore one’s relationship to the transcendent in order to deepen and enrich personal meaning, purpose, authenticity, and wholeness” (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken & Echols, 2006). While both definitions included the word transcend, not all expressions of spirituality would seek or acknowledge an experience of transcendence. Thus, taken together but modified, the operational definition of spirituality (as criteria for participant selection and as foundation for beginning to gather data) for this study that emerged from the above definitions was *a way of seeking meaning and purpose that exceeds the immediate which may or may not be deepened by religious beliefs or*

practices. I recruited students seeking meaning and purpose beyond or outside of themselves.

The recommendations produced a group of 11, five of whom agreed to participate (“Amy,” “Evan,” “Ruhi,” “Dawn,” and “Janet”⁵). A sixth respondent (“Josie”) was referred by “Evan,” and a seventh student was asked to participate after I overheard her offering unsolicited remarks about students’ level of spirituality at Northern State (“Banca”). When I received nominations from advisors/directors, I would follow up with an e-mail to the nominated student introducing myself, describing my research, and requesting his or her participation (see Appendix B).

Consistent with theoretical sampling techniques in symbolic interactionism (Clarke, 2005; Merriam, 2009), I analyzed the content of the data collected as of Fall 2010 to determine how to proceed with sampling and themes that had arisen. For example, regardless of students’ denominational affiliations, many reported struggling with descriptors for their spiritual identity. I elected to “return to the field” (Glass & Strauss, 1967) to continue purposeful sampling of students participating in MASS-related organizations/activities, exploring the themes. In early Fall 2011, to more actively solicit participation by students of color and students with disabilities, I sent an e-mail request to a co-advisor of AIM (the personal development group for African-American college men) and to the Director of the Multicultural Center (MC) and verbally communicated with the Director of Accessibility Services. These advisors then e-mailed or spoke to students in the respective groups they advised or directed, and three members of AIM and one participant in the MC initially responded that they would be interested in being interviewed. However, two members of AIM did not respond to a follow-up e-mail, so I

⁵ All names of participants are pseudonyms created by author.

interviewed one member of AIM (“Isaiah”) and one participant in the MC (“Dante”) who responded affirmatively to my request to interview them.

Also in Fall 2011, I attended a Ministerial Association (MASS-sponsored) panel discussion entitled, “Religion – A Positive Force or a Crutch?” Numerous faith traditions were represented by panelists, and audience members included participants in the Pagan Club, advisors and members of MASS-related organizations, and students attending out of curiosity or as part of a course requirement. As an audience member I was permitted on a break to verbally explain my research and ask for volunteers. I emphasized that I was interested in interviewing students who were affiliated with any church or spiritually-affiliated campus group or those who were not but would consider themselves as “searching for meaning.” Twelve students initially indicated their willingness to be interviewed. Of those, seven students responded affirmatively to follow-up e-mails and were interviewed (“Stacy,” “Carl,” “Selah,” “Trace,” “Azzam,” Karen,” and “Mike”).

In Spring of 2012, I e-mailed the advisor of Northern State’s Hillel organization explaining my research and requesting nominations. Four students initially indicated interest in participating; two students ultimately agreed to be interviewed (“Daniel” and “Zeke”). Finally, also in Spring 2012, after an informal conversation with me about my research, the LGBTQA advisor was prompted to send me two additional names of possible interviewees, both of whom agreed to be interviewed (“Hessa” and “Keisha”). Keisha was not an advisee from the LGBTQA group, but, rather, was a student employee in the student service office within which the LGBTQA advisor worked at Northern State. Because I worked in the same office suite in which the LGBTQA advisor and Kesha

worked, I was casually acquainted with Keisha before she became a participant. She was the only participant with whom I was at all familiar before starting the study.

The 20 students ascribed to the following worldviews, as self-reported during interviews (see Table 1): Agnostic/Atheist (1); Baptist (2); born again/Catholic (1); Christian (7); Christian/Catholic (1); Jewish (1); Muslim (2); Jewish secular/searching/pantheist (1); Roman Catholic (1); searching (1); searching/Buddhist (1); and, searching/Unitarian-Universalist (1). During the interviews, two students identified as mixed race, two as White, three as African-American, one as Indian, and one as Pakistani; eleven students did not specify race. The notation of gender or racial identity of those students not specifying was based on visual and verbal evidence from the interview(s). If I did not have verbal evidence in an interview regarding a student's sexual identity, I indicated it was not specified.

The participants represented the following academic disciplines, as self-reported during interviews: art (1); business administration (1); childhood education (3); fine arts/education (4); geology (2); English/communication (1); history and philosophy (1); interdisciplinary (1); literature/writing (1); mathematics (1); politics (1); psychology, communication and writing (1); sociology (1); and, writing and women's studies (1).

Table 1 lists the 20 participants, the number of times they were interviewed, and their gender, class, race, major, and worldview.

Table 1. Participant list and demographic information						
Name	Gender	Class	Race	Major	Worldview	Times Interviewed
Amy	F	So	White	Childhood Education	Christian	2
Azzam	M	Fr	Egyptian/Dutch	Geology	Muslim	3
Banca	F	Fr	White	Art	Born Again/Catholic	1
Carl	M	Jr	White	History and Philosophy	Agnostic/Weak Atheist	1
Daniel	M	Jr	White	Fine Arts Education	Secular Jew/Searching Pantheist	2
Dante	M	So	African-American	Literature/Writing	Baptist	2
Dawn	F	Gr	White	Fine Arts	Christian	1
Evan	M	Sr	White	Politics	Searching/ Unitarian/Universalist	2
Hessa	F	Sr	White	Childhood Education	Christian	1
Isaiah	M	Gr	African-American	English/Communication	Christian	2
Janet	F	Jr	White	Fine Arts	Christian	1
Josie	F	Sr	Hispanic/White	Interdisciplinary	Searching/Buddhist	1
Karen	F	Fr	White	Writing and Women's Studies	Christian	1
Keisha	F	Jr	African-American	Sociology	Baptist	3
Mike	M	Sr	Indian	Business Administration	Christian	1
Ruhi	M	Sr	Pakistani	Mathematics	Muslim	1
Selah	F	Jr	White	Childhood Education	Christian/Catholic	1
Stacy	F	Jr	White	Psychology, Communication, and Writing	Roman Catholic	1
Trace	M	So	White	Geology	Searching	1
Zeke	M	Jr	White	Fine Arts	Jewish	1

In all requests for participants, I was conscious of making an effort to recruit students representing a diversity of faith traditions, gender, racial and ethnic background, sexual orientation and ability to reflect the diversity within the group or phenomena being researched (Barbour & Barbour, 2003). Purposeful sampling afforded the rich insights I sought from a sample identifying as spiritual, religious, or searching. I met appropriate rigor of sampling for qualitative methods (Merriam, 2009; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), and the students' experiences provided through interviews contained important insights about public college students' exploration and exercise of their spirituality or religion.

Interviews.

All interviews were semi-structured, in-person interviews, and with the exception of Banca and Josie, involved participants recruited through either the MASS panel discussion or referrals from various campus-affiliated advisors or directors including but not limited to: advisors affiliated with MASS (e.g., the Muslim Student Association); the Director of the MC; the co-advisor to AIM.; the advisor to Hillel; and, the advisor to LGBTA. Twenty students were interviewed between one to three times for a total of 29 interviews with an average of 20 single-spaced transcribed pages per interview. Some students provided more examples, had given a greater amount of thought to issues which was reflected in their interviews, or were simply more verbose than others, all of which necessitated a second or third interview to be certain I had their complete answers to the questions and that I understood their answers to the questions and probes.

Initial questions were very broad, asking the students to simply tell me about themselves including whether they had grown up in a particular faith tradition. Later questions were designed to elicit more specific information about how their spiritual

perspective may have impacted their academic and social lives. While interviews included the same general range of questions (see Appendix C), the process oriented nature of the research often required further probing as well as some alterations to interview questions as themes and salient issues emerged (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For example, a number of students in the pilot study volunteered that they preferred the descriptor “spiritual” as opposed to “religious.” Given their distinction plus what was outlined in the literature review regarding how terms are sometimes used interchangeably, I made it a point to ask about students’ preference and rationale regarding this in subsequent interviews.

A less structured format allowed me the flexibility to obtain some basic descriptive information at first in an effort to establish rapport plus information in response to the semi-structured questions while also probing for clarity and following up on the unique ways in which students made sense of their experiences. While the exact phrasing and order of questions varied by interview, I drafted questions to directly address my research questions, that is, students’ experiences of spirituality and their opportunities to explore spirituality or religion at college as well as how they experienced other aspects of their identities in relation to their spirituality. Open-ended questions such as, “What does it mean to be religious or spiritual when you are in a college residence hall?” and, “As a (fill in the blank, e.g., Baptist), in what ways are you similar and in what ways are you different from others who aren’t (fill in the blank)?” permitted students to give primacy to experiences and identity aspects as they saw fit.

I interviewed students in a meeting room in Northern State’s student union – a space with an element of privacy but not seclusion, as the adjoining hallway had minimal

traffic. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed and lasted approximately 45-50 minutes. At the start of each interview, I explained that I was a graduate student at Syracuse University and briefly outlined that I was interested in whether and how students drew upon their spirituality to negotiate college life. I presented students with information about informed consent (e.g., they were free to cease their participation at any time, they would be assigned a “fake name”), and they then gave written indication of their consent and permission for me to audio record the interview. Audio recordings and consent forms have been and are kept in a locked file. Word processed records of the study are also kept private and confidential, stored securely under password protection. I assigned a pseudonym to each student and changed any particularly distinguishing characteristic (e.g., specific, unique major of study) in order to preserve anonymity. In addition, I modified the names of the university and the titles of any offices and organizations cited in a way that reflected the entity’s function but differed from its actual title.

Coding analysis.

SI methodological processes required me to collect data and conduct analyses simultaneously, as the analyses informed further data collection which in turn focused subsequent analyses. I generated analytic codes and then categories as I analyzed the data which I then integrated to form conditional statements (Clarke, 2005) about students’ perceptions of exploring spirituality and religion at a public college. I illustrated my understanding of the students’ actions and meanings, then provided abstract interpretations of relationships within the data in order to then create the conditional statements about the implications (Charmaz, 2005). My goal was to

combine interpretation of the data through SI (students' own perceptions of events) with the critical stance possible from applying the lens of intersectionality (how components of identities interrelate) to interrogate power dynamics as they affect students' exploration of spirituality. For example, both Trace (White, bisexual) and Dante (African-American, straight) described being nervous their first days on campus, but components of their identities combined to cause very different reasons for that nervousness.

I coded transcribed interviews for themes using open, axial, and selective coding types (Merriam, 2009) and noted laughs, changes in pitch, and other small gestures made by either me or interviewees. During initial, open coding, I jotted questions, observations, summaries, and impressions in the margins (e.g., "use of technology" and "public vs. private important?"). In axial coding, I began to interpret the data in order to label and group commonalities and themes between participants (e.g., "organized religion" and "evolution"). Finally, in selective coding, I determined nine overarching categories into which I placed the themes derived from axial coding (i.e., "affiliation" and "coping").⁶

Trustworthiness

I do not suggest that this group of respondents is like any other. This is a collection of interviews from a select group of individuals and may or may not be representative. While I was most interested in learning about students' experiences in their own idiom and from their own perspective, the human condition makes for imprecision. A tenet of symbolic interactionism is:

⁶ Selective themes included affiliation, identity, intersectionality, defining beliefs, developmental issues, controversial issues, resistance to spirituality, disequilibrium, and coping.

Events, objects, and situations have a multiplicity of possible meanings; their character cannot be assumed by the observer – the researcher. The observer cannot simply *assume* the meaning or meanings a situation has for the subject. To study human behavior...the observer must, as much as is possible, ‘take the role of the other,’ try to see, as much as possible, from the other’s perspective. (Gusfield, 2003, p. 122)

Even the most objective data must still be interpreted, so I employed a series of checks to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of this research, that is, to not assume the meaning or meanings a situation or event had for a participant. I used three different methods to enhance the usefulness of the data and to bolster the accuracy of analysis.

First, I attempted to “bracket” my biases and assumptions concerning spiritual identity meaning making in order to provide readers with conceivable prejudices that may have shaped my methods or interpretation of data, identifying my assumptions and interpretations as applicable. For example, I assumed that most students (younger than me) would prefer to refer to themselves as spiritual instead of religious given that a review of the literature suggested that the term was more commonly used and might conceivably carry less emotional baggage than that associated with denominations or organized religions (Newman, 2010). However, as I asked the students to describe their spiritual or religious identities and whether they had a preference for either the label spiritual or religious, I learned through their descriptions that a preference for the word spiritual was not universal among participants; indeed, I had to acknowledge that (a) it was an assumption and that (b) those who did use the word spiritual to describe themselves may not have done so for the reasons I assumed.

Second, I provided “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) in notes and transcriptions and in presenting and analyzing the data to bolster reliability, which in qualitative studies connotes a fit between what is recorded as data and what actually occurs in the setting

being studied. Third, I member-checked study findings and interpretations with three (15%) participants by sharing with them copies of their transcribed interviews. I chose participants who would represent differing class years, genders, races, and worldviews (Azzam, Keisha, & Trace). Merriam (2009) noted that this common practice of soliciting feedback from some or several participants helps to bolster internal validity and credibility. I asked for clarification on terms or for proper spelling of words from languages other than English and for their opinion as to whether I was correctly interpreting their meaning or intent in various instances in order to further address Gusfield's (2003) suggestion to see as much as possible from the participant's perspective. In addition to these three methods, I had prolonged engagement with the data, from collection beginning Fall 2010 to analysis concluding Fall 2013. That is, I was present in the site long enough to "build trust with the students, experience the breadth of possible variation of responses all of which lends credibility to research results (Williams, 2011).

Limitations

This research offers insights into students' exploration of and experience with their spirituality at a public university. However, there were some limitations to the work. First, like Fowler (1981) and Parks (1986), given my western, mainstream Christian positionality, the questions I chose to ask as well as my interpretations of answers were unavoidably filtered through that subjectivity. Second, the findings constituted a snapshot derived from the experiences of a relatively small number of students at one university. Additionally, students' participation was solicited primarily through organized, religiously-affiliated groups or by virtue of their attendance at the

Mass-sponsored panel discussion. So, only those students identifying with affiliated groups or identifying as searching for meaning were included. Third, while participants' faith tradition affiliations (e.g., Catholic, Muslim) proportionally approximated that of Northern State's, the findings may have been more applicable to a wider population had students of more diverse affiliations been included. Fourth, despite efforts to develop trust, students might not have felt comfortable sharing aspects of themselves that either represent privileges I do not have (e.g., male privilege) or reflect privileges that I do possess (e.g., White privilege) but they do not. Fifth, assigning pseudonyms instead of asking students to choose increased the possibility of designating names stereotypical to racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds. Sixth, I could have probed more fully to unearth more concrete examples during interviews. Seventh, not all students specified a gender, sexual, and racial identity, and I had no specific questions asking students to do so. Basing understanding of some students' identities on visual and verbal evidence from the interview(s) may have misrepresented a student or students. Finally, because of the nature of self-report data, it is possible that participants gave what they considered to be socially desirable answers in order to influence my impression (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Chapter 4: Constructing Spiritual Identity

In Chapters 4-6, I present the analysis of the interview data collected from 20 student participants at Northern State College. Appropriate to a study employing symbolic interactionism, I included excerpts from participant interviews as well as analyses in order to augment the study's credibility.

A student's unique social identity – including race, gender, sexuality, class, spirituality and other – is more than a series of categories strung together but, instead, emerges in how identities interact to forge something new (Jones, Kim & Skendall, 2012). In an effort to not view particular identity components as discrete entities to be disaggregated (Crenshaw, 2012; McCall, 2005; Naples, 2009), I weave examination of multiple dimensions of students' identities in light of their spiritual identities as appropriate throughout the data chapters. That is, I balanced participants' stories and experiences with a portrayal of them as multidimensional human beings, not essentialized representations of categories.

One of the key themes that emerged in this research was affiliation, or the opportunity for students to affiliate with, belong to, and be involved and connected with groups of like believers or those with similar spiritual locations. Nearly all participants who professed or were searching within a particular faith tradition or worldview sought affiliation with groups of organizations on or near campus representing those beliefs. Chapter 4 examines how participants made or began to make meaning of their spirituality or worldview while in college and how they connected to or attempted to connect to various sources for spiritual exploration. (Chapter 5 includes those students whose

affiliation concerns were criterion for college choice.) I included some elements of students' backgrounds as pertinent to their current spiritual exploration.

Chapter 4 begins with those students still searching for meaning and concludes with those who professed a particular religion or spirituality but not necessarily as criterion for college choice. For many, the connections they made with groups, organizations, or places to worship provided a sense of belonging. For all students, I outline how the role of spirituality or religion and related experiences helped to shape their beliefs and impressions about meaning and purpose in life.

Chapter 5 highlights how students navigated to and at college. I present the stories of students who purposefully sought connection or affiliation with various sources or organizations on or near campus prior to attending college that might represent their faith and outline how students drew upon their spirituality and worldviews to cope with daily stressors. Chapter 6 traces how students used spiritual meaning making to navigate controversial issues during college, during classroom discussions involving spirituality or religion as well in instances outside the structure of the classroom.

Construction and Connection

The following two sections comprising Chapter 4 describe some of the ways in which participants made or began to make meaning of their spirituality or worldview while in college, connecting to or attempting to connect to various sources for guidance or spiritual exploration after being a part of the college community. Some described themselves as searching for meaning and spiritual identity while others professed a particular religion or form of spiritual expression.

While research suggests that nearly half of entering freshmen feel it is essential or very important that the college they attend encourage their personal expression of spirituality (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011), the students I interviewed did not look to the public college itself to fulfill that goal. Instead, as will be outlined, students with established beliefs conducted inquiries into the availability of extra-curricular or community-based groups for affiliation. Two students, not finding evidence of culturally-familiar places to worship or connect, established their own organizations.

Of those searching.

Attending college affords students the opportunity to examine and challenge the beliefs, values, and viewpoints of their upbringing (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006; Fowler, 1981; Palmer & Zajonc, 2010; Parks, 1986; 2000, 2011) and to encounter many diverse worldviews, thereby providing fertile ground for refining and reconstructing (and, for some, constructing a new) spiritual identity. Several students in the study were beginning to search or explore expressions of spirituality unlike the views and beliefs of their parents or other relatives and thus made connections (i.e., to organizations, places of worship) well after enrolling. This section outlines key points in that search for some students not adhering to a faith tradition.

Carl (White/male/junior/history and philosophy double major/unspecified sexual orientation), whom I met at the MASS-sponsored panel discussion, explained that he did not believe in God, because he had not seen evidence or heard compelling arguments to sway him to believe. He suggested that one could loosely assign the term Christian to his parents but that they were not practicing (which he described as attending church) and did not have him baptized. They had expressed to him that when he was old enough, he

should make his own decision regarding religion or spirituality. In his efforts at college to personalize his beliefs, he had read *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2006) and described his understanding of the scale or continuum of belief as depicted by Dawkins - with strong theism at one end, agnosticism in the middle, and strong atheism at the other. Carl placed himself “between agnosticism and weak atheism” (Carl, 1, 4), reflecting a less firm stance than that of his earlier statement confirming that he did not believe in God. When I asked for clarification, that is, would he describe himself as searching, he answered: “Yes, to be honest, I don’t think I could be like ever case closed, no God. I think that would be dishonest, but right now, no, I certainly do not believe in one [a god]” (1, 20).

Carl was trying to make sense of his experiences, to interpret them meaningfully. He expressed that as a philosophy major, it was important to him to approach things cerebrally, weighing arguments: “I am reasoning my way to where I feel my identity, um, I do not want to call it spiritual identity (pauses), my space on the continuum is” (Carl 1, 9). His approach mirrored that of the agnostic and atheist students in Mayhew’s (2004) study who used mostly cerebral images to describe their understanding of spirituality, that is, they projected spirituality as a mental project or exercise. Carl shared how he felt as though society should be past the point where it needed religion and anticipated that eventually world religions would not be observed but would only be taught about and referred to in history classes similar in fashion to how students study mythology and its impacts:

Because I just feel like it’s, I feel like we have gone past that point of where we need religion. Maybe I just don’t understand that someone can believe that. I am sure people follow Greek gods and believe that they actually exist, but like that is

taught as mythology now. In my 12th grade English class, that was mythology, so I was like when does this get applied to like Christianity or Islam? I guess I do not understand how they work, but at the same time like it is such as driving force around the world.... (Carl, 1, 19-20)

Carl wished to approach religion and spirituality through reason, philosophically, and felt this approach should be commonly embraced. The class, the Dawkins (2006) book, and the panel discussion provided points of connection to both people and structures to help him cerebrally consider his “space on the continuum.”

Daniel (White/junior/male/fine arts major/unspecified sexual orientation) shared Carl’s skepticism about evidence for God and also looked to Dawkins (2006) for possible answers to some of life’s big questions but stopped reading halfway through it because he “just couldn’t stand it anymore. It is so crass,” (Daniel, 1, 11) which he later defined as harsh. Yet, the book helped him to understand that he would not count himself an agnostic, as he did not agree that it was impossible to know if God exists. Rather, he believed that it is possible, but humanity just did not know at this time.

Daniel had sought evidence of a synagogue prior to attending Northern State but is included in this chapter (as well as Chapter 5) because, identifying as a “secular Jew,” pantheist, and searching, he was seeking connection to Jewish culture not necessarily collective worship. He did not believe in God in what he called the traditional sense, that is, “a God that interferes in our lives” (1, 8) but, rather, spoke of pantheism which he described as nature, the universe, and energy: “Pantheism is basically more nature and the universe. Using that as a metaphor for God, it is closest to a metaphor than anything....” (Daniel, 1, 7). Taken together, nature, energy, and the universe comprised for Daniel a metaphor for God: “[Pantheism] is more belief in this energy instead of this like sentient being, as we would think of a sentient being of God” (Daniel, 1, 9).

Daniel believed that humanity would eventually have the means by which to understand the physics or mechanisms behind the force or energy. The force did not decide life events but did drive how everything worked. One did not have faith in the force but was compliant with it. But, all in all, he explained, “it is just too complex to understand right now” (1, 12). He noted that many “physicists are pantheists. Like Albert Einstein was a pantheist, and it is just kind of replacing the faith part of religions with...this is how the universe works, more [like] the universe works in mysterious ways” (1, 9).

Daniel, noting that there were branches of Judaism, described being brought up in the Conservative Movement yet never “actually solidly believing in God in the traditional sense” (Daniel, 2, 5). He went to Hebrew school and attended synagogue regularly until a little after his bar mitzvah at age 13. By his senior year in high school his attendance at synagogue had decreased to about once a month. A college junior now, he related the progression of his spiritual development in his first two years at Northern State:

Um, freshman year I would ...have told people Jewish but I would have been confused about that. Like the whole freshman year I was starting to be like, starting to think through, um, and then it was by the end I would have said agnostic though I would not have made a big deal about it. Then, in the sophomore year, I would have said atheist, definitely. (Daniel, 2, 13)

During Daniel’s sophomore year in college, he discovered that neither of his parents believed in God, a revelation that took him by surprise. His father was comfortable with the moniker atheist; his mother’s description suggested that while her worldview did not necessarily include a belief in God she enjoyed going to synagogue and praying and liked the community, cultural, and social aspects of Judaism. Daniel’s adoption of atheism coincided (intentionally or unintentionally) with his discovery in his sophomore year of

his parents' lack of belief in God. He explained that "at some point last year, I actually changed my Facebook religion to atheist" (2, 12), but that the "harshness" of atheism later triggered his investigation of pantheism as a possible alternative worldview, one which he felt allowed for both science and mystery. He began to feel that "people who call themselves atheists kind of have the same sort of blindness" (Daniel, 2, 14) as do other extremists which amounted to the harshness he wished to renounce.

Again, Daniel since described himself on Facebook as "Jewish secular" (Daniel, 2, 13), explaining that "pantheism is too confusing" (Daniel, 2, 13) to describe to others via social media. His childhood friend studying to become a rabbi called him "a secular Jew which is kind of how I basically identify myself to other people now" (Daniel, 2, 14), meaning he may not believe in Judaic doctrine but is nourished and invigorated by connection to Jewish culture and community, something he so keenly missed that he founded a chapter of Hillel at Northern State. He consistently attended synagogue in Northburg for community and connection and enjoyed praying in both group and silent prayer, as he felt there was "some sort of energy" (2, 3) that was revitalizing and reassuring.

Trace (bisexual/White/sophomore/geology major), who attended Catholic school until fifth grade, was very comfortable with describing himself as searching or, as he put it:

I am a pick-and-choose person. Like, I agree with different things from different religions. Like the Ten Commandments – I agree with those. Like honor thy father, thy mother, I agree with that. And then I believe in karma so, and I believe in past lives as well and that everything has repercussions. (Trace, 1, 2)

Trace was actively engaged in seeking personal wholeness and purpose, describing that meaning in his life meant "...just to live every moment I can and learn from my

experiences and my things and grow from them” (Trace, 1, 23). His father was “not really religious.” Trace referred to his father’s partner as his godmother and indicated he thought she “is probably Catholic, I think, because she goes to church” (1, 3).

After Catholic school, Trace attended public school where he met students from diverse backgrounds, triggering his interest in expanding his knowledge of other worldviews. For example, he went to the bar mitzvah of a friend and described relishing the experience to learn about other religions:

But when I went to public school I kind of opened my mind like wow, there are a lot of different things going on in public school. So, I kind of started out staying in the Catholic, like, I would go to church occasionally. But, then I was like, I want to expand, because there are other religions there. There are Jewish people, there was, I think there was Muslims, I think. But, um, there is far too many religions. I need to expand my mind on these, so that is how I just became a person who wanders through religions.... I have a couple of friends that are Jewish, and I went to this bar mitzvah, so that was new experience for me as well. It was like this was a pretty interesting way to go into manhood. (Trace, 1, 6-7)

Trace identified as bisexual. While he indicated that he had not yet made a connection to a religion or religious body, in the intersection of his sexuality and spiritual search, a religion or denomination’s stance on homosexuality was not a litmus test for him but rather only one of the elements he considered along with what constituted the particular religion’s idea of morality, prayer, and basis for family life.

Trace recognized that as a freshman last year he was “kind of bottled up” (Trace, 1, 14). Having attended a rural high school, coming to a populated college and meeting new people proved demanding. He remembered having a lot of stomach problems his first year, owing to nervousness, most especially the first day on campus: “Like the drive up here, the first day I came in to drop off my stuff, I got out of the car, and I just felt nauseous” (1, 15). This year, coming out to his parents, joining clubs, and experiencing

academic success had bolstered his confidence. However, his fear of hate crimes had impacted his social life in that he feared walking alone plus feared walking downtown even with others, as they had to walk by fraternity houses. The saliency of his identification as a bisexual male searching for a worldview became more pronounced given the context of conducting the search on a college campus:

From what I heard and so, plus it is just not on campus, it was also outside of campus, a lot of hate, a lot of rhetoric and from word going around and stuff and so it is kind of like, plus with the frat houses and stuff and so like just walking alone is just not, it is not doable anymore, I think....Last year I was more apt to do it. Like I would go to the movies probably twice a week if the money permitted, and this year I just feel I need to go with a friend. Like yesterday, me and my friend went to see *Happy Feet*, so we went together, but I don't think I can do it alone anymore. (Trace, 1, 15-16)

He could afford to go to the movies twice weekly but had chosen not to given his fear. In this way, his social life as well as his sense of belonging had been shaped in a way not of his choosing, with a significant constraint imposed on him owing to his oppressed status as a bisexual male. Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, people are controlled by the approval, disapproval, and evaluations of others (Stryker, 2002). Seen in this light, presumed disapproval of his sexuality by fraternity members not only limited Trace's leisure time options but served as part of the backdrop in which he was conducting his spiritual identity search.

Like Trace, Josie (female/senior/interdisciplinary major/identifying as Hispanic and White/unspecified sexual orientation) was very open to the ideas of karma and reincarnation in her spiritual search. She was reluctant to attach a label to her belief system:

Um, so it's a bit complex. I, uh, have very complex sort of beliefs, I guess. Um, I'm not one hundred percent anything at this point....Uh, like maybe an agnostic,

maybe, but I don't like, when it comes to religion, I don't like terms, I guess.
(Josie, 1, 8)

Josie resisted being labeled a part of a body of believers in any prescribed set of beliefs. She rejected atheism, reasoning that it was narrow-minded of atheists to dismiss a belief just because it was different from what one knew:

I don't believe in being completely atheist because I feel that atheists sort of reject any possibility of anything that's besides what we have now. And, I feel like you can't really say it's impossible to have an afterlife or God....it would be the equivalent of someone saying, oh, aliens are impossible because we've never seen 'em. And, then as time develops, oh, now it's possible. (Josie, 1 8)

Like Daniel, Josie felt that some truths could still be unearthed, suggesting that perhaps what was now known would in the future appear as primitive as thinking the world was flat. But, at the same time, she estimated that the truth "is probably so vast that like we would probably never be able to fully understand" (Josie, 1, 8). She expressed a budding interest in Buddhism:

...I have a strong interest in, uh, Buddhism, and, um, especially Zen Buddhism. Um, I took a course and [while] I feel people added over time sort of more gods and this and that [Bodhisattvas], their kind of overlaying philosophy behind I think is very close to truth, probably. (Josie, 1, 10)

She had first become interested in Buddhism in a class and then sought connection to the religion through her own research. She expressed preference for Zen Buddhism because "it kind of goes away from all the additions that people kind of put back in over time" (1, 11) Josie went on to explain her understanding that Buddhists believe life was suffering (desires, pain), and when one died, one's essence was reborn. She clarified that death meant one was dead, but that Buddhists' idea of the self was very different. That is, Westerners' belief of self as an individual human being was an illusion. Because you

were never really one person, when you died, you were not attached to that physical being.

Unlike a number of this study's participants (outlined in Chapter 5), Josie did not choose Northern State for an opportunity for affiliation with like believers. Instead, her intersectional struggles heavily influenced her college choice decision. She transferred to Northern State after attending a nearby private college her first year, citing cost, a significant cadre of friends at Northern State, and the opportunity to be the architect of her own major as the reasons behind the move. But, when asked what she did not like about the private college that she liked about Northern State, she discussed how her social location made for uncomfortable moments at the private college:

And, a lot of it is I'm really shy when I'm in a new environment. I mean, not after I know people. I'm very open. When I'm in a new environment with people I don't know, um, I'm very shy and that school, it's like a lot of rich, sort of privileged, uh, white (small exhaling laugh) students and, um, diversity there kind of means kids from the city with scholarships – and they hang all by themselves. And, I don't even feel like I fit in the city, and I'm from New York City. (Josie, 1, 3)

Josie was from Queens, NY, and identified as Hispanic and White, adding that she was “not fully Hispanic” and “maybe” middle class. She alluded to experiencing multiple forms of oppression; being bi-racial and of mid- to low-socioeconomic status, she felt that she lacked membership in any particular group. Josie's race and social class influenced her perception of belongingness which in turn affected her persistence and success at the private college.

Josie's intersectional struggles pre-dated Northburg in other ways in that she was not following what she perceived as the projected, expected tangent for a middle class Hispanic female:

I'm not fully Hispanic, and a lot of Hispanics in the city kind of expected me to act a certain way or like certain things. I, I, the mainstream music was like rap, and I didn't, I hated it, you know, the sort of values I was kind of against from early on. Just like a lot of people wanted to date really young and not care as much about school. And, it's not everybody, and I kind of had to find my, my place with the, the more academic focused people cause there are people that aren't like that. (Josie, 1, 4)

Josie's search for spiritual identity was informed by her social location, a location evidently also at odds with the social, cultural, and religious mores (explained in the quote below) of her home surroundings. She called her immediate family Christian and claimed to have grown up believing in God but indicated that it was her extended family that applied pressure to maintain Christian beliefs:

Not my Mom, it's my aunts and uncles that are religious, really. And, they're born again Christians and they always kind of push, ah, I gotta believe about God and heaven and this and that and every time I see them at Christmas or Thanksgivings, "Are you, still have God in your heart?" You know, "Do you still believe in the Lord?" (1, 8)

When I asked Josie about how she answered her relatives' questions about her spirituality at holidays, she reported that she told them she believed in God, because she understood that she was still on a spiritual quest. The intersection of her race, social class, geographic place of origin and extended family all combined to mold and challenge her spiritual journey. She lacked models or frames of reference and did not feel necessarily included in terms of race ("not fully Hispanic"), class ("maybe" middle class), spirituality ("I'm not one hundred percent anything at this point"), or Hispanic culture in Queens, New York ("rap music," "dating young," "not care as much about school"). Josie seemed to paint a portrait in which she felt incomplete, marginalized in multiple areas.

Josie related an earlier memory exemplifying how she began to experience a collision between her extended family's beliefs and what she was learning that presaged

her reluctance to be “narrow minded” in college about what was truth. When she was approximately 13, she had a discussion with her uncle – one of her relatives who expressed concern about her straying from Christian roots – in which she enthused about a museum picture of a black hole, how astronomy was quite interesting to her:

And, he said, uh, well, there’s no need to know any of this, because God made it all. And, I, I realized in that one sentence, he just kind of, anything, you know, intelligent, any science, any, any form of knowledge, he just sort of threw it in the trash can and said you don’t need to be smart. You don’t need to know anything. You don’t need to learn, because religion has every answer for you. You know, he just kind of threw away all the factual knowledge. And, I think that’s his whole life pretty much is just ignoring everything else in favor of his religion. (Josie, 1, 16)

Josie adhered to a questioning approach to not only faith but life:

You gotta, you gotta look at it, you gotta look at people, you gotta think about it....And, you have to realize, you know, whether or not this could be true or not. Just like when I look at Buddhism and it, you know, the ideas of non-self, and I, I could look at the world and say, you know, that could be true, you know. That there, that’s probably, that, you could probably back that up with something. Or, you know what, you know that even if you can’t back it up with something, I, I could see where that makes sense....if someone believes in, uh, that dinosaurs and humans walked at the same time...then, but if you look at the world and you’re like wait. That doesn’t make sense. That can’t happen, because we’ve checked these records, and we checked all that stuff, and we know that they weren’t at the same time, obviously. We know the earth is much longer than that. We know that, you know, from geologists, and, you know, I don’t think that they’re being tricked by the devil, you know. Like, that’s not a good argument....I’m not even a hundred percent saying that I would believe completely in Buddhism. (Josie, 1, 17)

She said she still prayed to God when things were not going well for her or to ask for answers, yet she questioned God’s power to affect change:

...everything in life happens for a reason almost as if, you know, everything influences each other and everything has a meaning, you know....if there’s a God, then He can’t really do much of anything. Like, well we can’t pray and expect for Him to do things. He can only like give you the strength to get through something. (Josie, 1, 12)

Josie reiterated her belief that everything happens for a reason and that there was always a purpose or “a meaning” and that even if there is a God, God cannot affect change; instead, it would be up to her. These notions are consistent with Buddhism, as Buddha taught that everything, including the individual, exists only in relation to other beings and things (“everything influences each other”) and is constantly changing (Yeh, 2006). Further, it is in the individual’s own hands to strive for Nirvana, a place of no suffering, so one does not look to a god or gods to do what one must do alone. She also was trying to make sense of her experiences, to interpret them in light of the multiple, salient identities noted.

Evan (gay/White/male/senior/politics major) also experienced significant intersectional struggles. One of three students in this study identifying as LGBT, Evan reported that the intersection of his spirituality and sexuality had begun as a source of distress for him when a teenager:

...when I was younger I used to kinda like, when I realized who I was, I was like thirteen when I kinda realized like, oh, like, I’m gay and it was, at first I thought, like, why did God curse me? (Evan, 2, 18)

Evan’s coming out as gay in college had a strong impact on his spirituality, and he was aware of its influence:

I realized that it was actually a big thing that shaped my beliefs because when I stopped and thought about it, I thought, you know, it’s really sad that like this Bible is like condemning me for all of these reasons, so that made me of course disillusioned with the Bible.... (Evan, 1, 5)

A first-generation college student, Evan shared that his family went to the Episcopal Church when he was a child but discontinued when he and his siblings were older. Yet, he described an environment in the home where “religious references were constantly used” (Evan, 2, 8). He related that his views even then clashed with what he

called his parents' conservative values, but he "didn't want to betray [his] parents by betraying their ideas" (1, 26). He understood that he was breaking family tradition by attending college (Terenzini, et al., 1994). His parents were supportive of his attending college but did share some concerns based on their view that all college kids "drove Volvos and they ate sushi and they talked about foreign films" (1, 25).

Evan's questioning of the existence of God peaked in college when he began to struggle to understand the point or purpose of life, an experience he referred to as his existential crisis when studying abroad:

...I basically hung out with a lot of younger people from Europe, and people from Europe I think are really disillusioned by religion because in the United States, we haven't had a war about religion, but in Europe they've had so many and obviously there was a Holocaust. So, like they, they see religion as like this thing that's really dividing people. And, I think economically, since Europe tends to be more like, uh, embracing of socialism, if you look at the father of socialism, Marx, he even said like religion is the opiate of the masses. So, I think there's like this really frank criticism of religion that's led them to be more atheist or agnostic. And, being around those people it kinda made me think....so let me take a look at it again and then it was what's the probability of there being a God....And you're in that kind of environment, I think it can be a little unsettling. And it just takes away like the certain, like, I don't know. It takes this kind of weird feeling out of you. And, it's hard to explain what it was. But, I remember not being around my family and friends that much and feeling like this cold and isolated from the world. So, it kinda just maybe made, it probably just put me in this mood to be even more embracing of atheism. (Evan, 2, 17)

Evan experienced that crisis of faith (Fowler, 1981), as he examined his beliefs in light of others:

I began to wonder well, what's the point of my life? And, if I was gonna, if I'm, if the atheists are right and I'm just gonna die and that's it, it was really uninspired, actually; it was kind of a, it's a very depressing thought (small exhaling laugh) to just think, oh, I'm gonna die. There's nothin' after that and, uh, everything you do is basically erased once you die (small exhaling laugh). And, it was a, uh oh, this sucks (exhaling laugh). (2, 11)

The process of letting go of his formerly-held assumptions and beliefs was “unsettling” to Evan. Such disequilibrium is consistent with Perry’s (1970) notion of how an individual begins to grapple with ambiguity and the subjectivity of knowledge. However, he became equally disillusioned with his European friends when studying abroad, as he felt they were insisting on atheism and suggesting that anyone having a belief in a god was weak in mind and character. At that point while in Europe, in an atmosphere that “crushes your spirit” (2, 17), he despaired about life having no meaning. Evan indicated that he no longer adhered to his parents’ religion or what he termed their socially conservative beliefs, but, not having shed their views altogether, neither did he identify as an atheist. He was certain his parents would not approve if he did:

...if I said I was an atheist, if I ever, I’m not, but if I did say, oh, I’m an atheist, I think my parents would kinda freak out on me and would try to like encourage it to, like, not be there. (Evan, 2, 8)

He stated that he could not be an atheist because he could not rule out life after death: “I don’t feel that you can just say, oh, there is nothing, and in some ways I guess I have an agnostic spirituality to a degree that something could be there” (1, 12).

Evan described that as he got older, he heard more than just positive notions such as love thy neighbor and instead heard the parts of the Bible that some thought were used to discriminate against gay people and felt that “it was really sad how something that was supposed to be the Word of God can be used to actually hate other people...” (2, 5). As noted by Davidson (2000), Evan realized that the very entity that has helped family and others find meaning may be a source of alienation to him because of a significant aspect of his identity.

Testing his beliefs was a necessary component of Evan's development toward authenticity (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006) and self-authorship (Baxter-Magolda, 1992, 2004). While rejecting what he felt was religious dogma and the way in which he perceived that religion was employed as a tool for control and condemnation ("to like hurt people"), Evan recognized the human search for meaning and purpose and sensed its interplay with spirituality:

Because I remember for awhile, I just, I kinda went through my own like, I was questioning everything. There was a point not too long ago where I just said, oh, you know what, like, like I just kinda give up on religion and all that. And it's just, I just had this very weird, I guess I had like it was a very strange view of the world cause it was so depressing I feel and it's only, it felt empty like to just say, it's gonna, there's nothing out there, nothing at all and that everything is just like a certain way. And I, it felt weird but then I said, you know, what about spirituality? And like that's not as dogmatic I guess as religion, but it is there. And then I really thought a lot about spirituality, it kind of made me feel like whole again to a degree, and it kind of gives you a purpose because that's the thing, I hate, I feel there is a purpose for everyone. It may not be this grand scheme, God-designed plan, but I do feel everyone has a purpose and that there is something that they can contribute to the world and what not. And, I don't know, I guess I just want my overall impact on the world to be more positive than negative. (Evan 1, 10)

The intersection of Evan's sexuality and spirituality prompted him to seek a spiritual community in which he was comfortable believing in God, identifying as gay, and remaining disillusioned with the Bible. One of Evan's acts of resistance (Weber, 2010) was his search to find and practice a "civic religion" involving all of humanity, and he had this to say about what he called a "traditional church": "... I've come to realize when I go to a church, I don't feel any, like, comfort or the feelings some people get. I guess I just feel like nothing when I'm in a church to be honest with you" (Evan, 1, 11). Evan had grown numb to inspiration or condemnation from what he considered a traditional church.

At the time of the interview, he was beginning to embrace the Unitarian-Universalist Church as closest to the spiritual community he was seeking apart from what he would label as a traditional church:

...I think my parents do hold to like the more Christian idea [literal interpretation of the Bible]. And, I used to hold to that idea. But, I think I've been very disillusioned with the Bible and the actual organization of the church itself. So, to me even though I did identify more as a Christian in high school, I don't identify as a Christian any more. And, now if I were to identify as anything, it would be more a Unitarian-Universalist, because I, I feel, I guess, because I look at it the Unitarian as more of a group that's all encompassing of humanity and that like goes into my beliefs more (Evan, 1, 4)

Evan felt that the Unitarian-Universalist Church proffered a stance nearest to the "civic religion" he sought, that is, one involving and accepting of all of humanity. Similar to what Love, et al. (2005) found, Evan, who had been raised in a loving environment associated with religion, had begun to draw upon the structures of a faith tradition to reconcile his sexual and religious identities. The Unitarian-Universalist Church provided Evan with a forum accepting of the intersection of his sexual and spiritual identity, a place in which to freely explore issues and the idea that there may be something "bigger than you":

...after Europe I came back and for a while I didn't go to church but the reason why was because I remember feeling so empty when I was [in Europe]. Like I had, when I start thinking about the whole idea of a meaningless life and like how everything was, I was just an accident and everything is just an accident. There's nothing after I die. And, I'm thinking about how, how empty it all felt, and I just didn't like it. It was just a period where I really just felt like I was just going through the motions and there was nothing to it. And, that hurt. I think what happened was I said, you know, I like [the Unitarian-Universalist] Church because it will put some meaning to my life. The people there are really accepting of gay people. They're really open-minded....And, I like that feeling that there's something bigger than you. And, it's a good feeling that your life does have meaning. (2, 25)

As a student who identified as gay, Evan resisted occupying the position of oppression in which he felt Christianity and the traditional church placed him. He felt shunned by the Bible and did not seek answers regarding the intersection of his sexual and spiritual identities through any campus-affiliated group such as IVCF whose stated and practiced mission included a study of the Bible (<http://www.intervarsity.org/about/our/ministry-overview>). Instead, he sought answers through the Unitarian –Universalist Church after hearing about the church via the advisor to LGBTA. Yet, as a White student raised in a rural town near Northburg, he was unaware that he occupied a position of dominance in that he was able to enter any Northburg Christian church, was accustomed to the style of worship, and was unlikely to receive the curious or questioning glances – an advantage not shared by students of color from urban areas in this study.

Like Daniel (who thought that humanity will eventually have the means by which to understand the physics or mechanisms behind the force/energy comprising what some think of as God), Evan saw science as an authority that might one day be employed to ascertain truth. Specifically, Evan hoped science could prove some form of existence after death though he did not believe in “the heaven that, like, people kind of see on TV” (Evan, 1, 12). Subscribing to an “agnostic spirituality,” a spirituality in which he remained open to all things (including God) being possible, he was searching for meaning.

Contributing to humanity comprised a large part of Evan’s view of his life’s purpose:

“...if I like contribute to humanity and I do these things now, that way I do kind of live on. And, that’s been like more of a comfort to me lately. So, like now

what I find interesting also like becomes my life purpose and it's also the thing that comforts me in, like, the face of death..." (1, 7-8)

Evan was seeking meaning and coherence among his life's experiences, a dynamic process in which he was attempting to interpret and reconcile many things including his parents' beliefs, what it meant to be a college student, the rationale for atheism posed by his friends in Europe when studying abroad, and organized religion's view of gay church attendees. As a senior, Evan's spiritual viewpoint eventually prompted him to seek connection to a local Unitarian-Universalist church that better reflected many of his reconstructed beliefs. No one component of his identity can be understood independently (e.g., identifying as gay) of its relation to other components. Likewise, no component can be understood without acknowledging the influence of changing contexts (home vs. college).

Students in the above section were exploring expressions of spirituality through a variety of means and sources of connection (e.g., reason, science, world religions, coursework, atheism) in their attempt to construct or refine a worldview and locate meaning and purpose in life. Folding in new experiences (e.g., Carl and Daniel reading Dawkins, 2006), they were actively constructing and reconstructing beliefs, values, and viewpoints of their respective upbringings as they encountered diverse worldviews.

Of those with a professed (examined or unexamined) religion or spirituality.

Some students defined themselves as feeling very much a part of a spiritual or religious tradition and attempted to maintain and practice that expression of this salient part of their identity. This section outlines key points in that search for some students adhering to a faith tradition.

Mike (male/senior/business administration major/unspecified sexual orientation), originally from India, readily claimed to be a Christian yet shared that he was actively examining many of the tacitly held beliefs of his family. As such, his story straddled these sections (searching vs. professed religion), as he indicated that he was searching yet committed to a particular belief. Mike experienced a saliency (of conflicting feelings) regarding components of his identity involving spirituality and place of geographic origin. He immigrated to the United States when he was 17 years old and did not attend an American secondary school. Because of the time and effort expended immigrating, he did not finish his schooling in India, so he completed a high school equivalency diploma after coming to America. His parents referred to themselves as “first-generation believers” (i.e., called out from the world to the church vs. those who were raised up in the church) and attended a non-denominational Christian church in a small city near Northburg. Mike was raised speaking English in both the home and Christian school he attended in India and was not as practiced in the regional language. In India, this intersection of language, culture, and religion was a cause of considerable discomfort and even affected his beliefs:

...I was brought up speaking English and, um, Hindu, again, was ninety percent of the population. Because I spoke English, I was fluent in English back in my school, it was always viewed as, “You Christians think you are better than, you know how to speak English better, you know how to write English better than us.” And, I think my views about religion were challenged. At that time, you know, I was scared, and I did not know what to do and how do I convince you that I do not have other options than how to speak English at my home. But, I can see people were not as close or trustworthy towards me because I spoke English.... (Mike, 1, 11-12)

His parents tried to “push for English being a helpful tool” for him in attending college and finding successful employment. But, Mike spoke a good deal about how others in

India viewed it as a point of separation. He understood that he was in the minority in India: “I felt kind of, you know, discriminated or looked down upon or separated” (Mike, 1, 13). In Mike’s country of origin, he neither spoke the language in his home or school nor observed the religion of the majority; because of this, he felt challenged on his religious views and unfairly accused of an arrogance or elitism he did not feel. When I asked if he had plans to return to India, he stated that he wanted to return to visit family and friends but wasn’t certain if he would stay:

It is not because I don’t give back to my country. It is, it’s just that I need to find a place where I can call home. I don’t, I can’t say where there is my home – here is my home, where India is my home? Now, it is just too early to tell....Really, it is almost like hyphenated identities. (Mike, 1, 13)

Mike’s reference to “hyphenated identities” captures the saliency of his conflict regarding matters related to spirituality, language, and place of geographic origin.

Mike admitted to calling himself “a mess” because, as a senior, he was “still searching for the truth” (Mike, 1, 4). He reported enjoying learning about other religions, even challenges to his beliefs and what he holds as truth, yet later shared that he viewed such experiences as an “attack,” that is, being presented with differing perspectives was akin to an attack. He labeled his search process as “shopping,” but believed that he will ultimately stay a Christian, that his beliefs and values will not change:

I do believe that God exists, and I do believe that Jesus Christ is one of the elements of trinity God had but as to sharing my beliefs, um, at this point in my life, it is confused. Because, ah, when you come to college, you are enrolled, you get into college, so many diverse cultures, you get to see different kinds of religions, you get to see different kinds of beliefs and different worldviews, and, ah, you have no other choice but to question your own beliefs. So, I think that while I am questioning my own beliefs, um, there are, there were some things that, um, shaking on the foundations of that belief have started to crumble, um, but at the same time those that were really strong have survived, and I think that the attack continues to go on. I think things that really matter the most, irrelevant, will fade away. (Mike, 1, 4)

When I asked for clarification on his beliefs (what was “crumbling” vs. “surviving”), Mike maintained that he believes in God, Jesus, and the trinity; these were the elements of his belief system that were “really strong” and “have survived.” He was connected to friends, the doctrine, and the worship services of his local, home church. But, he was still searching for truth on questions such as homosexuality (see Chapter 6) by looking at others’ religion and descriptions of truth. He pointed out that his beliefs were not the same as his parents and described the shopping process as comparing his beliefs with those of others and their religions: “I want to see what they are all about and see and challenge [other religion’s] beliefs with my beliefs and see what and how they differ” (1, 4). For example, he compared Islam and Christianity:

I don’t believe that, you know, Islam is right. I am questioning and at the same time I may be questioning Christianity by saying, yea, we have a common past and Ishmael came and Islam is derived from Jacob and Christianity is derived from Jacob. I want to be informed and educated about the past, but at the same time, I want to know how that process is going to affect the future. (Mike, 1, 5-6)

He was trying to make sense of the fact that both the Koran and the Bible refer to Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son (whose descendants would inherit the land) but differ on whether that son was Ishmael (Islamic) or Isaac (Jew), a dispute that some link to the present-day Israel-Palestinian conflict over border and territory rights. Mike was sharing that he might be “questioning Christianity” by considering more than one explanation of the story of Abraham’s descendants.

Mike was considering his own spiritual identity and faith, reflecting upon assumptions and beliefs of family and others, but at the same time experienced his and others’ questioning of his beliefs as an “attack,” illustrating the painful properties of such disequilibrium. His social location (race, spirituality, ethnicity, language, nationality,

culture, socio-economic status) may have exacerbated this disequilibrium during “shopping” for meaning.

Like Mike, Ruhi (straight/senior/mathematics major originally from Pakistan) also immigrated to the United States (to New York City from Pakistan). He then earned his high school equivalency diploma. Ruhi disliked the hectic pace of New York City but pursued and received his associate’s degree from a two-year institution there.

Transferring, he welcomed the slower pace of Northburg. Ruhi, a Muslim, expressed no hesitation about his religious identity and strong connection to the local mosque and Northern State’s Muslim student organization. He defined Islam in relation to the other two main world religions:

Hey, it’s not a big difference between Christianity or Judaism or Islam. We have only one God. I think so. I hope so. Christian also believes in one God. But the main difference is Christians say that Jesus was the son of God, and we say he was not the son of God. He was just a prophet. And, that’s, that’s the one difference. And, then we pray five times a day. And, in Islam, I don’t know what, what west media say, is not right about Islam. That we don’t taught to kill anyone. We are taught to care for each other. (Ruhi, 1, 8)

Azzam (straight/male/first-year/geology major identifying as Egyptian and Dutch), who also enjoyed the connection to Islam through the Muslim student organization, was equally comfortable in his religious identity as a Muslim, stating that, “I know Islam best represents me. It is a banner that I hold, you know” (Azam, 2, 7).

His declaration of Islam as best representing him or as being his most salient identity is reminiscent of Peek’s (2005) findings in her study of second-generation Muslim American students. Azzam offered this core belief of Islam:

There is no God but Allah, and the prophet Mohammed is his last messenger. But, we respect all other messengers who came to this world and we respect other religions and their belief books. We want to enter this world as strangers and leave this world as strangers...where we do not get too attached to it, but we just

stay here to live and finally end our lives so that our vessel, which eventually deteriorates which is the human body. All that happens, so go and be judged for the life that we have lived....Our religion, Islam, means peace and submission, and that is all we want. If you believe that we want to take over your land and kill your women and blow everything up, you need to learn and educate yourselves better about our religion. (Azzam, 2, 15)

Both Ruhi and Azzam described core beliefs of their religion in terms of not only what those beliefs were but also what they were not, contrasting their experiences and worldview to the negative images of Muslims that they felt were portrayed by western media. This desire to explain one's Muslim faith was also noted by Peek (2005), as participants in her post-September 11, 2001 study reported an urgency they had not felt prior to that event. Thus, their description was shaped by their experiences as members of a faith that they felt was held in suspicion by the larger American society in which they lived. Both students articulated that their Muslim faith was a key component of their identities, serving as the main means by which they found made sense of life. For example, Azzam felt that Islam served as underpinning for meaning and purpose in his life:

I believe everything is written down, and if you put your faith in God no matter what, even if you have a hard life....And when we say, La hawla wala quwata illa billah, means there is nothing that happens except through God. He has the power of everything. (2, 24)

In the same vein, when I asked Ruhi to describe a typical day in his life, he framed his answer by detailing his prayer regimen.

Azzam articulated that his "thinking process...is based a lot on my religion" (Azzam, 2, 3). He gave the example of his answer to the following moral dilemma posed by his English instructor: If a plane crashed in the desert and only you and one other person were alive with enough water for one to survive until you reached the end of the

dessert, what would you do? Azzam spoke up in class and said that he would split the water. The instructor asked him to explain:

She said why, and I said this is from a religious perspective....In Islam, the intention is a very big factor in a lot of things....The first option was to take the water by myself. Now that would be greed and that cannot work. Ok, the second option was give him all the water. That would be choosing suicide, because I know that I am going to die....But to split the water, I have a 50/50 chance, and he has a 50/50 chance. This 50/50 chance – I would get the good intention [in Allah’s eyes according to Koran]....The last is to drop the water on the floor. Now I am just committing suicide and doing horrible for someone else. (Azzam, 2, 4-5)

This was an example of how he would choose to use the tenets of his faith as a guide to make sense and order of life’s events and challenges that might unfold.

While Azzam interpreted his culture or “society” first and foremost through his identity as a Muslim, the primacy of this was closely followed by the saliency and intersection of his ethnic identity as an Egyptian and a Palestinian. Azzam sometimes attended the MSA and the local mosque but admitted that:

Religious-wise I might not be as sturdy as I am when I am in the city, but I still have great strong connection, and I feel very close to God. Um, I feel like maybe one day in this path of, you know, education and everything like that, I might have to leave and perform the promise I made to God [jihad]. I might have to defend. I might have to do something. (1, 19)

He spoke of jihad (defined later) because he was touched so deeply by experiences at the Israeli/Palestinian border (described presently) and felt he must remain open to what he viewed as a calling to right injustice. This realization and commitment provided an ever-present, overarching direction for his life. Azzam also noted the importance of the mosque in helping him to define his faith. Because his father would so often take him to mosque from a very young age, others would call him “ibn al masjid,” or son of the mosque. Like Ruhi, Azzam is from New York City. Because he is both Dutch and

Egyptian, he became known as “the blond-haired, light-skinned guy, you know, who is always there, and he is always quiet” (Azzam, 1, 5). His father called him “ifrit” which means little ghost and would take him to mosque to be in the company of grown men which he explained was stressed as an appropriate way to raise a male child. When he was in his early teens, his father cautioned that he must be careful in his speech:

...you know, Azzam, this is the mosque that we go to. You have gone there since a kid so you only think of the positives there, but the thing is with that mosque, I am sure there is a lot of FBI that come there undercover. So, you always have to watch what you have to say cause although it is a religious place, there is a time and place for everything. People there might not be trustworthy. (1, 7)

Azzam explained that his mosque had been under scrutiny since after the World Trade Center bombing. A sheikh from Egypt, Omar Abdel-Rahman, who at that time had said inflammatory things at Al Farooq (an Atlantic Avenue mosque) and was later convicted of being the leader of the cell conducting the bombing, had come to Azzam’s mosque. For Azzam, such scrutiny represented a form of injustice, because it did not take into account that the sheikh’s talk was one person’s uncensored speech who did not feel the need to make his words more palatable when “coming to a land that was particularly Christian” (Azzam, 1, 6).

He encountered what he felt was another form of injustice when visiting Egypt. He went several times, and at one point when he was perhaps thirteen, he spent a year there. During that year, he had an opportunity to observe the border between Palestine and Israel. Seeing the steel walls dividing the land, the poverty of the Palestinian people, bombs going off, and fighter planes flying over had a lasting effect on him:

But to be honest with you, seeing that really did mold a basis in my mind of not accepting any type of justice....I don’t believe that Israel should have the right to kill Palestinians. I don’t believe that they should have been given that land. There is another place that they could have had, you know. I just don’t feel like it

was right for them to get an amount of land and then expand....They say they were victims of Holocaust which I completely agree with. I would never deny the holocaust that a lot of people do. But to say that they are still victims to this day, I don't agree with. I believe that they have changed to be more offensive. They are doing basically, I feel like Israel, like they are doing things that Hitler would have done to Palestines, a type of racial cleansing.... (1, 9)

Azzam explained that this experience so affected him that he fully anticipated that he will be expected to help do what he can to amend the injustice:

...I made a promise one day to God, and this promise was, God keep me strong and alive so that in the future day I will be able to better benefit you in a way of battle and war to stand up for the religion. Stand up for other people, you know, perform jihad, which is not suicide bombings, you know? The term jihad is struggle. When it comes to Arabic, some terms have more than one meaning. And, it depends on the context that you say it in, the meaning, you know, to have the meaning. So, the misconception that jihad is suicide bomb was, it is not true. Jihad is when you see that someone comes and takes your land, for example, you have the right to take it back. Jihad is when you see that someone hits you, you have the right to hit them back, to stand up for yourself. But, jihad does not mean that you start waging war everywhere you go. No, jihad is a struggle, because you are defensive. You stand up for yourself. (1, 10)

Azzam felt that when there is injustice to him or others, one must defend against this injustice. This struggle against injustice, Azzam specified, is called jihad. He felt called to jihad: "I need to free people from, like, from the chains of injustice that is on them, you know" (2, 20). Because Muslims are all "under one movement, that is empire," (2, 21) they are connected. He described it as being part of one body where if one part aches, the whole body aches. This lesson of standing up for himself was learned as early as junior high school where he experienced bullying regarding his identity as a Muslim:

Azzam: There is a time where you do have to fight back because if you do not fight back eventually people overtake you, and you will never be able to free yourself from this. And, I learned this lesson in junior high school. I learned this, because so many people used to throw such animosity towards me.

TD: Give me an example.

Azzam: Oh, saying...you are Muslim terrorists. Yeah, no one likes your Egyptian self. I literally had no friends in middle school. Um, I recall coming home days and actually used to cry and said to my father, no one, I have no friends, no one likes me there. And there was, I always had this vow of silence like no one, my Dad, he would want to go to the principal and talk to the principal about it and you know, I was like no it is fine. I can deal with it. I never wanted to be called the rat. (1,10)

Azzam found that if he ignored it or called others immature, the bullying got worse. But, if he retaliated, he was told that he had anger problems. To illustrate, he recalled a story Osama bin Laden had told in an interview:

Osama bin Laden said it in one of his interviews and, you know, I do not support the whole 9/11 or the innocent killings, suicide. It is not right; it is not Islam. But, he said a story, and I can relate to it very well. He said there one day was these two animals, and one was like a sheep, and one was like a snake. I don't remember exactly, but basically one animal kept pestering the innocent animal. It kept on pestering it and, you know, the sheep never did anything, you know, he just tried to be calm, relaxed, be what is the word, you do not want to be violent, so he never retaliated and finally when he just had the last straw, the sheep fought back. And, then other animals saw him and said, oh you are definitely guilty because you just [fought]. (1, 11)

Azzam closed this story noting that “there was a lot of molding that made me the person that I am today....” (1, 12). He acknowledged his blessings as well as his struggles, and believed that everything happened for a reason, that is, some things are tests, character building events. Azzam witnessed what he felt strongly was the negative structural positioning of Muslims in both America and on the Israeli/Palestinian border and felt called to not only be a part of daily, personal resistance to oppression but of an active, oppressed group's resistance. Azzam's visit to the Israeli-Palestinian border was a poignant turning point for him. Ultimately, he viewed his experiences as foundational for God's plan for him.

Azzam spoke very little of his mother (White, Dutch, raised Christian) and her influence on him other than to say she converted from Christianity to Islam when she

married his father (Egyptian, Muslim). When I asked him about his mother, he would dismiss the subject, indicating that, “She is in her own little world, so leave it at that” (Azzam, 1, 2). He clearly identified predominantly with the culture of his father, focusing solely on his Muslim and Egyptian identities which were evidently more salient to him than his White and Dutch identities. His Muslim faith provided the basis for interrogation of issues. Consistent with Mayhew’s (2004) findings of the overriding importance of family in shaping a Muslim student’s beliefs, Azzam attributed his experiences with his father (significant family member) as molding his conception of Islam. Identifying strongly as a Muslim and an Egyptian, embracing both the privilege of his gender (in both a spiritual and wider social culture dominated by men), he was also ready to defend the oppression of those sharing in Islam and the Palestinian culture. Because he was the “little ghost,” both Egyptian and Dutch, it is possible that his intersection of race and spiritual locations heightened his desire for a concrete belonging, acceptance, and firm foot in one world represented in his individual constellation.

Zeke (straight/White/junior/male majoring in fine arts) had also travelled to the Middle East discovering his heritage. An opportunity to immerse himself into Judaism present and past helped to springboard his deepening interest in his religion. He described being chosen to go on Birthright, a program sponsoring students to tour Israel for free for 10 days in order to discover their personal Jewish heritage and identity and to connect to Jewish history and culture. He went between fall and spring semesters in 2011. He especially enjoyed learning about Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism and had begun to practice meditation of a “specifically Jewish fashion” (Zeke, 1, 10) in which he just breathes and says:

“God is with me” (1, 11) or “Ribbono shel Olam [which means] the master of the universe...And as I am evoking the name of God...my thoughts are generally guided, and the idea is that whatever pops into my head is what should pop into my head” (1, 12).

Zeke had sought out places on campus and in the community to which he could connect that were more congruent with his religion and had joined Hillel when it eventually was founded (by Daniel). He described what it meant for him to be Jewish:

It is just a part of who I am. It is a part of my identity. I grew up Jewish. I had a briss eight days after my birth. I was bar mitzvahed. I do not know a life not being Jewish. It is just a part of who I am. In terms of how that affects my view and what I believe, growing up in Hebrew school, I wasn't really religious until my teen years, I guess, as far as taking Judaism seriously but, uh, let's put it this way. I am a big geek. I love history, mythology, symbolism, and a lot of aspects of religion appeal to that side of me. So, hearing biblical stories and talking about the role of God in everyday ethical decisions appeals to me. And, uh, over the years, that just kind of grew and grew. So, in terms of my sense of morality or code of ethics, I turn to Judaism, because that is what is always there in my life. (Zeke, 1, 6)

After attending Birthright, he sought other ways of “Jewish meditation” such as recognizing different levels of the flame of a candle as corresponding to levels of the human soul, but always with the mission to control his thinking in order to gain insight and answers that can even lead to prophecy. While Zeke appreciated traditional prayer, he sought meaning from meditation. He distinguished meditation from prayer, describing the latter as “communicating with God or talking to God or asking God for something. Or maybe a better way to put it would be prayer is trying to evoke the blessings of God” (Zeke, 1, 11). He sees prayers as a means of communicating but meditation as a means of being present with or connecting with God.

When I asked him how he thought his life was different in other ways now after the Birthright experience, he responded:

Um, my first thought would say more troubled (laughs). Because, I am now unconsciously thinking about deeper things on a daily basis, which is awesome and confusing at the same time. And, although it does provide a lot of comfort in certain situations, it also provides a lot of turmoil in others. (Zeke, 1, 16)

While Zeke was not questioning his beliefs as a Jew, he was working out how to apply his beliefs on an everyday basis. (See Chapter 5 for examples of Zeke's negotiation of "turmoil.") He was beginning to move past an uncritical acceptance of an external authority's definition of what it is to be Jewish and toward developing an inner authority (Parks, 1986), critically reflecting on what his faith means and how it applies to his life (Fowler, 1981) prompting both moments of comfort and disequilibrium. He pinpointed what he saw as the overarching purpose and meaning of his life shaping his daily life and actions:

I believe that the purpose of our lives is to become one with the Divine, become one with God which we do by acting like Him and His image. He created man in his image. The way we become one with Him is by illuminating His attributes....by doing good for others. (Zeke, 1, 5)

Isaiah (straight/African-American/male/graduate student majoring in English/communication) would share Zeke's interest in becoming one with the Divine although would balk at the use of a male pronoun to describe God, as he did not believe that the Creator was a masculine figure; instead, he envisioned the trinity as man, woman, and child. He gave the example of Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel:

Problem with most portrayals...take Michelangelo and the Sistine Chapel when he had to, you know, he had to draw Adam touching God. To do something like that like it is very ingenious aesthetically, I guess, but it limits the concept of God. Once you start adding a physical container of race, of size, of gender to something that is supposed to be, to something that you can't even really, you have no concept of it mentally, it is so much bigger, so much greater than that. I find the travesty in that. (Isaiah, 2, 20)

Isaiah saw God as perhaps the ultimate intersection of characteristics, not to be limited by human constructions of race or gender. Moreover, while Zeke sought to become one by imitating the Divine's positive features and works, Isaiah believed that humans have the potential to not only imitate the divine but to overcome our character failings:

So, Jesus, for instance, Christ is a title. It is not a name; it is not His last name. Jesus Christ. You look for that, and you are not going to find anything. It is a title; it is a state of being. So, I look at that, the character of Christ, the personification of Jesus, as a state that all human beings have a potential to reach and so if you, pretty much the higher, like the higher self, and I feel that Jesus was a character that explained how we as humans have an ability to master our lower selves, and He did that. (Isaiah, 1, 4)

Isaiah referred to himself as a non-denominational Christian and described having attended a church founded independently by his great uncle, but explained that his beliefs differed from most other Christians. He believed in Christ as both real and metaphor and in an evolution of Christ, that "Christ's story was one of human progression, human progression from His lowest state to His highest state" (2, 17). He understood his spirituality to be a key component of his identity and described it as "in a loop with everything else in my life, so it is not really some separate category like I bury on Sunday's. It just comes" (2, 7). This notion of spirituality as a core component for Isaiah, an African-American male, coexisting with and equally salient with other identity components is consistent with several researchers' findings (Dancy, 2010; Patton and McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2009; Watson, 2006; & Watts, 2003).

Isaiah found churches in Northburg to be "solemn little places that you could go to for service that didn't really, they weren't really, it wasn't like what I was accustomed to" (2, 3). Though not identifying as Baptist, Isaiah's construction of what did not constitute church for him was similar to that of other African-American students in this

study, linking him with what emerged as a pattern of disaffection shared by students of color not finding a familiar style of worship available at Northern State or in Northburg. The students missed particulars of the Black Church experience described by Jones (2002), that is, an emphasis on livening up worship and celebrating Christ. These students occupied a position of multiple jeopardy in that they lacked the resources of White, rural Protestant and Catholic students who felt accustomed to the styles of campus-based affiliation groups or opportunities for worship in the community. Unable to connect with the styles of worship available in Northburg churches, Isaiah described participating instead with gospel choir plus praying, fasting, and remaining in contact with members of his great uncle's church.

Like Isaiah, Hessa (lesbian/senior/female/childhood education/White) also referred to herself as a non-denominational Christian. As she professed this belief at the time of the interview, she is included in this section. However, Hessa did not attend church when younger as did Isaiah. Growing up, she had "never like been to church or anything....never really experienced or really done anything really religious" (Hessa, 1, 3). Her mother did not "do any church or anything religious" (1, 4). Her father was Muslim, but: "I was never actually involved in that religion, and he practices fairly often, I guess. And, he would go to the mosque on special holidays, but I never went or never got interested in it" (1, 4).

Hessa identified as a lesbian. In November of her senior year at Northern State, a friend who was aware of Hessa's struggles regarding feeling unaccepted by others in general owing to her sexual identity brought her to a non-denominational, Christian community church. Hessa felt a strong connection and had attended regularly ever since:

I just like the idea that there is a higher being that you know kind of accepts everything for who you are which is the message that [the pastor] tries to get out every week, that it is a place to bump into Jesus and basically work out your junk and find Him as he truly is. (Hessa, 1, 4-5)

She was attempting to comprehend her life and make meaning in light of her ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and spirituality. Her spirituality was clearly informed by her identity components (Tisdell, 2003), and this will be parsed more fully in Chapter 5.

Keisha (straight/African-American/female/junior majoring in sociology) was from Brooklyn, NY, and described a process of filtering her understanding and meaning making through her faith tradition; morals and values learned through her upbringing in the Baptist Church came into play regardless of the topic considered: “Everything is kind of really religion-based whether we acknowledge it or not” (Keisha, 1, 16). For Keisha, her faith tradition and beliefs not only constituted worship but, rather, were key factors in how she constructed her identity. She described her beliefs:

Um, I am Baptist. That is how I grew up, and so I believe in God and believe in the three bodies of praise...Father, Son and Holy Ghost. We believe that God died on the cross and that He rose again and that everything that I do is already pre-planned. Even this morning, I say a prayer every morning and basically in the prayer it says give me the strength to do what is Your will and even though I do do what I want to do, I know that it is already chosen and kind of the idea that pre-destination, that there is a set thing God is going to use me to, like I want to help people. He is going to use me, to touch me, to help me save lives. (1, 8)

Keisha did not seek out information about avenues for affiliation prior to attending Northern State. After matriculating, like Isaiah, she was unable to find a local church that provided the spiritual connection she was seeking:

So, at home the services are three hours and that is without Bible School, Sunday School, and without anything that happens after, like dinner or anything. It is just three hours with the ceremony. But, here in Northburg, it is over in like 45 minutes, so that tells you one thing. There is a lot more singing and performance kind of stuff at home, and at Northburg it was kind of like a Power Point. They did half the songs. It was just completely different. It was very quiet.....more

laid back I guess is the way to put it. And, even with the ceremony, it wasn't as deep as the other pastor at my church is.... (Keisha, 2, 4)

Keisha attended one Bible study on campus but did not like how the students were trying in her estimation to "recreate church." Instead, like another participant who related that he would rather watch YouTube and stomp the way he did at his home church (Dante, 2,20), Keisha claimed that "it would do more if I watched something on-line or like if I just did my own thing in my room" (Keisha, 2, 3). She sought connection through Northern State's student-led Gospel Choir and followed 31 Status (on-line movement to emulate what a Proverbs 31 woman would resemble in today's generation, i.e., strong, chaste, dignified, industrious, and sober). Strayhorn (2011) found that participation in gospel choirs not only assisted African-American students with a sense of belongingness but also with a way to nurture resilience through such means as recalling the lyrics of a song for solace and motivation or drawing support from devotionals, prayer or connection to God for support during college. The choirs and 31 Status provided Keisha with spiritual resources for belongingness and resilience.

Keisha not only participated in Northern State's gospel choir but also another local college's gospel choir and services led by a female, African-American Baptist pastor. As with Hessa, a pastor played an important point of connection for Keisha:

The reason I go there is because my friends go there and it is welcoming to everyone, no matter what kind of tree they fall under. And, it is a safe place, basically. And, I just feel like I am being fed like the way I am at home. Maybe it does have to do with race and maybe it does have to do with the fact that it is a Baptist 'church' and we have choir the way it is at home. You know, it is more up to beat and it is lively. Not saying that other churches are not, but for me. (Keisha, 2, 8)

Keisha employed a telling analogy of being fed spiritually, with spiritual food of importance in its ability to sustain and provide energy to the recipient. She was not

certain whether she felt fed because of the race of the pastor or congregants, the upbeat music and choir, the elements and order of a Baptist service, or a combination thereof, each representing salient pieces of Keisha's identity. By safe, Keisha meant that the pastor is very welcoming to everyone which she felt mirrored the atmosphere of her home church. She mentioned how this welcoming extended to gay and lesbian congregants: "And some of the members at home, we do have some people [who] have different orientation; they may be gay or something, and they have the same thing here" (Keisha, 2, 9). Keisha did not identify as a lesbian but used the example to indicate how the nearby college's gospel choir's leader/pastor provided a safe place for people of various racial and sexual identities. She indicated that worship was done in the manner to which she was accustomed, that is, in an urban, Black Church tradition, and, consistent with the literature (Patton & McClure, 2009), she was more comfortable worshipping in that fashion.

Like Isaiah, Keisha had tried to attend churches including Baptist churches in Northburg but explained that the way the members worshiped was "quiet," that, for instance, she could not play her tambourine like she could at home: "I can't worship how I want to" (Keisha, 3, 1). She related how a male friend of hers was stared at in a Northburg church when he vocalized his praise, a barrier to worship not recognized or noted by White students in this study attempting to locate churches or joining on-campus spiritual affiliation groups. Understanding Keisha's spirituality requires viewing her experiences holistically; in this particular example, her social categories (race, geographic location, faith tradition) had an impact on how and where she worshipped.

Dante (African-American/sophomore/male/unspecified sexual orientation/Literature/Writing), like Daniel, took matters for connection with others of the same cultural and spiritual backgrounds into his own hands. Dante had chosen Northern State primarily because of its reputation for excellence in teacher education. Like the others, he was not anticipating that the college would necessarily play a large role in his spiritual development, as he noted, “I had my platform before I got here” (Dante, 2, 19), meaning that he had a strong spiritual foundation prior to attending Northern State:

And so when I chose college, I didn't, I honestly did not think about God in the equation. I knew that He is personally going to take me where I need to go. He is going to send me where I need to go. It would be a phrase like from a songwriter for gospel music where He would order my steps through his words. His words are for me to go there. He would order my steps, and I would go wherever He told me to go. According to Jacob's ladder, Jacob being the person in the Bible where he had a ladder that he would climb to Heaven. He called climbing Jacob's ladder, and I did not think about God or the godly aspect of the university when I chose this university. (Dante, 2, 20)

Dante was an African-American male who attended and led the worship (music) team at a Baptist church in the Bronx. He had seen an admissions promotional piece which stated that Northern State had a gospel choir and, though not part of his criteria for choosing Northern State, he had been counting on joining: “Um, I came here my first semester, and I read in the brochure from the school that they had a gospel choir. And, I got here and they didn't (laughs). Very changing experience” (Dante, 1, 3). At Northern State, like Keisha and Isaiah, he was unable to find a local church or campus entity that provided the spiritual connection he was seeking:

When it came down to, um, when it comes down to it, my expression and I think my connection with God is through me singing His praise, me singing His music. And, so that's when I realized that I was, that that's an aspect of my life that I was missing, that's an aspect of my life that I felt was the strongest and my connection. Like some people read the Bible, and it just fills them and they just feel a certain type of way. For me, it's singing about God that brings that

connection, and I wasn't doing it at all. There was no church that I found, I went to a few churches in the neighborhood, and there was no church I found that made me feel that way. (Dante, 1, 6-7)

Dante's concerns reflected Strayhorn's (2011) findings that campus gospel choirs are viable venues for African-American students' involvement and engagement in college, as the choirs help to reduce feelings of marginalization and foster a sense of belonging, the lack of the latter a reason why minority students and African-American students in particular are retained at lower rates (Strayhorn, 2008). Northern State lacked this important forum, an absence especially disconcerting for Dante after having understood from admissions literature such an opportunity existed.

Attempting to worship in rural Northburg, Dante faced multiple marginality. He described how a church he had attended in Northburg did not worship in a fashion familiar to him:

Once I went to a church in the neighborhood which was a non-denominational church, and I thought well if that was the case there will probably be some radical praises, probably be, and it turned out that it wasn't what I was looking for....in the non-denominational church it is a mellow conversation type [experience] (Dante, 2, 21)

Jones (2002) suggested that for many African Americans, worship focuses more on the experiential, celebratory, and dynamic and less on the cerebral and rationalistic. Dante was not able to employ his way of connecting to God and worshipping, because there was no campus-based entity for singing praise to God nor was there a local church which worshipped in the fashion to which he was accustomed. Adding to the feelings of isolation and marginalization, Northern State is located in rural Northburg with a dominant culture very different from Dante's own; and, as Dante explained, one's geographic region of origin can be a salient identity component:

But I also know that the environment that I am in, the culture that I have come to and that seven hour drive, I have always called it the time warp zone because I go from New York City which is like the most unique place on earth in terms of the amount of different cultures and how they inter-operate, how they just harmoniously just go as opposed to coming to Northburg where mainly there is just one culture, one way of being. And I don't think, I have never been to a Baptist church up here, I can say that, but it is the Baptist church style that I am used to and which even sitting at home and watching a video on YouTube, I still clap and stomp the way I would at home at church. I still don't, unless my church moved up here, I don't think it would be the same thing.... (Dante, 2, 20)

Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) noted that the saliency of one's identity dimensions is fluid and dependent on context. As such, Dante's identity as an urban, Baptist-church-style worshipper became pronounced at Northern State.

Dante took it upon himself to create the space and conditions in which to explore and express his spirituality with others from similar cultural and faith traditions, that is, with others who shared the symbol systems that structured what he was accustomed to associating with spirituality and worship. He co-founded a gospel choir at Northern State in order to have a place in which "we all share the same goals, we're worshipers together" (Dante, 1, 10). Whether participating in a gospel choir or other entity, the relevance of Dante's action is underscored by the literature which suggests that African-American students in particular may benefit from the creation/existence of their own social and cultural networks (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Guiffrida, 2003). By creating the gospel choir, Dante linked his love of singing and praising God in a vocal way with a social group comprised of other students who predominantly shared his racial and cultural background as well as his worldview.

Karen (straight/White/first-year/female/writing and women's studies double major) attended an extremely small local church at which her mother was priest. She did not attach a denomination to the church to which she was strongly connected but, instead,

described it simply as Christian. She equated Christianity with an inerrant belief in the Bible: “Pretty much as Christians you believe that Jesus died for you. You believe that everything in the Bible is true, which is a big one because (laughing) our masses are really long” (Karen, 1, 4). What Karen knew to be true did not rise from a complex, critical examination; rather, her religious beliefs were based on the strength of an authority, in this case the Bible and the teachings of the Christian church which she attended. Karen was one of three freshmen I interviewed. She had not begun to question her beliefs and was just beginning to learn about other beliefs. For example, she enjoyed comparing faith traditions with her friend who is Jewish:

Well, one of my close friends, Sheila, she is Jewish, so she had mentioned that to me. We were talking about just the differences and the similarities because I thought it was interesting....I was asking her about like the afterlife and what the Jewish customs are for that, and she actually wasn't sure about that. It is kind of a murky area, but it was just interesting to talk about. (Karen, 1, 4)

She spoke of being born into the Christian faith, being home schooled, the importance of prayer and reading the Bible, and being, admittedly, “a bit sheltered.” She understood that her beliefs gave meaning to her life and were what she used to make meaning: “If you do believe in it, you really have to believe in it because it affects how you live. It has to affect everything....it is all consuming of your life, if that makes any sense” (Karen 1, 19). Her beliefs, however, were not nuanced; that is, they were divided into rights and wrongs. The following example illustrates her decision-making in response to ethical concern posed in the classroom:

Um, we were talking about the oil spill that happened, and there was a lot of debate going on about who should have been responsible for it and who should have paid for it. And, I was like, it was kind of not the point. The point was that it was a crime, and it was the wrong thing to do. It was not dealt with, and the money is beside the point...No, it is not always about money. It is about what is right and what is wrong. (Karen, 1, 8-9)

She claimed to be “stubborn” about her beliefs but was starting to embrace being exposed to “different ideas” in college such as comparing faith traditions. Yet, while she had begun to probe other beliefs, she indicated that she had not changed her feelings or ideas on much; moreover, she claimed to have always been opinionated. For example, she said that abortion is murder, and while she knew that offended a lot of people, it is a life and that takes precedence. Karen appears to reflect a *synthetic-conventional faith* in that she could think abstractly about spirituality but had only just begun the process of stepping outside of her beliefs to examine the tenets of her own and others’ faith (Fowler, 1981).

Another freshman participant, Banca (straight/White/first-year/female/art studio major), may not have been as ready to ponder others’ worldviews. For example, she shared Karen’s anti-abortion stance and belief that there is a clear right and wrong about the topic, but did not share Karen’s concern for whether others might be offended. She planned to do a persuasive speech to tell the class, “This is why it’s wrong” (Banca, 1, 16). Banca said that she “wasn’t raised religious at all” (1, 3), but indicated that “we hadda go to Sunday school cause we had to do our confirmation cause we’re Catholic...my Mom like hated going to church...she didn’t show interest in that, and I didn’t either” (1, 4). She claimed that her Dad disliked Christians and believed that Christians blew up the twin towers. At the time of the interview, Banca identified as a born again and Catholic.

Banca was from a predominantly blue-collar area with racial diversity outside of New York City. While she wanted to attend Pratt, her father would not allow it. She was accepted into another, private school in upstate New York and planned to bake to raise money for the fee, but was prevented from doing so by her father:

Um, he is not so nice and he, um, told me that I hadda go to this school...I used to bake and sell it at school. And, during that time, my Dad wouldn't let me bake. Like, he didn't want me to go to any of those schools. And, the reason why I was doing this [baking] was to pay for application fees. (Banca, 1, 4)

Banca was in the process of completing paperwork to withdraw from Northern State and transfer to a Catholic college when I met her. The administrative assistant that normally answers questions for students wishing to complete the withdrawal process was not in the outer office adjacent to where I work. I stepped out and asked the student if I could answer any questions for her; thus, Banca began addressing her concerns to me. After hearing her offer several unsolicited remarks about students' lack of spirituality at Northern State, I first addressed her concerns about withdrawing and later explained my study and asked her if I could interview her.

In her interview, Banca related that her father had chosen Northern State for her though she had expressed to him that it was not her choice. While she had not expected the public college to play an active role in her spirituality, she felt disappointed in the nature of the affiliation she experienced with peers in the Newman Club:

'Cause even the religious groups here aren't really that religious. The people who are in them aren't really that religious. Like part of it, I'm on the board of the Newman Club, and, um, the spiritual board, so the basic theme of the board is to bring God to the group and, um, do the activities that they do. And, um, we had this Christian house party, but they were sitting around talking about how like there's liquor here and you guys can, uh, I don't drink and any drugs, um, and they're just like you know, there's liquor here, you guys, so drink. Cause they did, we had root beer pong vs. beer pong....And I know that they, they used the church's money to go on a shopping spree, which is not cool. That's not very religious. (Banca, 1, 5)

When asked if there were other groups on campus with which she might affiliate, Banca mentioned InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF) and concluded:

Um, they're OK. They hate Catholics, but they're OK. And, I'm not fully Catholic. I believe the Bible is right. I don't believe in purgatory, for example.

The Catholic Church does. But, um, it doesn't say it in the Bible, so therefore, I do not believe it. But, they're, they're, they're OK. Some of them aren't that religious, but they're OK. (Banca, 1, 5)

While Banca had not expected the public college to promote her spirituality, she was disappointed that neither the Newman Club nor IVCF provided her with an atmosphere sharing her particular beliefs, (e.g., about appropriate alcohol use). Her responses indicated a *mythic-literal* (Fowler, 1981) understanding of her faith. When her experiences with others in affiliation groups did not match the images she had appropriated from stories, beliefs, and related spiritual experiences, she appeared not yet ready to critically examine her own or others' perspectives about issues (e.g., alcohol or drug use). Though Banca said her interaction with IVCF was "OK," she did not report a strong sense of belongingness, identification with, or connection to the college or any of the "religious groups." Indeed, she had related to me that her disappointment in Northern State's students' lack of spirituality and her subsequent lack of belongingness were the leading causes in her intention to exit the university, reflecting research indicating the importance of involvement to a student's persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Banca told me that her increased interest in spirituality and religion began after she was raped. She did not indicate any particulars about when and how the rape occurred but described experiencing severe physical symptoms as a result: "I couldn't walk....And, I couldn't sleep either" and "thought it was something really, really bad. Um, you can fill the blank in" (Banca, 1, 2). She had a dream in which God told her if she believed she had a disease, she would have it, but if she believed that she did not have it, she would not. She related that through faith, she believed it was not so and, as such, God had rewarded her with the miracle of health: "God is the only one who could've

done this, plain and simple. And, um, that's why. Um, well I am celibate now, or chaste, actually the Catholic word is chaste" (1, 2). Banca's orientation toward men and sex, her sense of justice, prayer, life, and spirituality were shaped by the rape and by her social location, specifically, marginalization and constraints imposed by virtue of gender and, ostensibly, class. She maintained her Catholicism but also pointed out that she had been born again after this trauma, born again signifying to her that "you were religious at one point, and then you lost your faith. But, then you came back with full strength and full passion for God and Jesus" (1, 6).

Banca had examined her own beliefs in light of Catholicism and what she termed, "different strands of Christianity" (Banca, 1, 6). Because she determined that Catholics stop at just doing good works, she identified as both Born Again and Catholic:

Well, there's lots of different strands of Christianity, the difference between Christians, I guess. Catholic church believes in saints. They believe that they can do miracles. That's why they're considered a saint, 'cause after they die, they perform I think it's three miracles. Um, they also believe in purgatory which is like between heaven and hell. Um, and the Bible, and the Christians, um, they believe in - actually I've a better definition The main thing that's different about Christians and Catholics, Catholics are, "You need to do lots of good works." That's their thing. Everything's about good works, but He shows through Jesus all the good works that you can do and all the good works that he wants you to do. Um, so [other Christians] are saying that you don't have to do it....And, that's why I fall between, because I'm just like, you have to have God in your heart. You have to be strong with Him. And, um, but you also have to do good works. You have to show and help people, because that's so important. And I can, if I, if it means talking about God in the classroom where they're all atheists, maybe one person sort of thinks about it later. (Banca, 1, 6)

She appreciated that non-Catholic Christians point out that it does not say in the Bible that you have to do good works, but it does say that you have to have Jesus in your heart. (She may be referring to such verses as Ephesians 2:8-9 which speaks of being saved by accepting God's grace and not by any works one can do to earn it.)

While Banca had sought connection with the Newman Club and IVCF (outlined later), she did not feel that the other members shared her particular beliefs and had concluded that “people in this school really aren’t [religious]” (1, 13). As a result, she was in the process of withdrawing from Northern State.

Selah (straight/junior/female/childhood education major/White) grew up in a family that loosely adhered to Catholicism. She, like Banca, had started to identify as both Catholic and Christian. She attended IVCF and a non-denominational church and through those connections had begun to understand and acknowledge the developmental task of making her own meaning:

Well, I made my First Communion. I was confirmed but it really did not register with me. I don’t, I would pray but I did not have the personal relationship with God until I came and um just I guess exploring it on my own was really important and not just following in my parent’s footsteps and that finding out for real that God is real. (1, 4-5)

Providing an example, Selah described what a personal relationship with Christ meant to her and how it helped her to discern meaning and purpose. She talked about a period in college when her grandfather had just died, when she wasn’t getting along with a suitemate. Selah would go to parties trying to “find my identity in friends, and so in guys. I would not give myself away to guys, but it was just, I thought that when guys would give me attention that I would feel good” (Selah, 1, 5). She had several fights with the suitemate who she felt attacked her character and called her naïve. Another suitemate comforted her by telling her that she was a positive person who viewed the glass as half full while the other suitemate who had had a difficult life viewed it as half empty.

The next day, after having cried herself to sleep the night before, she went to a class she had with the now-retired professor who is the campus minister. His quote of the

day read: The glass is always half full. Three students who were late to class that day, a rare occurrence, had to read quotes, and she felt that each quote also directly applied to her life. She then asked the professor to state his favorite quote:

He said that no one can make you feel inferior without your consent and that was really, like, really feeling God's presence. And, I knew like at that point that God was watching out for me, and I don't know. I knew God was always there, but felt like I, I didn't have that relationship until Dr. Allen's class where you just kind of, he was the instrument of God almost. (Selah, 1, 6)

Selah described being open to God speaking to her directly in everyday activities and believing that God places people in one's life for a reason. In addition to remaining open, she asserted that it is important to "keep stretching your personal life, to keep growing" (Selah, 1, 12) through Bible study and other forms of fellowship. While she described a faith that was in many ways still authority-bound (Parks, 1986), Selah was beginning to consider other worldviews:

I don't think you should just be friends with Christians, just Christians, because then, because people that are not Christians can be different toward different aspects of life, too. And, I think that some people who are not Christians are knowledgeable in...different faiths....It is just nice to learn about other things than just besides your own perspective, I guess. (1, 13)

A tenet of her faith, a concern for others, is part of what Selah believed gave her life meaning, that is, to love your neighbor as yourself and to learn more about God. One is to consider this on an everyday basis and understand that it is a type of communication from God:

I feel like...God speaks to you directly and everything you do every day - activities, and whatever you read, whatever, you see the people around you - I feel like they are trying to tell you something. The people that you are surrounding yourself with, they are trying to tell you something, because God has placed them in your life for a reason. (Selah, 1, 7)

Just as Trace, for example, attempted to discern meaning through cognition and Zeke through what he called Jewish meditation, Selah attempted to divine meaning through a personal relationship with Christ.

In this chapter, I demonstrated how students constructed, reconstructed, or refined their spiritual identities as they attended Northern State. Most students assumed it was their responsibility to find existing or to establish organizations for spiritual affiliation. That is, they felt that their college should be supportive but did not expect it to take the lead. Some students were at an advantage, helped by the quasi-institutionalized support systems already in place on campus and in the community (e.g., IVCF) to which they could turn.

Because White, Christian students are in the majority at Northern State, they enjoy numerous opportunities for organized spiritual association with peers (e.g., local churches, IVCF, Newman Club). While these avenues are theoretically open to non-majority students, results of my study mirrored that of the literature in that social integration for students of color and students of non-majority faith traditions often occurred through smaller organizations (e.g., Hillel, gospel choir, MSA) providing this critical connection to students from similar cultural backgrounds (Guiffrida, 2003).

Dante, Keisha, and Isaiah's descriptions helped me to understand Stewart's (2010) notion, for example, that for African-American students, both (racial and ethnic) cultural identity and spiritual identity have co-existed and will continue to co-exist as salient features of students' spiritual journeys. Zeke and Daniel missed Jewish culture, but the White, Protestant and Catholic students could join pre-existing organizations designed to ease their transition into and life during college. Ruhi and Azzam felt that

they had to defend their spiritual location and define what it was not; White, Protestant and Catholic students did not describe their spirituality in terms of what it was not. They did not feel compelled to answer for violence committed by White, Protestant or Catholic persons. Neither did they have to doubt whether the College would have a reasonable number of like worshipers. Finally, straight students did not have to wonder whether a place of worship would accept their presence. The tacit acceptance that straight, White, Protestant and Catholic students realized no doubt smoothed the students' identity and meaning-making journeys in comparison to the additional challenges students of non-majority race, ethnic, sexual, and spiritual locations faced. Chapter 5 outlines the role some students' spiritual identity played in their choice to attend Northern State as well as how students navigated the stresses of daily college life.

Chapter 5: Navigating (Intentionally) to and at College

Several participants who professed a particular faith tradition or worldview sought opportunity to affiliate with, belong to, and be involved and connected with groups of like believers or those with similar spiritual locations as a key part or even as criterion for college choice, strongly underscoring a theme of affiliation in this research. Further, many participants described drawing on their worldviews to negotiate in and make sense of the world during everyday college life. Several looked to their worldviews for guidance, strength, and a means to reduce stress. Practices such as prayer, fasting, meditation, reading sacred texts and associating with others of similar spiritual expression provided guidance, strength, and comfort for daily living.

Spiritual Exploration as Part of College Choice

Amy (straight/White/sophomore/female/childhood education major), who identified as a Christian, chose to attend Northern State, a public college, because it was less expensive than the private, Christian college she was considering. However, attending Northern State would still afford Amy the opportunity for community with other students who identified as Christian, via, specifically, IVCF:

[IVCF] had a huge role in first my decision to come here. Um, I was looking at mostly Christian colleges, and I was really excited about going to [private, out-of-state college]. But I couldn't afford that, um, I couldn't afford out-of-state, because I would have no financial aid and, you know, all those factors, financial factors mostly. Um, and so I started looking at [in-state, public schools] that had, religious groups on campus, Christian groups, so that I would have a group for fellowship, and I heard of Northern State, because a whole bunch of college students from my church at home had gone to Northern. So, I looked it up [college website], you know, um, Christian groups on campus and got in contact with InterVarsity. So, my first visit up here I started going; I went to my first InterVarsity meeting. (Amy, 1, 4)

Before interviewing the students, I had underestimated the value that students (planning to attend a public college) would place on or the priority that they would assign to a search for organizations or sources for spiritual affiliation at or near the College.

Because it had never entered my thinking during any of my college selection decisions, I was blind to it and became struck by the agency many of them described in finding ways to become affiliated and involved.

Amy reiterated the importance IVCF had in her connection and engagement with people on the campus and in the community:

So, it was a huge factor for me and then just coming on campus the first week. I was already aware that InterVarsity was there as well as local churches and staff like that. So, I had, that first week I went to Pizza in the Park that was sponsored by InterVarsity, and I just met like a whole bunch of people there that, um, were Christians and, you know, who went to Northern State. And, so, it really helped me to find like a really solid group of friends and to really acclimate to Northburg.... (Amy, 1, 4)

The availability of a forum for spiritual exploration with like believers was a “huge factor” or driving force in Amy’s college choice, trumped only by her ability to financially afford a college with existing opportunities for fellowship. Amy sought a school at which she could “have a group for fellowship” as part of an extracurricular organization. The campus and community had organizations that immediately welcomed her and people of like faith. Her experiences differed significantly from that of other students in this study like Daniel and Dante who created their own spiritual support organizations on a predominantly-White campus in a predominantly-White and Protestant community.

While Amy initially sought to not be isolated from and to have fellowship with other Christians, she also came to understand that attending a secular institution shaped

her beliefs in that it played a part in strengthening her faith, prompting her to move from an inward focus to a more outward focus on serving others, as she explained:

Um, and, it's kind of transferred from a situation for me where like I was looking to make sure that I was going to stay strong in my faith, so it was more like a self-centered like looking for something to help me, um, to more of a perspective to where now I look at it as a really awesome opportunity for me to reach out to other people on the campus so like serving more as like my time here as a missions field. (Amy, 1, 13)

Consistent with what literature indicates (Astin, Astin & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Maryl & Oeur, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; & Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler, 2007), Amy's development involved a strengthening of faith, a refining of purpose. In treating her time at Northern State as that of one in a mission field, Amy was accepting responsibility for her commitments and beliefs. Some students, like Amy, are intentional about seeking a college at which they can continue this journey beside a cadre of like believers.

Other students noted that campus and community spaces in which to explore their spirituality were critical factors in their college choice. Dawn (straight/White/female/graduate student in fine arts education) who had also attended Northern State as an undergraduate reported that the availability of the Newman Club, IVCF, and local churches weighed heavily in her decision to choose Northern State. I include Ruhi (straight/senior/mathematics major originally from Pakistan) in this chapter as well because, while he did not intentionally choose Northern State because of the possibility for affiliation with like believers, it was part of his decision to attend the nearby college from which he had transferred:

There's a mosque on Elm Street if you, if you don't know it. And I, when I, so I find out there is a mosque here, so I said OK, so fine. I find out there are other

Muslims, and there's a mosque, so I can go pray. So, it helped....It was really, it was a big reason why I came here.... (Ruhi, 1, 6)

For Ruhi, the presence of a mosque in a rural area signaled a critical mass of Muslims with whom to affiliate and worship. Later in the interview, Ruhi reiterated the importance of having “enough” students of like spirituality with whom to affiliate:

TD: So, would you like a larger population [of Muslim students]?

Ruhi: Not larger but (pause) enough

TD: For?

Ruhi: To (pause) I don't want to be alone here. (Ruhi, 1, 17)

Ruhi's comment illustrates the importance not only of affiliation and connection but of a sense of belongingness. Involvement and affiliation are not only vital to a student's development and persistence, but are critical to the individual's psychological sense of belonging, the latter defined as a psychological sense of identification with and inclusion in the campus community (Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Johnson, et al., 2007). While affiliation with other Muslims was not part of Azzam's (straight/male/first-year/geology major identifying as Egyptian and Dutch) college choice process, he also observed the importance of the mosque as a confirming symbol of belonging: “[it] factored in a lot and made me feel that this is the right place to be” (Azzam, 1, 16).

Janet (straight/White/junior/fine arts major) remembered choosing Northern State over another private arts school when college shopping as a prospective student because of the individual attention she received from faculty members during an open house and the opportunity for affiliation with like believers in an organized and structured group, a group quite unlike that evidently available at the private college:

“...but mainly it was the teachers and also I mean [the private college] did not have a strong Christian group on campus. They basically said that we have one but they do not want to be affiliated with like the adults helping out” (Janet, 1, 4).

When attending the open house at Northern State, her brother, a student at a nearby college, arranged for her to stay with a local pastor’s family and to meet peers through IVCF and a local church. Like Amy, Janet was introduced to an affiliation group prior to even enrolling. This played an important part in her college choice process and her sense of belonging to the campus and community, all of which served to reinforce her spirituality.

Stacy (straight/White/junior/female triple majoring in psychology, speech communication and English writing) began her studies at a private, Catholic college but became disillusioned with the level of spirituality or religiosity of her peers at the college and transferred to Northern State. She still identified as a Roman Catholic. She described being raised Catholic and going to mass every Sunday with “very devout” parents. Through middle school and high school she attended church retreats and was on a high school council for the diocese. She was adamant about not drinking or abusing drugs and still attended mass every Sunday, though offered that, “I think I have matured more just because to me your faith isn’t just about going to church every Sunday, you know, it is something you live out every day” (Stacy, 1, 3). She felt judged in high school for “being religious” and had happily anticipated going to a Catholic school where, she assumed, everyone would be of like mind. However, she found that “there are very few who actually followed being Catholic” (1, 7), for example, praying the rosary as a group every week and praying together (1, 3), and she once again felt judged by other students for being religious at a school in which many students were “being secular while

still trying to hold on to this idea of being Catholic” (1, 7). She felt like she was “one of five people on campus who wasn’t getting drunk at least every weekend if not every weeknight, as [private Catholic college] is a big party school even though it was a very small school” (1, 5).

She later intentionally sought out Northern State because it was a public college in her geographic region and near her boyfriend’s college. Stacy particularly enrolled in a public college to pursue her pro-life interests and to escape what she considered the hypocrisy of the private, Catholic college she had attended:

One of the main reasons that I left [the private Catholic college] was that I was basically told that what I was attempting to get out of that college and what I was doing there just wasn’t going to fit, by a Catholic priest consequently enough. Um, I am very pro-life, and I was attempting to start a pro-life club on that campus, and it was shot down in almost every direction you could like think of. I actually got so frustrated that I actually wrote a letter to the Board of Trustees, and I left. When I came here, I knew there was a Newman Club, and I figured I could get involved with that how much I wanted or not. But my boyfriend goes to [nearby school], and we have been together almost five years now, so that was part of coming here specifically. And at that point I was not going to get as frustrated with a state school because they do not have any religious affiliation so that hypocrisy was not going to be there and just kind of do my own thing. It was really that idea, and I was happy, surprisingly enough, with the Newman Club and how involved it was. (Stacy, 1, 3-4)

Stacy felt that examining and publicly acting on her spirituality, specifically her pro-life beliefs, was hindered at the private, Catholic college she had attended. Because Northern State as a public college remained neutral on issues such as abortion but permitted religiously-affiliated organizations such as Newman Club on campus, Stacy ironically found what she perceived to be more welcoming conditions to plumb her spirituality.

Her experiences at the other college brought about some disequilibrium in her life, as she proceeded from a literal certainty of what a Catholic College should be to the

reality of diversity of beliefs and behaviors. When I pointed out to her that it sounded as though she had more freedom to be Catholic at Northern, a state school, she retorted: “To a certain extent, yes. I think it defends my theory at a Catholic institution, there are very few who actually followed being Catholic” (1, 7) which she defined by such actions as “praying rosary as a group every week” or, more broadly, taking an active pro-life stance.

Stacy commented on the importance of a forum on campus in which to feel connected to the same religious tradition. She offered that the Newman Club provided a community in which the students could “understand each other’s sayings without people misunderstanding because they are not from our religion or denomination” (Stacy, 1, 13). In using a symbolic interactionist perspective, one must understand the situation of the individual and the individual’s definition of that situation (Gusfield, 2003). Stacy is *situated* as a Roman Catholic interested in understanding and being understood by others of like faith. Her definition of the situation is her desire for and delight in finding a place in which to share with others familiar with and adhering to the doctrine and vernacular of the Catholic Church. Her desire for sense of community and predictability - as aspect of identity – leading to belongingness echo Sorrentino’s (2010) findings among university students. While she may or may not remain situated as such, importantly, this was vital to her at the time and was thus a critical factor in analysis. She understood and wished to be involved with others who shared that understanding of the same symbols - the intentions, actions, and meanings attached to the verbal and nonverbal communication of other Catholics. She left the other college and was not interested in examining her religious views in light of alternative views of what it meant to be Catholic. As she

refined her spiritual identity at Northern State, the world for Stacy was still fairly divided into the “we” of the conventional community of Catholics and the “they” of others (Parks, 1986).

By checking with acquaintances and the website prior to enrolling that Northern State and Northburg, Daniel (White/junior male/fine arts education major/unspecified sexual orientation) sought assurance that he would have spaces in which he could affiliate with other Jews. He sought a cultural, not religious, affiliation; but, because it was intentional, I include him in the chapter, as well. He identified as both a secular Jew and a (searching) pantheist, considering the latter belief system after attending college. He chose Northern State for its reputation as a school for a high quality program in the fine arts and the comfortable way he felt when visiting at an open house. But, as part of the process of making his college choice decision, he searched the Northern State website for indications as to the population of Jewish students or community members and the existence of a local synagogue and campus-based Hillel or similar group. He was able to find reference only to a local synagogue but not via Northern State’s site.

While a student, Daniel attended the local synagogue but felt that the college lacked a space in which he could experience Jewish culture, that is, aspects of community and predictability particular to his culture which Sorrentino (2010) found so critical to students’ sense of belongingness. Weber (2010) noted the importance of psychosocial resources associated with one’s social location, the “positive feelings of well-being and self-respect that result from a strong connection to and identity with a group of people who share a common history and life experiences” (Weber, 2010, p. 120). Daniel described how he missed the familiarity and traditions of the Jewish culture in which he

was raised on Long Island; again, understanding that he needed such a psychosocial resource, he founded Hillel at Northern State:

[P]eople just need to come and be around other Jewish people....I guess there is a certain comfort in being around other people, the same background as you. It is just comfortable with a place like Northburg where there are not very many Jews. It is just when you go to a meeting, like a Hillel meeting, you just, you just feel like you know these people. (Daniel, 1, 17-18)

Daniel explained that affiliation with Judaism and Jewish culture had always been a prominent part of his life prior to college:

For me, it was, in high school, I was vice president of a Jewish culture club as well. Judaism was always a really big part in my life. I would always be around, like in a social context, I would be with my friends and a lot of my friends are Jewish, just going around synagogue and to my local temple and I would just, a social kind of thing. Then, I came up here, and it was just missing completely, and complete absence of interaction of another Jewish person was kind of like really difficult.... (Daniel, 1, 19)

This void of Jewish culture at college helped to shape Daniel's eventual description of himself as a secular Jew, attending synagogue and identifying as ethnically and culturally Jewish though doubting doctrine.

Because the privilege of one group is often dependent on the disadvantage of another, some students' relatively smooth transition to campus (e.g., Amy) cannot be understood apart from understanding how the same atmosphere shaped the lives of students of other ethnicities, races, and forms of spiritual expression. Some of the difficulty Daniel experienced was manifested in others' lack of understanding and even misunderstanding of his culture. For example, Daniel related that he was asked if he celebrated Christmas, where the yarmulke goes (indicating that the person thought it covered a personal body part), and if matzo was used in a séance to celebrate Passover.

Hillel provided a sounding board amidst the majority White, Protestant culture of Northburg:

[W]e start every semester talking about how to deal with, um, the ignorance. Like people aren't aware of what Judaism is here up here and just being aware to the fact that they are not being offensive, that people are not being offensive when they ask you some things. They are not being offensive when like they are trying not to say that their religion is better by asking you why you do not celebrate Christmas, for example.... (Daniel, 1, 17)

Daniel interpreted objects (e.g., yarmulke) and actions (placement of yarmulke) according to the meanings understood and taken for granted in his life. Interpretation of symbols drives behavior (Benzies & Allen, 2001). Those students outside that environment did not have access to the meanings assigned to those symbols (language and objects). Both Daniel and the students posing questions to him may develop by learning new ways to interpret the stimuli and forming new meanings or new ways to respond.

For White and Christian participants there were various, published ways to identify information about campus and community groups, organizations, and places of spiritual expression that were familiar to them. Some were already welcomed into an affiliation group (e.g., IVCF) prior to matriculating, thereby easing their transition to college life. Students of non-majority religion, spirituality, racial or sexual identities often had to wait to arrive on campus to determine if the campus or community offered avenues for familiar spiritual expression, wait until they happened upon places serendipitously when a student, or wait until they formed their own means for affiliation.

Spiritual Identity and Coping with Daily Stresses in College

This section examines how students drew upon their spirituality and religion to strengthen them amidst and/or shield them from stress in their daily college lives.

Students described a range of practices such as prayer, fasting, reasoning, meditation, reading sacred texts and associating with others of similar spiritual expression that helped them to negotiate, understand, and interpret daily college life and events.

According to Zeke (straight/White/junior/male fine arts major), the best way to describe his interaction with God was to say that “the idea of the belief of God is with me, is something that sits in the back of my mind every day. Um, I really try to talk to God although I have read of different ideas to do that” (Zeke, 1, 10). As mentioned in Chapter 4, Zeke meditated in what he called a particularly Jewish fashion and had “Jewish apps on [his] phone that give Kabbalah messages” (1, 16). He provided the following example to describe how his spirituality provided comfort as he navigated his daily college life:

I was not invited to a certain event that I thought I would have been invited to and then there was something that I had been expected to be asked to do that I was not asked to do that I wanted to do. And, I was kind of bummed out about those two things kind of happening or not happening in the same day. And, this was yesterday, and I kind of felt in a grumpy mood. And, I felt the mindset of, you know, why don't I get this, and why does this happen to me sort of thing. And, just the other day I was reading something, on one of the apps on my phone, about how a certain aspect of Kabbalah is to try and provide joy for everyone else, how we are a vessel of divine light and share it with the rest of the world just as God shared Himself with us in the act of creation. And, so this morning I was thinking it is really not as big a deal if the world keeps spinning. Who cares? And, I have got to stop thinking about myself...and I should start thinking how can I make other people happy? How can I help other people and in the way the world works, I will become a much happier person because of that. (1, 17)

The lesson from Kabbalah allowed Zeke to put the situations causing him worry or stress into perspective. Compounding the common stresses of college life, some students like Zeke as well as Daniel (White/junior/male/fine arts education major/unspecified sexual orientation) were in unusually rigorous and competitive majors which added an additional layer of complexity and stress to their negotiation of daily life. Both Zeke and

Daniel felt that Hillel provided an atmosphere and space for stress relief. Daniel compared it to his experiences in temple and Hebrew School when younger:

When I was a kid, I went to temple every weekend, and I went to Hebrew School so very often we kind of grew up in it; it was more of like, it was a stress relief. It is kind of relaxing to me. It takes my mind off other things. I don't know why, it just, I don't know why, it takes my mind off of other things and so does being in the Hillel and talking about some of the things that we talk about. It just takes my mind off of other things. It is a stress relief. (Daniel, 1, 16)

Though Daniel identified as a secular Jew and pantheist and argued with some as to whether such an entity as a secular Jew could exist, he attended the local synagogue on a fairly regular basis. Some, including his friend studying to be a rabbi, questioned why he would go to services since he did not believe in God; he cited his comfort with the spiritual tradition of it and the energy he felt from the group when praying. Hillel provided a similar comfort, a sounding board, and a means of coping during college. While he was careful to say that he did not perceive the dominant culture of Northburg to be malicious toward him and his ethnicity, he did feel there was a good amount of ignorance about Jewish culture. (See also previous section.) He gave the example of a conversation that occurred when riding in a large, slowly-moving service elevator with seven students and two faculty members who were discussing the cost of parking on campus:

...we were talking about how it costs \$110 to park for the year for students or something like that, and one of the professors was saying how outrageous it was. And, she said something like they really rake you dry or something like that, and the other professor just didn't believe it, and he was like wow, and she was like, this professor goes, "What Jews," and so I was like, OK. (1, 5)

After talking with others at the synagogue, Daniel determined that the professor was not using the phrase out of malice:

...this professor grew up here, so I knew it wasn't out of malice. I knew it was just a phrase that meant greedy, or whatever, so I really didn't take too much personal offense to it, um, I was not offended by [the professor]. It was the phrase itself offends me. (1, 5)

The structures keeping this type of slur in the vernacular of Northburg residents were either largely not present or were not as overt on Long Island where Daniel called home. He was surprised by the slur but chose to not take offense after his talk with Jews at the local temple (who may have internalized the oppression, that is, come to accept, while not condone, the stereotype, Weber, 2010).

Daniel welcomed genuine curiosity about Judaism and had often been asked to explain, for example, why he had a menorah up for Hanukah and what Judaism was. At the same time, because there were few Jews in Northburg, he pointed out that he sometimes felt he represented someone's token Jewish friend:

Daniel: So, there is a lot of people who say or who have stereotypes or just like I am the Jew in the group or whatever kind of thing. Um, which sometimes gets excessive....to a lot of people, I am their Jewish friend; I am not their friend who is Jewish. It is really annoying, um, but/

TD: Why is that annoying?

Daniel: Because it's like devaluing you as a person, like, just like, I guess it is....the idea that I am Jewish before, like, my personality and all of that, just great, just they are more excited to have, to know someone who is Jewish than to be friends with me personally. That is why it bothers me. (Daniel, 1, 23)

Because of his ethnicity, Daniel sometimes found himself objectified, befriended solely because of his ethnicity; consequently, he found others' friendship at times suspect. That is, he had additional burdens when negotiating friendship or (what for some might be a forgettable elevator) conversation. Daniel looked to the combined wisdom and intersection of Jewish culture, tradition, and community as represented by the synagogue, Hillel, and his background experiences as creating and forming a foundation and a means

by which to negotiate and interpret dialogue in the residence hall, classroom, and elsewhere each day at college.

Amy (straight/White/sophomore/female/childhood education major) looked to what she described as her “two-sided relationship” (1, 15) with God for discernment. If she was walking to class and became worried or stressed over a paper she had to write, she “takes it to God” in that she prayed about it and talked to God about it, asking Him to help her to not be so nervous and to remove the anxiety. She described that there was a change in her life when she did this, that He “takes” her concerns and helps her to be more confident and to not worry: “It’s not like God is changing the words of my paper so it’s some like miracle paper. It’s that, I’m, my concerns are no longer on that, you know, trivial, you know, five-page (exhaling laugh) research paper” (Amy, 1, 15). Amy stressed that even when she did not receive immediate answers to prayer, she was still comforted, as she believed since she had taken her concerns to God and asked for His direction that He knew His plans for her life; thus, she could rest in the knowledge that she would have:

...an answer from Him through opportunities or, um, something that I actually hear Him saying in different ways. Um, whether it’s immediate or I see it in the long run, I know that He’s there, and He has that relationship with me. (1, 16)

Amy made meaning and drew strength and comfort through these connections among experiences and events.

Like Amy, Isaiah’s (straight/African-American/male/graduate student majoring in English/communication) spirituality was salient, and he was highly cognizant of how his spiritual identity was conjoined with other aspects of his identity (race, gender). He described an instance where the intersection of spirituality, race, and gender affected a

decision with which he was faced. He had always refused to help with Multicultural Weekend (a recruiting event aimed at prospective students) in the past, as he felt most other college men of color looked at it as an opportunity to scope incoming first-year women, and both women and men used it to form cliques. He disagreed with both of these uses of the weekend and felt it harmed the cohesiveness of the larger African-American student community. He would work afterward to try to get people involved in diversity efforts and would encounter resistance based on the resentments fostered by what he deemed people's reckless behaviors that weekend. Other African-American men questioned his authority to challenge them on their morality during or after Multicultural Weekend, to "preach" at them: "They may think that I am against it and that I am being churchie" (Isaiah, 1, 9), but he explained that his caution about "the promiscuity example" (1, 9) goes beyond a person's morality: "But, it is bigger than that. It affects other people, not just yourself" (1, 9). The collision of his multiple salient identities had caused him to avoid participation. One day, he was struck by a thought:

...and then it hit me. And, I was like, see you, you lose very critical battles to negative influences that you do not want to be associated with but this is, this is the detail thing. Even if there are 20 people with a negative intention [at Multicultural Weekend], and you are the only person in their midst that has a positive one, you are needed. And, you make an impact even if it isn't wanted, because the new students get to see the contrast - everybody is not trying to get the fresh meat, everybody is not trying to invite you to a clique. There are people that are better than that. So, my absence has a negative influence and...it hit me that I felt so bad. Like, it was so crazy how it hit me. Then, I felt like I was part of the problem. (Isaiah, 2, 1)

The patterns of social interaction that occurred were tied to race and gender, and his reactions to those interactions were tied to his spirituality, a key component of his identity, co-existing with everything else in his life. His sense of morality, which clashed with others who did not wish to be measured by that yardstick, was founded, he

explained, on the example of Jesus: “The bulk of my spirituality as a Christian is following the examples of the things that are taught by Christ as we know Him” (Isaiah, 2, 17). He indicated that he drew upon the example of Christ in composing a definition of self, in choosing how he makes sense of the world and as a guide for his actions, instead of adopting externally-imposed images from others.

In a similar example, as president of the Black Student Association (BSA) for two years, Isaiah at one point was frustrated with the behavior of some of the other male association members. When he confronted them, however, he got significant push back from the other men who did not agree with how he arrived at his position or critique, suggesting to him that his stance on the issue as derived from his spiritual beliefs was inappropriately applied to social life and membership in a student organization:

Isaiah: There are things that I want to address that I feel from a spiritual aspect, but there could be a stigma there because people feel as if you speak, if you speak of things that come from a spiritual source, it has to be separate from a social life, so to speak. I guess that is where the conflict is, because you feel like, um, your spirituality, there is a time and place for that. It is linked to a special social institution.

TD: The church?

Isaiah: Exactly, the church sphere and if it is not in church, I [meaning the other students] don't really want to hear about it....so I was President of BSA for two years, and I was having a problem with some of the male members in that organization, because they would get into these intimate, promiscuous relationships with a lot of females on campus. So, what would happen when one individual is engaging with a bunch of these individuals on campus, women, and the women all know each other. They will get angry with each other, and it's just such a mess. So, I would want to get people together....I can't get the unity that I want because your intimate choices are creating conflicts. The place that I want to address it and almost say that it is wrong would come from a spiritual standing. But, it gets met with the negative aspect because you are not, how can you judge me, you are not my father, you cannot tell me what to do. That is my personal life, this is BSA, or this is a student organization or this is the classroom. So, it gets met with the kind of attitude rather than people seeing how these things are linked. (Isaiah, 1, 8)

For Isaiah, these aspects of self - personal life, participation in BSA or the classroom – were linked; he did not see aspects of his identity as separate and distinct from his spirituality. Again, he recognized and vocalized that his “spirituality is in a loop with everything else in my life...not really some separate category like I bury on Sundays” (2, 7), similar to how Dancy (2010) found that African-American students perceived spirituality as a core component of their identity, an anchor and means by which they understood other components of their identity. Yet, Isaiah understood that there was resistance to interpreting issues through a spiritual lens from some others in BSA, as they felt that application of spirituality had no place in an organization, classroom, or personal life of another. Isaiah did not specify what he meant when, in addressing promiscuity, he wanted to “almost say that it is wrong...from a spiritual standing” (1, 8), but, in this instance, he felt obliged to dissect the application of his spiritual beliefs from his leadership role on this issue.

Isaiah talked about how he was more inclined toward self-reflection about such issues now than when he first came to Northern State: “Like, it gets more keen every year....I can’t say that I wasn’t doing self-reflection before I came to college. That would be too much to say. But, college definitely amplified it” (2, 16). He had begun to realize the importance of critical reflection on issues and how the process intersects with his spirituality. He related an example of a discussion he had about Israel and Palestine, explaining how the history, tied to modern day Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia, “spills into African sociology. It spills into African philosophy....So, I find myself when I engage in intimate discussions that involve something social or historical or philosophical, my spirituality is in line with it because it is all connected” (Isaiah, 2, 9). Faith development

requires that individuals reflect on their own existence and process of development so as to begin to self-define and self-construct roles and relationships with ideas and others (Fowler, 1981), a process in which Isaiah appeared to be engaging.

Isaiah also found that his spiritual practices and disciplines had helped him not only to navigate the stresses inherent in daily college life but had translated well into academic discipline:

I do engage in things like prayer. I do things such as fasting. There are certain custom, customary things in culture, certain things that I do that help me spill into my academia sphere and my social sphere and things of that nature. I feel if I can control myself, if I can discipline myself not to be so glutton because every time I see food I have to eat it, I can't refrain from it, it helps me to do the same thing when it comes to academia. For example... sometimes I wake up, certain things I allow myself to hear, watch, and listen to. The basis of my foundation for that comes from my spiritual, my spiritual background, but it spills into other things. So, if I can discipline myself in those avenues, it spills on when I sit in the classroom and I listen to a message being taught. It is kinda garbage in, garbage out, because I do the same thing spiritually. If I can refrain from kinda negative vibes and negative atmosphere from a spiritual and the same thing happens to me in academia. When it comes to getting certain projects done, certain forms of work done, I can avoid certain things that distract me from getting the work done. (Isaiah, 1, 6)

Isaiah actively made decisions about what is meaningful and what he would allow into his mind and body based on his spiritual beliefs. Isaiah's great uncle formed his own church after critically analyzing his beliefs and church. He learned how to refine the lessons of the culture of his great uncle's church and portions of the larger African-American community of home and to both use and balance them against competing concerns in academia. He explained that he tried to "have a high amount of patience when it comes to hearing other people's views" (2, 7). He gave the example of a discussion he had with another student about what Egyptians might have looked like (e.g., "pre-dynastic pharaohs were actually very, very dark people compared to what the

movies might say” Isaiah, 2, 10), explaining that he liked to try to give others little small facts to open up their thinking on a matter.

Dante (African-American/sophomore/male majoring in literature/writing/unspecified sexual orientation) also used his spiritual beliefs to interpret concerns in academia. At the same time, he understood that the ways in which he constructed meaning and interpreted situations were “radical” in comparison with those of many other students and provided this example:

...if someone were to come to me after, after an exam and say, and get their scores right then and there, highly unlikely, but to get their scores right then and there and they got 90 percent out of 100, and they would say, Oh my God, I studied so far and dah, dah, dah. I am glad that I did this. And I would say, nobody but God did that for you. You made it because God had it for you to make it. He made it for you where your mind had helped you. He made it to where your Spirit was in the right place at the right time, and a lot of people don’t want to hear that. (Dante, 2, 7)

He understood that such a perspective made some “people feel uncomfortable but that turns into a discussion that many don’t want to have” (2, 8).

Dante had often felt isolated, not in the majority with regard to other identity components at Northern State. Like Trace, who felt nauseous when he got out of the car when first arriving on campus, Dante had experienced the anxiety common to most first-year students. He remembers first arriving at Northern State, never having visited campus. He endured the “time warp zone” drive from New York City to Northburg, took one look at the College and the residence hall room with a folded, striped mattress, and proceeded to lock himself in the car. Through the car window, knowing full well that “it was the most childish thing I’ve ever done” (Dante, 2, 30), he told his grandmother that he was “not going here.” His grandmother and two of her friends carried and arranged all of his belongings in the residence hall room, “right down to folding underclothes” (2, 30).

Although I did not ask for clarification as to why he specifically felt so out of place, his nervousness was likely compounded by not seeing many other students of color on what he found to be a very rural, isolated campus.

Dante stayed but has endured many other difficult moments, a resolve reminiscent of what Stewart (1999) termed the “resistant soul force” of African-American students despite oppressive social, political conditions. Like Keisha, he missed what he called the Baptist Church experience, a response noted in the literature (Patton & McClure, 2009). He understood the definition of a Christian to be one who is “Christ-like” but particularly appreciated the experience of the Baptist church which in his words “is not calm” (Dante, 2, 6) in its demonstrations of praise for Christ. He most enjoyed participating in praise music and described his experience in his home church: “I go to a Baptist Church, and there [at that place] preaching is important, the reading of the Word is important, but the most historic thing about Baptist Churches is their huge gospel music sound....” (1, 3). The urban, Black Church gospel experience Dante cherished did not translate easily to Northburg where “you sit in silence and you applaud afterwards” (Dante, 2, 18) at the few churches he visited. He described how his spiritual and racial identities collided with those of audiences (congregations) accustomed to other means of worship and music appreciation in a predominantly White, rural area:

Like certain songs have certain feelings, the way the music flows, and it will just wipe the entire church out with the stance that they once had...it just turns to radical praise. They just can't control themselves. There is crying, screaming. There is everything, people shouting, and the preacher was stirred up, stuff like that. And, we have sung those same songs here on campus, and not a person in the audience was moved. So, that is what I am saying that I realize the difference. (Dante, 2, 18)

Dante recognized that even if his home church were to be transplanted in Northburg, it would not duplicate the “Baptist church style” to which he was accustomed given the difference in physical and psychological climate. As will be explored more later, Dante integrated the lessons learned from his spiritual background into his daily life and meaning making such that other components of his identity (e.g., how a Baptist student throws a party) were manifestations of his inward spirituality (Watson, 2006).

That is not to say that Dante did not feel pressure or a burden in defending his spirituality. The pressure was increased by the intersection of race. The following example poignantly underscores the saliency of Dante’s racial, spiritual, and musical identities:

Dante: I have this thing, this finger thing. This finger plays the piano. I have to keep the beat, and I just stop and think, ‘keep the beat.’ And, one girl in my class yesterday, we had a discussion about race which is a whole other issue [in addition to organ donation] for me, but/

TD: In class?

Dante: Yeah, in class. The issue...was about a Black male walking down the street, and because he was six foot two in a certain area. And, there was a White woman who just kept looking back at him and kept looking back at him, and she eventually ran. And, he was so depressed, so hurt, he didn’t know what to do. And, there is this guy sitting behind me who said, well I have to contradict what the book is trying to tell them. The book is trying to sympathize with the Black man, and I have come to realize that Black people stereotype that all White people are racists. And, um, I turned around and said, what you don’t realize is that you just made a stereotype. You just made a stereotype against what most Black people think.

TD: Right, right

Dante: So, you created a stereotype based on a stereotype, so you are just fighting fire with fire, and so he just went on with the conversation. And, the direction he was going with the conversation I knew would be a BIG (tone rises) issue for me. So, I was tapping, tapping, and the girl next to me said, it is OK, calm down (laughter). Because there are some times when you can be a radical about views

and certain times when just giving your input and letting people know what your stance is would make a difference.

I commented that it did not appear to trouble him when he held a stance different from another student:

No. In, in the specific instances, but the overall (tone rises) issue knowing that these many people, that I am the minority, doubled times being a minority of my race and being a minority of my [spiritual] beliefs is trying at times. Because, if I try to fight, battle this issue in this class, I am only here for four years. This is my fourth year coming. I am only here for four years. There is no way that I can get to every class and get to do every impact on every person, and so it gets trying to pick up the full spectrum of what needs to be done. (Dante, 2, 26-27)

Dante faced a predominantly White and de facto secular classroom. He felt like a minority in terms of both race and spiritual beliefs but also felt it important to influence others regarding both issues, challenging racism and speaking of spiritual matters as taught by his pastor: “Preach the Word...it is in the Bible where you are supposed to say what needs to be said” (Dante 1, 14). Spirituality for racial and ethnic minority groups is often intertwined with marginalization and racism; yet, spirituality can serve as a buffer to such stressors (Watt, 2003; Yick, 2012).

Weber (2010) noted that, “Resistance to pressures of structured inequality within subordinate group communities can, in fact, be a psychosocial resource that can be used in a collective struggle against oppression and in a personal journey toward self-appreciation and good mental health” (Weber, 2010, p. 121). The Gospel Choir was a group or community whose members may have shared Dante’s dual minority status of race and spirituality, a position that must have indeed been “trying at times.” Persons in dominant cultures have multiple opportunities to see themselves reflected in books, on television, and in front of the classroom, thereby molding the classroom experience to their own while dismissing the experiences of others. When challenged, students from

the dominant culture become resistant and, like the male in Dante's class, often project prejudicial behavior on others while neglecting the role oppression and racism have played in their own and others' lives (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003).

The words of Dante's home pastor (via memory and electronic sources) provided additional emotional strength. The pastor told him to preach the "unadulterated word" and to not "sugar-coat things" based on the situation:

There is something that my pastor always says, and he says it in this trilogy thing: Preach the Word, Preach the Word, Preach the Word. And it is a matter of, it is in the Bible where you are supposed to say what needs to be said and...if you represent yourself with God backing you up, you are not supposed to worry about it. I mean honestly, I do worry about it, even the human side of me worries about it, but also I was raised by my grandmother who is an independent southern woman and who made us not emotionless but very unaware of emotions, where we do not dwell on it, but we belong to the happy. And, we drive forward through anything else; that helps me in my everyday life and my Christian life as well, not saying that there are two separate identities, but it helps me in general to know that – persuasive, but it is hard at times. (Dante, 1, 14)

Dante's continuous relationship with his family, home pastor and church members (nearly uninterrupted owing to Facebook) as well as the gospel choir sustained him when he felt stressed given college's demands or alienated for his spiritual or racial identity. As an African-American male from an urban area, he had experiences that required him to draw upon these buttressing forces.

I asked him how he handled it if other students opposed him or his beliefs. Because Dante described "singing His music," or singing praise music, as his "connection with God" (Dante 1, 6), during difficult times, or what he described as breakdowns where he would be at his "utter most level of insecurities" (1, 16), he would handle things by singing until he would "find answers and He motivates me to keep going" (1, 16). He acknowledged that he regularly had these breakdowns, "a release of

sorts that happens once, twice a week, where there is a total breakdown” (1, 15). At these times, he would:

...just sing. I sing until my voice is cracking at the end of the night. I just sing. People do not understand why I sing so much, because there are not words to describe how I feel sometimes, and yet a songwriter can put them into words. (Dante 1, 16)

When he described this to others, they sometimes did not understand why such an outwardly positive person would break down so often. He answered that while he was an optimist, he just knew that “every now and then I have to draw my strength back from someplace that no one understands what I am dealing with” (1, 18) and gave this analogy as to how he pulled strength from God:

...as if there was a drain that was clogged and Drano came along and poured it into the drain and everything was swept straight out....what is cleared is all the doubts against me and all the doubt is gone and doubt is the biggest thing. Then, I can do it and set out what I am supposed to do. And, when I start back over again and having faith and knowing that I’m nothing, that I am doing nothing, but God is doing all the work. (1, 21-22)

Indeed, Dante noted the inevitability for him of filtering everything through his spiritual lens:

And it just goes to show, my pastor says let your light so shine and wherever you go, it is just going to follow you no matter what. There is this side of you that is just going to come out whether you want to come out or not. (Dante, 1, 19)

Dante related an incident regarding a student organization, one for which he was co-president, the Gospel Choir. Like Isaiah with the Black Student Association, Dante addressed the issue grounded in his spiritual beliefs about how one should conduct themselves as a member. The key difference was Dante was addressing a would-be member and indicating that he did not think her worldview would be appropriate in the choir. The student did not have the shared understanding of the symbol systems:

One prime example is, we were tabling in the union downstairs trying to get people to the group, and we had good answers to questions. And, one girl came by and she said, hey, you're talking about gospel music, right? That hand-clapping and foot-stomping music? I said, yeah. Are you excited about it? She said, I'm an atheist, but I love the sound of gospel music. And, so me, personally, my friends know me to be not a rude person but blunt person in that I say how I feel. I've learned how to say in the most diplomatic manner, but I say how I feel. And, I said, no, I don't think that this would be the right group for you. There's passion behind what we're singing, and you couldn't possibly share that same passion. You might share the same love for the rhythm and the beat of the music, but not the same passion. And, she understood, and she went off, but we have that issue a lot. (Dante, 1, 8)

The meaning of his last comment was that amongst the group itself, they reminded each other that the choir was to be passionate about praise (of God) not performance (the way it looks or sounds). He indicated that while all members had said they were Christians, "there are people who are a lot more spiritual than others" (Dante, 1, 9). He strove to find common ground amidst students of varying levels of faith development:

And, so it's a big issue to remember, especially on a campus where you don't want to be exclusive. You want to be inclusive with all people [in the group] to make sure they all feel the same way, but it's hard to make sure that they think about God. (1, 9)

Dante wanted to maintain the choir as a group concentrating on religious (Christian) exhortation, was prompted to both consider and explain the concept, and felt comfortable doing so with the student who stopped at the table.

Keisha (straight/African-American/female/junior majoring in sociology) also cited her relationship with God as being a critical source of support as she navigated isolation, concerns for family members, and racism at college. During her first year, Keisha had the added burden of worrying about her grandmother and sister both for whom she had been the caregiver since age 12:

...because I did not realize they were dependent on me, and so even being here, I still was taking care of stuff at home, and so the fact that I couldn't be there to

actually make sure everything was OK, um, it took an even bigger toll on me. So, praying and having the belief that God was going to take care of it, especially for my grandmother's sake, it really got me through my first semester. And even though all those things were going on at home, at school, it was a lot, it kind of keeps me sane. (Keisha, 1, 7)

Keisha shared how salient parts of her identity were “things you can't fix or change,” a fact brought into sharp focus when a first-year student. She described being the only Black student on her residence hall floor, being asked about her hair and body, and feeling like an “experiment or science project....I almost felt attacked even when I knew that it wasn't meant to hurt me, in a rude way, but it was hurtful” (Keisha 1, 4). Racial group membership not only shapes how a student sees themselves, but how others see a student: “People of color are often viewed in limiting ways based on controlling images – stereotypes of who they are and how they ought to act” (Weber, 2010, p. 119-120). Keisha twice mentioned feeling “attacked,” feeling forced to repeatedly explain who she was and why she differed from the inquirers.

Moreover, Keisha perceived how her identity as a female, African-American in concert with her identity as a spiritual (or “goody-two shoes”) person prompted an experience of acute isolation:

Um, freshman year...it was more hurtful because people did not get a chance to get to know me, so it was more like Keisha would not want to do this, because it is Keisha-kind-of-thing. Keisha wants to stay in her room and listen to her [praise] music or whatever the case may be. So, I felt like I was excluded from things. If they wanted to go out or like I was excluded from going to a movie or something or certain activities just because they thought I was a goody-two shoes kind of thing. (Keisha, 1, 13)

My best friend here, she does not believe in anything, but at the same time, she always gets upset and oh I wish I could be like you, but at the same time, I feel like she is constantly judging me because I still dance. I think people think that, and that is part of Status 31, they think that you have to be like it was in the old days. You have to cross your legs, you have to go to church five days a week or you have to do this, but that was not God's will. If that was His will, then I would

be that way, but I am not. So, that means it is OK. Status 31 always brings me back to that because it has been a part of me since I have been at school. Um, it kind of tells you that it is OK. I do not have a church to go to the way it was at home. I don't have anyone here that identifies with it. (Keisha, 1, 11)

Hall mates and even eventually a good friend did not understand or know how to approach Keisha for the seeming incongruities between participating in spiritual and what might be considered worldly activities simultaneously. Keisha credited prayer and the empathic ear of her special programs' counselor with sustaining her through the first year of college: "Deborah helped. She took the time to listen to me, and she never pressured me to talk about things, and she was just there" (Keisha 1, 6). As Watt (2003) suggested, practicing spiritual rituals may help an African-American college woman to connect with both a higher being and her inner strength, thus enabling her to better cope with and endure the pressures of college, especially isolating and racially hostile stressors. Keisha added that spirituality, particularly how it was portrayed and explained by 31 Status, served as a constant buffer. Female students' investment with and attachment to others with similar beliefs (for Keisha, via social media) positively influences their spiritual self-perception (Bryant, 2007).

Instead of bemoaning her limited opportunity for affiliation, Keisha recognized her independent growth:

"being isolated and not being at home or feeling like I am doing Bible study and not doing campus ministry and not having a church within walking distance – I feel like I have grown because I rely more on myself" (2, 10).

She talked about how she was on her own at Northern State, and described a faith development that involved "figuring things out on my own and what [spirituality] means to me and how to make it my own thing, my own without my grandmother and uncle wanting me to do it" (2, 26). She noted that instead of being in the choir and teaching

Sunday School out of obligation, she now had the choice and had “grown more now being away from it” (2, 27). In this way, Keisha was beginning to take responsibility for her own commitments and beliefs (Fowler, 1981) yet expressed herself in ways reminiscent of what Parks (1986) termed a *fragile inner-dependence* in that the world was still divided into the “we” of her conventional community and the “they” of other spiritual traditions.

The experiences of Keisha, Isaiah, and Dante coupled with that of the author of the student newspaper editorial in Chapter 1 highlight again the pattern that had emerged in which students of color did not perceive Northern State or Northburg as offering a culturally familiar atmosphere in which to worship and feel a part.

Mike (male/senior/business administration major/unspecified sexual orientation), had a local, home church, yet was experiencing feelings of alienation about living in America but between two cultures. His search for identity, his being a “mess” and having a “hyphenated identity” was highlighted in his vacillating opinions about the following example of a classroom discussion about whether a woman in corporate America could wear the hijab:

...people had conflicting views, and people said that you know from a professional standpoint, it wouldn't be appropriate, because I think normal views are more important....People in America usually trust people who look to them, um, look at them, and if they, especially after 9/11, you know, if you are going to wear that, people are always going to have that image of terrorists, you know, Islam is bad, and so. And, I think things started to get iffy. And, then I came in saying that this would not have happened, you never would have questioned the woman who was wearing a hijab until 9/11 actually happened. Because, back in India, we have Hindu as the majority, um, as the majority religion and then comes Islam, ah, women wearing the hijab with no problem for us. No problem for us, you know, this is their religion. You can't call them terrorist because they are wearing....I am not saying that I have a clear understanding of what Islam is all about, as to people wearing hijabs in the office, I would be all right with it. I

would definitely be all right with it, but then again, there is a side of me that fears, you know, I can't see your face. That is why I can't trust you. (Mike, 1, 10)

On the one hand, he was "definitely all right with it." Yet, if he could not see her face, he could not trust her. (Fear and distrust of women wearing the hijab was reported by Peek, 2005, in her research on Muslim-American students who credited the presence of the hijab with eliciting signs of uneasiness in others.) Mike's cultural identity as an Indian was comfortable with the hijab, but his privileged identity as an American business administration student negotiating the corporate world remained conflicted about the issue.

Though Mike had many friends in the church that he and his family attend, they did not understand his interest in what he termed "shopping," that is, his search for meaning and spiritual identity:

...a good example would be, I come to college, I get my stuff, and then you know it is almost like I am screwed up and then when the semester is over, go back to church, get my thing right with God (laughs), come back to college for the next semester, get messed up (laughs). It is almost like you know, a cycle that I see happening, and I do not know if it is going to change when I start working....I think it is almost a cycle where you get messed up, you get screwed up completely at the end of the semester, and then you go back to church and hang out awhile and then "What the hell happened to you? Why did you go to college? (laughs) Why are you questioning stupid things like Christ, like the system?" Like, it is almost like when I start talking about identity....what my purpose and what I believe in identity and when my identity is shaped by my religious beliefs, [my friends from church] are like, you know, "Don't talk. If you don't know what you are talking about, give an answer and shut up." (Mike, 1, 17)

Mike still welcomed learning about other worldviews and questioning his own but simultaneously experienced angst in the disequilibrium this caused within himself and with family and friends at home. When eating out with his friends from church, he sometimes adapted his behavior and speech, declining to reveal aspects of his spiritual identity search: "In order for me to conform to that club, I would suppress all those

questions...[and]emotions, just in order to put down that meal into my stomach and enjoy that time” (Mike, 1, 19). He made choices about what dimensions of identity he would share in which contexts – college, family, church – downplaying some while allowing others to surface. Jones, Kim and Skendall (2012) noted conforming to certain social norms in certain contexts does not mean one lacks authenticity, as it may be more about survival and learning to wear many hats given that one is never void of context.

Mike could discuss some spiritual-related questions with family members, but he described their beliefs as “very well established” (Mike, 1, 6) and understood that they were unlikely to provide any answers he has not already heard and considered. Because neither church nor family provided sounding boards of adequate complexity for him at that time, Mike indicated that he enjoyed an exploration of spiritual questions and issues of meaning and purpose in college classes and seminars such as the MASS-sponsored panel discussion where I met him. His interest in a forum in which to explore such issues is consistent with what research has suggested (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Bryant, 2007). He saw value in discussing and exploring spirituality because “everybody is, um, finding their own identity, and identity changes constantly, and it is a dramatic process” (Mike, 1, 8), although he indicated that most of his fellow students did not believe in religion or spirituality. I asked how he knew this: “Because they said it out; they stated that, ‘I do not go to church’” (1, 11). Mike had painted a portrait in which he felt incomplete (“hyphenated”) and marginalized (“I can’t say where there is my home”) during his spiritual identity exploration.

Before her senior year, Hessa (lesbian/senior/female/childhood education/White) could have been one of the students telling Mike she did not go to church, believe in any

religion or spirituality, or participate in any sort of spiritual expression. The idea that spiritual beliefs and a corporate body of like believers could be supportive in her negotiation of daily living was novel to her. But, identification with others with similar beliefs positively influenced her spiritual self-perception (Bryant, 2007). Through her spirituality, she was seeking freedom from what she felt as the oppression of social disapproval and rejection of her sexual identity as a lesbian. Hessa described a very small church whose congregation seemed welcoming to her:

Hessa: But, I mean when I walked in there it was that was the first thing that he had said, that they accept all, and love you, and Jesus loves you for who you are, and you cannot hide anything from Him. He already knows, and He is kind of accepting that. He loves you for everything that you are.

TD: So, was the pastor saying that in general?

Hessa: Yes

TD: So, he didn't know what you were seeking?

Hessa: Nope, he didn't. He knows that my friend identifies as being bisexual, so he knew about her, but I never told him anything of what I identified as.

TD: So, how did you feel when he said that?

Hessa: I felt good because I struggled with other people not accepting me so it...sparked my curiosity and what else does he have to say, what else could possibly be out there for this. It just made me feel really good to know that there was somebody out there that accepted me for who I am regardless of the other stereotypes or the other misconceptions that church is evil for people that identify as LGBTA. (1, 7)

Because she was struggling with others, especially her parents, not accepting her sexual identity, she had previously not understood why her friend who identified as bisexual was attending a church, an entity traditionally not accepting:

Um, I mean, before I started going, I just kind of, I just thought of it like a joke almost. Like, my friend would say that she was going to church every week, and this and that, and I was like, what? What? Who would possibly let you into a

church kind of thing and kind of had that stereotype. And I mean, I just, my friend, um, my friends and I had always joked about being, identifying as LGBTQA and going to church are just two different things, and I never seen them as mixing, I guess. (Hessa, 1, 6)

Because Hessa had seen as incongruent the identities of lesbian and Christian, she was contemplating whether or not a spiritual life was possible for her:

...I look at it as just a place where I can find a place to answer whether or not a spiritual life is possible, basically. Was there a spiritual life out there that would accept me and wouldn't discuss hate or say that it wasn't right or wasn't wrong or that the life I was living was wrong? I just wanted somebody to accept that this is the type of life that you can lead if you accept Him into your heart, and this is the kind of life that He is promoting. And, He is not promoting hate, and He is not promoting that you are going to go to hell or whatever. You are who you are, and He accepts you for that. It was just kinda that answering that question that it was possible to find that spirituality while still identifying as LGBT. (1, 10)

Her experience speaks to the importance of affiliation, acceptance, and community (Parks, 1986, 2000, 2011) and how inescapably intertwined her sexual identity was with her spiritual identity. The pastor of the small community church to which her friend had introduced her provided a heretofore unimagined concept of God. Hessa experienced an easing of the dissonance between her sexual and spiritual identities (Love et al., 2005). Further, following her pastor's inclusive views, she was beginning to conduct what Weber (2010) would term individual daily acts of resistance against the dominant social ideology filled with negative images about gender identity, replacing negative images with positive ones:

I fell in love with [the church]. And, I am just...learning to accept others and learning that everyone has their flaws and learning that you yourself have flaws. You just have to learn to accept those flaws, like nobody is going to be perfect; the only perfect person in the world is going to be the man who died for you to clear your sins and so. It is just learning to forgive and live this positive lifestyle, you know. Wake up every day and just understand that He wants you to be happy. He wants you to have this great life and to just make that happen. (Hessa, 1, 5-6)

When I asked her how her new-found beliefs helped her compared to students who may not have had those beliefs, she answered:

I feel that it just helps me to cope a lot more with emotional issues, but it relieves some of the stress...I feel more at ease with myself. I feel like more at ease with the things that go on in my life and that happen in my life, but it is the fallback that no matter what happens, you know. I am still going down to church every week, and I am still going to have Jesus on my side. And, I am still going to have, you know, no matter what happens, you know, how many mistakes I make, it is still going to be there. So...it is comforting to know that you can make mistakes and still have somebody who will love you unconditionally. (Hessa, 1, 15)

Hessa's description of her beliefs reflected a newly-hybrid product of her spiritual, gender, and sexual identities.

For support and stress relief, Hessa indicated that she prayed every night, thanking God for helping her to get through another day and letting Him know that she was looking forward to spending the next day and subsequent days following and loving Him. She also listened to Christian songs and applied the words and lessons to her life. She described what it meant to draw upon the support:

I feel that it just helps me to cope a lot more with emotional issues, but it relieves some of the stress. I feel like, as it is, I feel more at ease with myself. I feel like more at ease with the things that [are]going on in my life and that happen in my life, but it is that fall back that no matter what happens, you know, I am still going down to church every week and I am still going to have Jesus on my side. And, I am still going to have, you know, no matter what happens, you know, how many mistakes I make, it is not, it is still going to be there. So, I feel like, that is a little, it is comforting to know that you can make mistakes and still have somebody who will love you unconditionally. (1, 15)

Hessa's reported internalization of this message and her spiritual growth gave her strength for negotiating daily college life, navigating both external as well as internal pressures such as her angst about her sexual identity. As Love et al. (2005) noted, a strong sense of spirituality emerges for those students who reconcile being gay or lesbian

with a spirituality or religion. They begin to experience no dissonance between spiritual and sexual identities.

In Chapter 5, I delineated how some students professing a particular faith tradition sought opportunity to affiliate with, belong to, or be in entities representing those beliefs – an opportunity important to or as criterion for college choice. I demonstrated the presence of three broad patterns - first, the importance of a familiar atmosphere or space for students to affiliate with those of similar beliefs and culture in order to continue the process of refining spiritual identity. Second, I found that students appeared to lack any expectation of the College's involvement in this process; students assumed it was their own responsibility to find existing or to establish organizations for spiritual affiliation. They felt that their college should be supportive but did not expect it to take the lead. Participants' concern for affiliation transcended just a faith tradition and instead involved the intersection of spiritual, ethnic/cultural, and sexual identity (e.g., Jewish culture, "huge gospel music sound," pastor's implied acceptance of lesbianism). Some students were at an advantage, helped by the quasi-institutionalized support systems already in place on campus and in the community (e.g., IVCF) to which they could turn. And, third, students drew upon their worldviews to cope with and navigate daily college life and stressors.

I captured the complexities of the students' everyday lives and their identities in effort first to illustrate students' individual social locations and how they made meaning in their lives, sometimes portraying how these social locations are situated in larger social structures, are often dynamic (continually constructed and re-constructed), and are

impacted by systems of power and privilege. Students' self-definitions reflected an ongoing process of meaning making, of merging and, at times, colliding social identities.

Chapter 6: Tense Spaces

This chapter contributes to the mosaic of students' spiritual identity development by outlining the students' negotiation of tensions in college spaces, both inside and outside of the classroom. Many students looked to their spirituality as a compass for making decisions about controversial issues during college. Some perceived resistance in the college classroom to discussion or acceptance of spirituality or religious views. When spirituality or religion was brought up or part of the classroom discussion, students reported increased tension and resistance rather than enhanced understanding.

Outside of the Classroom

Practices such as prayer, fasting, meditation, reading sacred texts and associating with others of similar spiritual expression provided a means by which to understand and interrogate potentially controversial issues such as abortion, casual sex, or evolution. That is, many students looked to their spirituality and faith traditions as a lens through which to gain clarity on how to live life (e.g., how to treat others, how to decide what is important) as well as how to grapple with some controversial subjects. How they interrogated the issues depended on their spiritual identity as well as their intellectual, moral, and social identity development.

Selah (straight/junior/female/childhood education major/White) talked about the process of beginning to construct and rely on her own spirituality while in college. She spoke about leaning on God for guidance and direction, meaning that she looked to prayer and how the Bible indicated one should live, and gave the example of when her 17 year old brother had been hospitalized for pneumonia and a fever of 104:

I thought that God was going to allow him to die...my fear took over, um, I just really had to trust in God in the whole situation. And, I feel that doubt might

draw us closer to God too, because it is just, it can be a really negative experience, but it is just having this trust in God more and so that whole time like I was home, . . . I like turned to my Bible and read Psalms, and psalms were talking about even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil. And, it just really stuck out to me. I fear no evil even though all of this negativity is going on around me and that God is the light in this whole situation. (1, 16)

Selah observed that others in her suite and residence hall floor were struggling to find direction and means of comfort and compared their means of coping to her own. Selah's observation represents a sub-theme that surfaced for some Protestant participants, that is, an assumption that other students actively "turned to" substance abuse and casual sex as coping mechanisms:

I feel like it is really hard, because people, um, people around me don't really have any direction, a lot of them are turning to other things besides God. They are turning to so many things like alcohol and to dating and to relationships...and I am thinking about the people in my suite this semester; they swear a lot, and they get angry easily. This semester has been really tough for me, because I feel like I keep growing with God and then the people around me I notice are not so great. (1, 9)

Alcohol, anger, swearing, and casual sex were some potentially charged areas Selah mentioned, points at which the social and sexual aspects of her identity intersected with her spiritual identity. Her growing connection to God was a source of support for her, as she consciously decided to refrain from alcohol, anger, swearing, and casual sex as part of her beliefs:

...one of my friends said that he noticed that I do not swear, so he does not swear around me and, um, even the girl in my suite notices that I do not swear, so she tries really hard not to swear around me (laughs). I find that so funny, and then I am just thinking about another guy who was interested in me and then found out that I was Christian, and [she learned later] he was like thinking to himself, "I have no morals and I cannot do this girl" and (laughs). And, I thought that was the funniest thing ever, and we are still friends, and he still does not have morals (laughs), but he is kind of fun to be around. (1, 9)

In navigating her concerns and choices, including negotiating the responses of others who might choose differently, she did so through reading scripture and the use of humor.

Karen (straight/White/first-year/female writing and women's studies double major), also a Christian, chose not to "party" or to have sex and based those decisions on the Christian scripture regarding "your body being a temple, and I would probably say that drinking or doing drugs would probably be violating that and the whole purity thing" (Karen, 1, 12). She explained that purity meant not having sexual intercourse, that "you promise to not be with anybody before you are married" (1, 12) and that while some people make this a very public commitment, she chose to do it privately and personally. She understood that "that scene is pretty old-fashioned these days" and is sometimes able to laugh off the teasing she received when others learned of her commitment and how the social and sexual aspects of her identity intersected with her spiritual identity, but sometimes felt bothered because:

Um, I don't know, just like I am weird or something. Just the idea of being abnormal is kind of uncomfortable sometimes. And, I don't know. I definitely have had comments from people like, guys aren't going to wait for you, like, you know, if you don't do something about it, guys are not going to wait. I am uggggggh. (1, 13)

Adolescents, under the "tyranny of the "they"" (Parks, 1986, p. 76) especially do not like to feel "abnormal." Boosting one's spirituality, as Kim and Seidlitz (2002) noted, can allow one to become less vulnerable to outside stressors. To cope with her choices as well as the other everyday stresses of college life, Karen reported that she prayed all the time during the day: "It really helps me just knowing that there is God there that really cares that I passed my midterm or whatever; it really helps me" (1, 15). She explained that she knew that God was helping her because, for example, if she was reading the

Bible, sometimes she would come across a verse that she felt was specifically for her to read at that moment or she would have an experience in which she would feel really close to God. She understood and related that one has to have faith in order to believe that these events are truly God-inspired.

Karen noted that while most of the time she would just “hang out” with friends and acquaintances now that she was in college, she remembered one time when the topic turned to abortion which she believed was murder:

...yea, he is my friend and he said he was atheist, and, um, two of my friends are Jewish, a couple of my friends I do not actually know what their religion is, um, and I had a conversation with someone who identified themselves as pagan about abortion the other day and that was interesting....She just said that she thought it was wrong to tell women what to do with their bodies. And, I was saying that I did not believe that it was to a woman's body anymore, so....but I didn't convince her definitely. Like, she still thought what she thought, but I think she respected my opinion, so. (Karen, 1, 17)

Karen had weighed in on this controversial topic using her spiritual beliefs as a yardstick.

Dawn (straight/White/female graduate student in fine arts education) opined that if Christian college students are “struggling with something, they'll look to God and others for help, you know, encouragement” (Dawn, 1, 19). In another example of the sub-theme, she juxtaposed this approach with what she had observed with non-Christian college students:

“They'll say, Oh, I have all this freedom, and no one's watching over my shoulder all the time. I'm gonna party. I'm gonna have fun. I'm gonna do this. But, a lot of times they, sometimes, I've had friends hit the point, they're not Christians, of they feel empty. They have no idea like of what they're doing. And, when they hit that hard point where their classes do get tough or they have that one professor being hard on them and they almost fail that class and they almost lose their scholarship, they'll say maybe they'll just drink more and more and do kind of more substancy things or abuse things and (pause) just kind of want to give up. And, some do give up and just quit. Whereas, I think Christians persevere. We, or those with strong religious beliefs. You know, they'll say, there's a bigger purpose than just me here and now. (1, 19)

For Dawn, focusing on a purpose larger than one's immediate situation was inspiring and conducive to perseverance in negotiating college. While she may not have intended it, however, her comment representing the aforementioned sub-theme, created an unrealistic binary, proffering the notion that only Christian college students persevered with the knowledge of a larger purpose and did so without self-medicating by abusing any substance or action. Yet, she was conscious of not wanting to appear judgmental: "I don't wanna drive others to the point where they hate how I act so they hate Christians or they hate God or anything" (Dawn, 1, 16). As with Selah, humor and faith development helped:

I am really glad that I've turned into like more confident in my faith and am like more good humored about it. Because, I live in a suite right now, um, with an RA, and it's really funny because they know, they always call me like the good girl. And, I don't mind that. I'd rather be called the good girl than the slut or anything worse. And, it's just funny because they'll sort of pick on me. They'll be like, oh, you know, like especially when I started my first like relationship with a boy. So, like they were making fun, they were like, you guys haven't kissed, you haven't even done this, and I was like, no, and I'm not doin' that until marriage and those types of things. And one day, like my RA, they get in their mailboxes, like you're gonna laugh at some of this stuff, like condoms and stuff, and it was like, oh, well, we should just embarrass you, and they were like throwing them at me or something, and I was just like, guys, seriously? And, they were like, we just wanna see you blush. (Dawn, 1, 16)

Dawn's sexual and spiritual identities were interwoven, and negotiating life at a public college with social mores vastly different from those she was choosing to adopt produced some challenging moments like this one, an instance that might easily be viewed by another student as harassment.

Like Dawn, Selah, and Karen, Amy (straight/White/sophomore/female childhood education major) held assumptions consistent with the sub-theme, commenting that she felt many college students may lack the support that her spirituality offered her and

assumed that non-Christian students would be likely to engage in casual sex and/or abuse alcohol and drugs to battle an inevitable emptiness:

Uh, sometimes it's kind of sad to me, because like I know how much my faith impacts my everyday life and like helps me and guides me through just like all the difficult situations that come up in college and all the different stresses I have and schoolwork and social life and stuff like that. And, so, like knowing that most of the people in my classes probably don't have that same, like, help or guidance in their faith or don't have any faith at all and, um, and just knowing the different things that they use to fill that hole – just, you know, partying and relieving stress by, you know, going out drinking or doing drugs or you know, those kind of things, it's just really sad to me to know that that's kind of the grim reality of what we deal with as college students. (Amy, 1, 11)

She, like Karen, drew strength from what she called the reciprocal relationship Christians can have with God, the personal relationship with Christ, that she believed was unique to Christianity.

Like Selah and Karen, Dante (African-American/sophomore/male/majoring in literature/writing/unspecified sexual orientation) was aware that others had an image of him because he was open about his spirituality. He explained that “there aren't many people on campus who share that ultra-love for God and understand what I'm going through....It's hard being looked at all the time” (Dante, 1, 16), a sentiment echoing what Watson (2006) found to be a burden to African-American male college students identifying as spiritual or religious in his study. Dante threw a party at the end of the previous academic year. Some who came asked how he could have alcohol at his apartment, and he explained that he did not drink but that wouldn't matter anyway, because:

God has no problem with people drinking; it is the effects after. People drink to get drunk and to get into trouble and knowing mischief is going to happen, stuff like that, and so some people coming to the party - “Aren't you the campus pastor?” and “Is this OK to have a party?” And, I just stood there in amazement as if to say, my life is supposed to be somewhat like a monk's, and I'm supposed

to be this person stuck within this veil that can't move and has to spew out God's word everywhere I go and not enjoy life at all. And, if you look back on Jesus' life, He enjoyed his life more than some Christians nowadays are. So, it is very hard. Some people do see me, a lot of people when they have a problem and say, Oh, go see him. He is like Jesus and always has an answer for this...they do not realize that my answers come from God so my answer is going to be God's answer from my interpretation.... (1, 13-14)

Like participants in Dancy's (2010) study, Dante chafed somewhat under the public perception that all African-American Christian men's lives should be "somewhat like a monk's," destined only for the clergy.

Interpreting God's answers for life, even when the answers were difficult, provided comfort for Dante while he navigated college life. It was through such places of consciousness, faith, and connection to God that Dante, like the males in Watson's (2006) study, could best find strength or that "resistant soul force" (Stewart, 1999) to cope with culture's negative stereotyping of African-American men. Consistent with the sub-theme, he, like Dawn, Selah, Karen, and Amy, believed that non-Christian college students took refuge in partying as a type of relief but maintained that his source of strength and encouragement was his beliefs, belief as relief from stressors. He talked about God never leaving nor forsaking him and being with him until the end, "And, I haven't seen the end yet, so. And, so I know He is still with me" (2, 23).

For strength or to gain discernment on a controversial topic, he drew upon the Bible, lessons from his grandmother and other family members, and contact with people in his home church and beyond via Facebook. He might research an issue to validate that his thinking was scripturally aligned in his estimation:

Where I think abortion is this, but what about the woman who was raped and had to have a kid, but if God meant for that child to be here, God didn't like the situation, it is the same God. If God did not want that child here, he wouldn't be here. I have to do it in my head. Sometimes, I just have to go back. We live in a

logical age, and sometimes I will Google what the Bible has to say on abortion. I will have to do that and start reading scripture. I will either read scripture online or read it in the Bible.....That story of a person who went through a certain struggle in the Bible and this new scripture comes along, and I am reaffirmed and thinking that is already right. (Dante, 2, 16-17)

Like Dante, Isaiah (straight/African-American/male/graduate student majoring in English/communication) was an African–American at a predominantly White university and a Christian at a predominantly secular university. He had developed the ability to carefully consider ideas of others’ beyond his own:

We just had an event. It was Black Solidarity Day on Monday, and so a lot of the performances in the program they mentioned, it had a lot of Christian connotation because when you, when you go over Solidarity Day, you go over some of the history, a lot of the movements, and especially post-slavery there was a lot of motivation that came from Christianity. So, a lot of that came through the program and through the performances. And, after the event was finished, um, a couple of individuals kinda complained that well, there should have been a disclaimer; people should not have used Jesus, Jesus, Jesus so much, and there might have been people in the audience who were not Christians and would have been offended by that. And, I understood where she was coming from. Same time I kinda thought, well, I tried to put myself in that person’s shoes....Say, I could have went to an event that was Black Solidarity Day, but the people who put it together happen to be from the Nation of Islam, so if through their performances they give praise to Allah and Muhammed, I didn’t see why that would offend me – if anything I would understand where it was coming from, and I would have a respect for it. (Isaiah, 1, 14)

He understood that individuals with other worldviews were not just different from him but had beliefs that had been shaped by their histories and opportunities. In total, Isaiah reported that he wished to approach issues from a “spiritual aspect,” that is, using his spiritual beliefs as guidelines for behavior. This is consistent with research findings noting the relationship of spirituality, identity, and meaning making for many African-American college students, with spirituality often central to the process of meaning making for this group of students (Dancy, 2010; Patton & McClure, 2009; Stewart, 2010; Watson, 2006; Watt, 2003).

Azzam (straight/male/first-year geology major identifying as Egyptian and Dutch) used his religion to help him find meaning which in turn shaped his identity allowing him to better cope with external, sometimes hostile pressures. He related that praying his daily prayers and communicating with his father were major sources of strength for him as he experienced college. He looked to the tenets of his faith for guidance on hot button, controversial issues. For example, he spoke about Islam's stance on homosexuality. He did not like it when people "put that upon" him, meaning told him that they were gay but related how Islam subsequently informed his beliefs and actions:

Azzam: You know, you want to say that you are straight or bi or, you know, gay, do whatever you want. The thing that bothers me is the fact that when people want to come into my face and, Yea, I'm gay. OK, I never asked you. There was no reason for you to put that upon me. But, people would believe that because I am Muslim, and I have a certain animosity towards gay people.

TD: Right, because why?

Azzam: Well, in almost every Abrahamic religion, um, homosexuality is not correct.

TD: OK

Azzam: But that does not mean that we have to discriminate against them. Kill them. Hurt them. Get them away from a job. No, it doesn't. Now, the people who might say that Muslims do that, keep this in mind; there is a difference between your religion and your culture. (Azzam, 2, 9)

Azzam was indicating that Islam crosses borders and cultures and was interpreted differently by different peoples. He then pointed out that others may not have an accurate understanding of Muslim views on race and sexuality and again described how he looked to his faith to negotiate controversial issues:

Azzam: Noah's son Ham supposedly walked in on him while he was naked, and they said (a) that Noah was a drunkard which is very disrespectful to call a prophet a drunkard, b) because they say that Ham walked in on him, and he placed the curse of Abraham on him and banished him to Africa in a sense and

making him, you know, all Black people and all that stuff. That is ridiculous. In Islam, there is no racism. It is not allowed. There are White people. There are Black people. There are yellow people. There are orange people, whatever. We are made of dust and clay, and clay comes in different colors. No wonder there is a quote that says no Arab is better than non-Arab, and no White is better than non-White except through fear of God. So, who is better, between me and you?

TD: The one who fears God.

Azzam: More, that one who fears God more. Through your actions, the things that other people do not see. There is a fear of God, and not everyone can see it. So, therefore, people are saying oh, this and that. There is no need for that, you know. When they want to say, oh, I am a homosexual, and you are Muslim, you should have animosity towards me. No, I don't go out of my way to purposely hurt a person, especially a homosexual person. (2, 10)

Azzam believed that homosexuality was wrong given that “in almost every Abrahamic religion...it is not correct” but maintained that Islam would hold no person better than another; as such, the wise course was to fear God who would guide one's actions. Thus, in his navigation of the issue, fearing reprisal for engaging in (or criticizing those who engage in) sexual activity with a person of the same sex would then serve as sufficient deterrent for either action.

Mike (male/senior/business administration major originally from India), who lived at home with his mother and father, talked about examining his beliefs sometimes in the backdrop of his parents, sometimes at church, and sometimes at college. He also chose the example of sexual identity to illustrate a potentially controversial issue to which he had applied his spiritual lens and related what he had learned from parents:

Give you an example. You know, it would be, um, let's start, let's talk about, with conversation of topics, it is, um, homosexuality. Um, is it a sin or you know, is it accepted? Because the people are living in the modern world, and my parents and my pastor's, well I don't know about my pastor's belief, but my parents' belief is strong, because so and so in the Bible say such things. But, my belief, when I come to Northern State, it would be, I don't know. It would be, um, I am indifferent of it. I think that gays should not be discriminated whether it be on religious grounds or whether it be on social grounds. I think that, um, I don't

necessarily agree with their lifestyle, but I think when it comes to religion, I think, I haven't thought this through yet. (Mike, 1, 6)

After some thought, he added what he has learned from other authorities:

And, researchers and scientists tell me, you know, that this is what it is, and people are found gay and social circumstances does shape their life, uh, so as a scholar in college it is difficult to negate science, because you are so involved in science when you are in college. But, when you come to religion, religion is not a science, not a science; it is basically balancing. Is homosexuality wrong in terms of religion, or is homosexuality, um, um, you know, right in terms of science, in terms of basically living in peace and harmony with the social world? (Mike, 1, 7)

Mike was using the tenets of his spiritual tradition combined with information learned in college from “researchers and scientists” to attempt to sort through the issues, reflecting some of the assumptions about knowledge consistent with Perry’ (1970) *Multiplicity* position in which authorities are disagreeing on the answers. He related that his family had discussed controversial issues such as “racial issues, what it means to have a Black president...what it means to be Republican, what it means to be Democrat, what it means to have strong beliefs and values” (1, 8). He joked that balancing what he had learned formally and informally in college against the tacit understandings from family and church caused his “brain to hurt” (1, 8) but commented that everybody was finding their own identity, and there was value in such discussions in order for him to partially stabilize an identity that was currently in flux, “not set for life; it is going to change” (1, 18). Yet, while nuances of his spiritual identity were being examined, he described having had deeply “euphoric” spiritual experiences at some point which continued to solidify his Christian beliefs:

I think those spiritual, spiritual experiences have kept me and my beliefs going. I don't care if other people believe those spiritual experiences. You know, they are going to negate it and say that you have been, you know, you may have been in a trance or some kind of things. I am going to say, you know what, at least I have

had spiritual experience that I can hold on to, and I can hold on to that...It is better to hold on to something than to hold on to nothing. (Mike, 1, 16)

These experiences, the details of which he did not wish to share with me, had what he implied was a profound effect on him and were what he referenced when discussing his certainty that he would maintain his faith after his current spiritual quest was completed.

Hessa (lesbian/senior/female/childhood education/White) also discussed same sex affection issues, a critical concern for her, as she identified as a lesbian. She explained that the pastor of the small, Northburg church had addressed sexual identity in a sermon she heard him preach a day her friend could not attend:

I mean you hear things about [a controversial Baptist church often in the news] and the Catholic Church, and you hear all these things of hate and stuff within these churches. And, one of the most powerful sermons that really sparked my interest was the first time that I had actually gone to this church by myself. My friend couldn't come that day, and it was just really, um, he had started to talk. The message was about love and how everybody is doing it wrong and basically it was, um, just brought up that you are supposed to love everybody regardless of who they are. And, he just talked about, he mentioned homosexuality, and he brought up [a controversial Baptist church often in the news], and he was saying, you know, how these people are spewing all these messages of hate, and Jesus was saying, no, that is not what I died for. That is not what I told you to do. You are doing it all wrong. You are supposed to love, accept, and understand, not spew out messages of hate. (1, 7-8)

Because this socially-controversial issue was very personal to her, she appreciated both the pastor's acceptance of her and the message she heard during this time in her life when she was grappling with the issue:

I just believe that there is somebody out there that does accept you for who you are. He does, um, He died for your sins, and He forgives your sins, and he died so your sins can be forgiven and so that you could live this life to the most extent. You have the, with His help, you have the power, with His help and guidance and the power you believe to be the greatest person that you can be (Hessa, 1, 5).

Evan (gay/White/male/senior/politics major) had also found a church which provided fellowship, acceptance, and a safe space within which to continue his search for spiritual meaning and purpose. Prior to this, Evan described a spiritual quest that was stalled in part by his experience with organized religion (Love, et al., 2005), at the intersection of his sexual and spiritual identities. While he had conversations with friends to help him sort through his conflicting feelings about the Bible and Christianity, he credited the Unitarian-Universalist Church which was accepting of his sexuality with helping him to envision meaning in his life which in turn had provided comfort and direction for daily living.

His involvement in politics as a political science major and through his work with his hometown's gay-straight alliance while at college provided him with opportunities to interrogate the issue of gay marriage:

...it makes me happy to be involved in politics [because] I feel like I am contributing to the world and somehow making it better. If, like if I fight for certain causes and my big causes have always been the idea of like fighting for, like, liberty and justice for all and [my parents] always told me about why it's a great thing...[yet] they would argue that gay marriage shouldn't be allowed...if we did that, like the society wouldn't remain intact and things would be grave. But, I look at it and say no, that's, that's a violation of like treating other people wrong, and that to me like spiritually is a bad thing, 'cause you don't wanna release those kind of negative things in the world. If you make people hate who they are, or if you install like those kind of hatreds in the society, that, in my opinion, destroys it. (Evan, 1, 3)

Through political involvement, Evan felt he could assert liberty and justice for gay couples to be married. To do otherwise, he reasoned, would be to “treat other people wrong” which in turn would be spiritually “a bad thing.” Beyond applying a political lens to the issue of same sex marriage, Evan lacked a campus forum in which to apply a

spiritual lens. He was not certain about whether spirituality or religion should be a part of the discourse in college, as illustrated by an example he shared:

...there's this one kid in my hall who used to put up Bible quotes on his board every day, and people would like, like I don't know if they made fun of him to his face, but they kind of would laugh about him. Like, why is he putting that stuff up? Like it seems kind of like really out of place on this campus, I feel. (Evan, 1, 18)

Evan felt that Bible quotes or outward demonstrations of spirituality or religion were out of place on the public college campus. But, he understood that maybe others were stereotyped like he was stereotyped. Biblical commentary on a residence hall whiteboard is “like really out of place on this [public] campus” yet he would “sometimes feel bad for the religious people in [his] classrooms.” His social location had opened his eyes to the “cultural contradiction” (Chase, 1995, p. 12) faced by students free to hold any faith at a public institution that were simultaneously not always free to discuss or experience that faith.

Ruhi (straight/senior/mathematics major originally from Pakistan) explored what for him were conflicting beliefs about gay marriage through a discussion he had with other students who had questioned why he would even care about the topic since they expressed to him that they felt no one in [Pakistan] had any rights:

As I said they were talking about gay marriages, and I was talking about why I'm not against homosexuality. I think it's people's choice, but a few people changing something which is fundamental, I don't think is right. Marriage should be between a woman and man....So, if they are to get married, we'll call it married. If they care so much for normal life, I mean normal life mean a man woman, that's majority. (Ruhi, 1, 20)

He continued exploration of the topic with the local Imam and other MSA students. The importance of such opportunities for Muslim students to connect with other Muslim students and to collectively examine specific aspects of Islam in a safe environment was

emphasized in Peek's (2005) research. Ruhi told of listening to a guest speaker who described himself as a former Christian who was now identifying as a gay Imam:

And, he was just trying to make everyone, he said, he was talking about how restrictive Muslim countries. I remember he said, they gay cannot express themselves sexually in society. And, one of [the other students] said, what you talking about? You talking about East? Nobody can express sex in Middle East. Nobody (laughs). (1, 22)

Ruhi went on to explain:

And, so, you won't just say about gay or um, or, even though heterosexual, no, that we can't, I mean, people don't have sex until they're married....That's the norm of the East....We don't until we're married. And, we still don't talk a lot about sex (small laugh). (1, 23)

Ruhi indicated that while he was “not against homosexuality,” when he considered same sex marriage, he did not “think [it] is right.” Yet, he then stated that he felt that “normal life mean a man, woman.” While acknowledging that Middle Eastern countries were more restrictive about sex outside of marriage or even discussion of sex, Ruhi was interrogating these issues as a straight male Muslim from Pakistan at the predominantly White and Christian Northern State. His privileged sexual and gender identities were intersecting with his salient religious and cultural identities as he negotiated challenges on these controversial issues.

He reported being similarly challenged on women's rights. A student asked him why he would care about the issue of gay marriage when in the Middle East no one had rights and that women were slaves. He countered with how two of his three sisters had bachelor's degrees. Because the intersections of his spirituality, politics, and culture differed from the predominant ones at Northern State, Ruhi very likely received more challenges to examine and explain his beliefs than did those students in spiritual, political, and cultural majorities. This may have accounted for why his answers to my

questions sometimes seemed practiced, as though he had had to be strategic in trying to help others understand the positives about his religion, explaining both what his religion was not and what it was (e.g., “I don’t know what west media say, is not right about Islam. That we don’t taught to kill anyone. We are teached to care each other” 1, 8).

Context played a critical role in an interaction Ruhi had with a former roommate. Before he was married, Ruhi lived in a Northern State residence hall. At one point, he and his roommate had a heated discussion which illustrated how Islam, culture, race, and politics were intertwined for him, as evidenced by his thoughts and actions:

Ruhi: Uh, I don’t know if you know, there were some sskk, sssk, sskk, sketches of prophet Muhammed [unintelligible] in the Swedish [media]/

TD: /Yeah, a few years ago/

Ruhi: And, I was talking to him about the why it was wrong, and [my roommate] said, oh, it’s freedom of speech. OK, if I have freedom of speech, then I can say anything? He said, yes, sure. So, to make my point, just to make my point (louder), I said Holocaust never happened.

TD: OK

Ruhi: And, you should have seen [my roommate]. He was jumping around the room, and he said, why would you say that? And, I said, you just said I have freedom of speech. And I said, I can say whatever I want. And he say, no, you shouldn’t say that. So, you said, I have freedom of speech. So, why you don’t go ask them why they are insulting the people....It’s a power, and you shouldn’t use power to hurt other people. I mean if I, he was really short, if I call you shorty, or if I call you, he was offended when I was reading Malcolm X. [My roommate] said [Malcolm X] call us, [my roommate] was White, and he said [Malcolm X] call us White devil. And, I said, if you are offended with this, think how much we are offended when there’s a cartoon of prophet with [unintelligible] bomb on his head? (Ruhi, 1, 13-14)

In this conversation with his roommate, Ruhi asserted that publishing the cartoon was an abuse of power used intentionally to hurt or offend a group of people and likened it to denying the Holocaust or Malcolm X’s use of the phrase White devil. He was attempting

to make visible for his roommate what was invisible, to lay bare how offensive it is for his religion (and specifically a prophet therein) to be denigrated when it also represents the religion of his Pakistani culture of origin, his past and present cultures of worship, and his culture's larger political and historical tensions with Israel. He was seeking and composing meaning – what was important or significant about this - by comparing and interpreting notions based on the intersectionality of his particular social categories.

Stacy (straight/White/junior/female triple majoring in psychology, speech communication and English writing) also sorted through potentially controversial issues using primarily the lens of her faith tradition. However, like Ruhi, she alluded to how other college students who knew of her faith tradition, Catholicism, made assumptions about the reasons underlying her stance:

Yeah, you know, if there is a discussion about gay marriage or something like that, as a Catholic, I am against gay marriage, but I am not against someone who is homosexual. I know plenty of people who are, and I do not treat them differently than anyone else, and I have religious reasons to be against gay marriage. But, it is not a bigotry thing, but the assumption is that it is. (Stacy, 1, 9)

Stacy was reconciling this issue by adopting the Catholic Church's stance of distinguishing between the person and the action (Davidson, 2000).

For Trace (bisexual/White/sophomore/geology major), the issue of gay marriage and the actions of a controversial Baptist church often in the news actually served as catalysts for his coming out and examination of gay marriage:

Um, so I was like, what is going on? Like, why are they doing this? It is people who love each other. It is nothing to be really afraid of. And, so recently I came out to my parents that I was bi, 'cause I had a phase when I was, so I was gay, and I was kind of rethinking myself through that phase. And, actually, I still like women. So, I will stay bi. So, it was hearing people like, 'God does not like this,' mostly from, I don't know, specifically from [the controversial Baptist church] like those people....and so I was like, this is not something that needs to

be fought about. Like, they love each other. Let them live their lives. [The people representing the church] are not literally in [the gay or lesbian couple's] house and getting married. So, that issue kind of helped me shape my opinions and stuff. (Trace, 1, 7)

Trace examined the issue from multiple angles including how religious and legal issues might overlap.

Like once everything calms down and people just say, OK, we will accept it, like how New York did their law, they protected the priests and stuff from like being sued from doing a gay marriage...Like religion is not really a good argument to block the marriage thing. It is like, I understand that somewhere in the Bible it says that man should not sleep with man, but if you took the Bible, took the Bible so literally, it says a bunch of other stuff like women, I think, can, they should be more of a home person. They shouldn't be working and all. But, so, like why are people doing this? They are picking and choosing what to fight about, and like it is a separation from religion and state. The state is the one who gives that marriage license. (Trace, 1, 7-8)

He reported being alienated from some topics, because he felt the arguments were often senseless. For example, he was somewhat alienated by an anti-abortion protestor who had set up posters in the quad one day and was speaking to passersby. While he felt bad that other students were yelling at the man, he felt that the man was pushing his own religion and acting like God: "I was like, you are not God; no one is God, and no one knows what He believes or what He thinks" (Trace, 1, 19). While Trace felt it was a woman's choice, he was concerned if the fetus felt anything, but summarized by saying that, "they have the rule like you can't abort it after a certain tri-semester, I think, like I believe that is OK" (1, 19). Again, he used multiple lenses to consider the topic – bioethics, religion, and law, with the law (the importance of law and order) trumping the others in his decision making.

Keisha (straight/African-American/female/junior majoring in sociology) shared Trace's belief that abortion was a woman's choice and, as such, faced criticism from peers at college who made assumptions about what a Baptist should believe:

...some things, like abortion, is always a hot topic, and I am pro-choice, so I feel it is up to the person, and that probably sounds horrible. Some kids might think that I am a hypocrite for saying that, but I feel that if it was not meant to be, it won't be.... (Keisha, 1, 18)

She clarified by explaining that the Bible would say one should not kill, but as a believer in pre-destiny, if a woman was pre-destined to not have a child, "At the end of the day, it is in God's hands" (3, 1), meaning all things - whether a child is born or whether one has a nice or difficult life - are in God's hands. Keisha had internally negotiated this terrain and though it caused some tension when she considered others might accuse her of renouncing what she "should" believe as a Baptist, using the tenet of pre-destiny she had reached a conclusion of pro-choice on this controversial issue.

Carl (male/White/junior/history and philosophy double major/unspecified sexual orientation), who tried to make sense of things cerebrally, that is, weighing arguments in a rational manner, was drawn to learning about religion and related controversial topics: "...I guess I want to know their thought processes and how they got from a, b, c, beliefs to like picketing funerals of dead soldiers or...Islamists blowing themselves up with bombs or anything of that nature" (Carl, 1, 5). He came to the conclusion that others can hold any belief they wish, but took umbrage with the way others sometimes applied those beliefs. He felt that everyone deserved freedom of speech, and he was drawn to studying extremists but did not want to be the one to challenge them, as he felt it was pointless, because such individuals often repeat formulaic arguments. Yet, he was concerned that if no one did challenge those with what he referred to as extremist beliefs, they were going

to go “unchecked.” He also cited the example of the man who had set up posters in the quad to protest abortion and homosexuality:

We had him last year, and he was an Evangelical Christian come on campus...I tried to talk to him a couple of times, but I guess I got my hopes up. I guess I expected somebody like, which I thought [would have] well-reasoned arguments. And, I talked to him, and I found out it was the same old cookie-cutter, typical...that you watch [on] debates or something. And, it was nothing new. (Carl, 1, 11)

Overall, however, he tried to “hear both sides and be neutral before figuring out what position...to take” (1, 13). When I asked him how he made decisions about such topics, he responded, “I would definitely say that I am a science guy” (1, 12). Carl looked to science as the authority by which to parse controversial issues.

Banca (straight/White/first-year/female art studio major) rejected scientific explanations. She expressed an inerrant, literal belief in the Bible and used scripture for guidance in negotiating controversial issues, especially regarding casual sex. Since being raped, she had chosen to be celibate or “chaste” which she described as meaning, “you don’t have sex until marriage and when you are married, you have sex the way God intended you to have” (Banca, 1, 2), that is, heterosexual, vaginal/penile intercourse. Banca was drawing upon her traumatic experience and her understanding of the Bible – at the intersection of her spiritual and sexual identities - for direction in how she made decisions about her own and others’ sexual practices.

She shared her beliefs about chastity by a poem she copied onto her residence hall door white board:

Um, well, I used to have a board on my door that had Bible quotes on it. I mean it didn’t have quotes, but I wrote Bible quotes every day on it. And, um, someone wrote, I wrote a Bible quote once and I wrote a poem. And, it was about, um, you’re a vir, um, being a virgin. And, because I was raped, I wrote, I felt like I wanted to show that it’s OK if you’ve had sex before. I didn’t say rape, but it’s

OK if you've had sex before. You can always ask God to forgive you. And, He will, if you want your virginity back, then He'll give it back to you. And, it was about like a rose, a precious rose and how beautiful it is to have like this rose and, um, I have like this analogy that has to do with, um, that has to do with sex, like not sex, like has to do with like you vir, your virginity. And, you have this beautiful rose. And, imagine every time someone, every time you had sex with someone, that your petals would fall off. Like who, what are you going to give your husband? What do you want to give your husband: Do you want to give him a beautiful rose, whole and elegant, or do you want to give him the stem? Yeah, um, and I feel like, I always feel the need to express not in harmful, harm, harmful way but just not, like express myself because I feel like maybe one person might read it... (Banca 1, 12)

A hall mate responded to Banca's posting with a portion of a Bible quote. Banca's boyfriend subsequently wrote the remaining portion of the Bible verse, adding the admonition to write and study entire Bible verses in order to accurately understand what they mean. Banca later saw the hall mate ripping the board off her door: "And, I don't have anything on my door anymore (exhaling laugh). Um, so they're very hostile" (1, 13). Banca saw the student's actions as evidence of a lack of religiosity:

She claimed that she was really, really Christian and that she loves God and that, you know, she lives for God. But, she doesn't really live for God if she is doing that...I knew she wasn't that religious because of her personality type 'cause I like to analyze people, cause it's fun and figure out who they are...and I knew she would do something like that. I knew someone like her, and she claims to be very religious, but she's really not that religious. But, um, the people in this school really aren't. (Banca, 1, 13)

Banca gave no thought to other possible explanations for the student's behavior, such as a Christian who behaved poorly in that instance, and instead tied the student's rude behavior to not being Christian. She was beginning to examine her own beliefs but not critically and, as this story illustrated, could not step outside of those beliefs to give much consideration to or to integrate others' beliefs, even those of another Christian. She negotiated college life and the parsing of controversies with a nearly unexamined acceptance of Catholicism and biblical inerrancy. She was hopeful that navigating

everyday life at the Catholic college to which she was transferring might offer fewer tense spaces.

This section described the ways in which some students used their worldview or the tenets of their faith as a means of making sense of the world and as a compass for making decisions about controversial issues. Lessons learned from faith traditions and spiritual exploration directly influenced other components of identity and daily life.

Inside the Classroom

What was it like for students at Northern State who wished within the classroom setting to navigate the topics of spirituality, religion, or meaning and purpose in life? Did they feel that classroom spaces were generally conducive to free discussion of faith or worldview and how it relates to controversial issues? This final section documents how a number of students drew upon their spirituality to contribute to or process classroom discussions on topics related to worldview, topics at times disputed.

Some students were not interested in visiting spiritual or religious concepts in the classroom. Zeke (straight/White/junior/male fine arts major) did not see the point of such a discussion, believing such matters for introspection not communal dissection unless in courses specifically dealing with the topic: “I think if I were to do that, I would be a different major. Um, any academic pursuit of religion I ever wanted or do want, is something I do on my own” (Zeke, 1, 20), such as his study of Kabbalah and meditation. Daniel (White/junior/male/fine arts education major/unspecified sexual orientation) felt that instructors did not wish the topic of religion to enter into classroom discussions, stating that it “is not taboo; you just don’t talk about it” (Daniel, 1, 15). Josie (female/senior/interdisciplinary major identifying as Hispanic and White/unspecified

sexual orientation) pointedly reported that the classroom was a place for discussion of facts, not beliefs, and characterized the college classroom as predominantly atheist:

...it's funny, because when you're in college, the, the sort of mainstream belief system is atheism....It's, it's just that's how it is....You just kind of take it that this room is sort of a facts are facts, that's the end of story. We don't argue them. Um, that would be done somewhere else, you know. Some sort of debate if you want to somewhere else, but not in the classroom. Classroom, you take what the professor's telling you, you don't question it because of your morals or your, your belief system, you just take what he says and that's what you go by....there's always critical thinking in class, but not based on beliefs....That doesn't come in. Based on what you think, you know I, I heard this might have happened or this is a fact or this might be right. You can argue that, you know. You can argue political, uh, feelings in a politics class, but stuff based on religious beliefs generally just kept very personal. They're not, not in the classroom. (Josie, 1, 18)

Josie perceived her public college classroom as excluding discussion of any and all spiritual expression. Her comments reflected Astin, Astin, and Lindholm's (2011) claim that secular institutions provide a de facto positivistic, atheistic perspective that may discourage students' exploration of spiritual concerns even when germane to content. Others, like Amy (straight/White/sophomore/female/childhood education major) suggested that it happened but under controlled circumstances: "...the teacher will specifically probably have a conversation about religion and a debate about religion, or they don't want to get into it at all. And, so they'll ask nobody to head in that direction" (Amy, 2, 7).

Amy and Selah (straight/junior/female/childhood education major/White) agreed that instructors not wishing to tackle the subject of religion or spirituality purposefully steered the class away or discouraged it. Selah reported that a friend told her how she had actually discussed the phenomenon with an instructor:

I am thinking about another teacher on campus, and one of my friends was talking to him and how he shuts down those types of topics completely. He, he used to be Catholic, but now he doesn't believe in anything, I think she said. She has a

really hard time talking in that class, and she fears for her grades, because she wants to get good grades. She is in the teaching program, too. She, just like with me in that one [literature] class, do want to get good grades but also want to be able to speak my mind about different topics. But, I think that I would rather lay low about topics like [abortion] especially in that class. (Selah, 1, 11)

Selah had concluded that while she wished to share her opinion in class about topics based on her spiritual beliefs, she would not do so, as she feared it would cause an instructor not sharing her belief to lower her grade as a result. Amy described an experience in freshman Biology in which the instructor cautioned students that if they entertained serious doubts about the legitimacy of evolutionary theory they should probably not take the course:

...the professor said in the beginning, we're gonna talk a lot about evolution and, um, just gonna say this off the bat. If you don't believe in evolution, you really don't belong in this class, because it's pretty much true. You can say it's a theory, but there's really nothing to go against it, so, I was like, interesting, because I have to take this class for my Education requirement. But, I don't agree with you. (Amy, 1, 9)

Discussion of this polemical issue could monopolize class time, so a firm statement from the instructor as to the parameters of acceptable exploration of the topic would seem reasonable; yet, Amy felt that she was told her beliefs were not valid and could not be explored. She remained in the class because it was a requirement.

In English, Amy took the opportunity to approach the instructor after class regarding what she felt was the instructor's misinformation:

...[the instructor] decided that for the background of this poem we're reading she was gonna explain the principles of the Christian faith, but she was kind of misinformed. She was like giving all these definitions to words like, words like grace and, you know, um, sanctification or whatever. She was like giving these like skewed definitions, and I was like watching the entire class just like, you know, taking these things down in their notes and not asking anything, and I was like just sitting there going, ahhh, I should say something, but she's moving on (laughs). (Amy, 1, 9)

When pressed, it seemed Amy was reluctant to express her views in front of the class:

Amy: Because, I mean, I have like talked to people I know, who aren't Christians, about what I believe as a Christian. But, doing it in front of a large group of people is just a little bit more daunting (exhaling laugh) to me, because it's almost like, you know 25 to 1 kind of deal? Like (exhaling laugh), I would be fine with it if I were prepared for it and I had time to kind of just mentally prepare for it. But, um, you know, ah, just unprepared coming up talking and then having people ask me questions – that's just very nerve wracking to me (laughs).

TD: 25 to 1

Amy: Like the, the class against me kind of thing. Like.

TD: So, you would perceive it as kind of they'd be against you?

Amy: Yeah, in general I don't really expect there to be a lot of people in my classes that share the same view as me [what she believes in as "principles of the Christian Faith," e.g., definition of grace or sanctification]. (Amy, 1, 11)

Amy waited until after class to seek clarification on the definitions. Assuming a lack of tolerance from classmates, she feared approaching the issue during class would have required her to be the sole representative or spokesperson for the "Christian faith," a minority position in that particular space that she was not ready to defend. While Amy drew upon her spirituality to consider the topic, she felt neither Christian privilege (Seifert, 2007) nor empowered to express her views in the classroom. However, because her spiritual identity was invisible, she had the privilege of not revealing it.

Azzam wanted to bring up a number of things in his geology class, a course in which the "main gist of the class is evolution" (Azzam, 3, 9):

Azzam: And, every day having so many challenging points that you want to bring up, but you know that your professor is one of the individuals that will say religion is for the time when humans just need something to believe in.

TD: The person said that or you just think that they would?

Azzam: Oh, no. They [the instructor] believe this.

TD: How do you know?

Azzam: There is a poster on her wall. There are many examples I can use. [The instructor] said when religion ruled the world, it was called the Dark Ages. So, if you are thinking about Medieval Europe, the problem is is maybe she isn't too good with geography simply because if you looked to the left of that, the left and the south, oh actually southern area, North Africa, Middle East span at that time, this is the time of the Islamic Golden Age. Ok, now I know that is going towards Islamic and what not, I know, but this is actually true....At this time, this was the fastest growing empire, OK, it ruled Cordoba which is in Spain for 800 years. In this time, there had been extreme scientific advances, religious advances, and they worked together in harmony.

TD: Not so dark

Azzam: Not so dark after all, actually. But, of course, who wants to know about the Muslims? You see, now, I don't know if she herself was, you know, trying to cloud the area. But, a lot of scientists would follow the Marxist idea that religion is the opium of the people (3, 9)

He went on to describe how the professor had used the strengthening of diseases over time as an example of evolution. Because people did not still take the same medications they took for the lesser strains decades ago, ergo, society also "believed" in the evolution of disease. To Azzam, she was, "Basically saying, if you do not follow what I believe, you are a complete, blind idiot who would not use technological advancements" (Azzam, 3, 10). He entertained a counter argument in his head but struggled with not wanting to "embarrass her in the classroom [or] take time away from her" (3, 10), so he approached her after class. Part of his explanation to her involved revealing that he was "not a stern believer in evolution" (3, 11) at which point he indicated that her face changed "and for the rest of the semester it was like hell....I felt like there was a targeted animosity towards me" (3, 11). Later in the semester, Azzam questioned the instructor about why an entity kept the genesis name if it came from a different area. She indicated that she had told the class already, and he felt that she

demeaned him in front of the class but that it was she who looked ignorant, because “the whole class was looking at her like you didn’t teach us this yet” (Azzam, 3, 12).

Azzam was excited to be the first scientist in his family and exclaimed his love of science. However, he was simultaneously trying to balance the intersection of his spirituality, culture, and role as scientist, accepting notions such as disease strains strengthening over time but rejecting others: “Now I have a problem when a person starts saying that we came from monkeys, fish, or what not” (Azzam, 3, 13). Exploring how he could reconcile competing notions, he concluded, “But, rather I say it is religion and science together. It is not separating paths” (3, 11), a conclusion consistent with Bryant’s (2006) finding that Muslim students at times attempted to see science and religion as collaborative though often perceived conflict. Part of this exploration was a budding critical view of the information authorities were dispensing:

You see they will make you think what they want you to think. I am not saying that they are purposely trying to brainwash us. No, I am not saying that at all. I am saying as a student that in order for us to find new things in the world and for us to even benefit the world even more, we are most likely going to need to find faults in most everything that they are teaching so we can better it. (Azzam, 3, 14)

Azzam was beginning to understand that his professors’ intentions were not to brainwash but to prompt him to undertake critical thinking by challenging his assumptions. When his spiritual, cultural, and student identities collided in the classroom, he was beginning to attempt to see where he could find congruence.

Isaiah (straight/African-American/male/graduate student majoring English/communication) talked about his impression of both instructors’ and classmates’ reluctance to navigate the topic of religion or spirituality. For example, in his view, historical accounts that ignore the contributions of a people are spiritually or morally

wrong in their exclusion; but, when he had attempted to explain this concept in classes, he felt his point was minimized by both students and instructors. Most classes, he pointed out, were:

...supposed to be empirical or, um, rational [and] when you try to come from an area in religion and/or spirituality it's not really, it doesn't count. If I want to talk about how, um, the first people to circumnavigate the globe weren't European or if I want to talk about the Spanish Moors helped with art and science in Spain and the reason why they are not represented in academia, it is because there is a problem. There is kinda a spiritual or moral problem with why certain people are treated...If I talk about the moral or spiritual backing and that is the reason why I think that is being done, that is kinda like, well, I don't know about that.

TD: We are not going there.

Isaiah: Yeah, we shouldn't.

TD: Is this the teacher talking or your fellow students?

Isaiah: The fellow students.

TD: The fellow students.

Isaiah: Even with professors, you can see, it may not be an actual verbal remark that displays but you can see that attitude is kinda withdrawn. ...I have witnessed, if anything, withdrawal kinda like an attitude of negligence when it comes to doing it in an academic classroom setting. (Isaiah, 1, 11)

Isaiah concluded:

...in academic spheres...there is an inclination to want to be politically correct and the politically correct thing would be for you to not mention anything religious because you do not want to offend anybody else that is in the room and logistically, I don't see how that would offend people. For you to mention, like, just because I consider myself Christian, it does not make me anti-Islam, it does not make me anti-Hindu...By mentioning those things, it shouldn't offend me. (1, 14)

As mentioned earlier, Isaiah worked to have "a high amount of patience when it comes to hearing other people's views (Isaiah, 2, 7) and was ready to transcend fear of offense in

search of a more comprehensive study available when considering the “moral or spiritual backing” (1, 11) for why something happened in history.

Dante (African-American/sophomore/male majoring in literature/writing/unspecified sexual orientation) pointed out that those professors at Northern State venturing into spirituality or religion in classroom discussions tried not to exclude students of any worldview, that they did “a great job at not leaving any group out” (Dante 2, 9). However, he simultaneously felt that those professors who might belong to a faith tradition or would describe themselves as spiritual shied away from committing verbally to it in the classroom. He gave the example of his communication professor, one who Dante described as a “firm believer in God and a Baptist” (Dante 2, 10), who would:

...often include religion in the discussion...he will say something and catch himself. But what bothers me sometimes is that he will not let it stand as what it was...he knows that he said it because [it represented] what God has done for him and how God made him feel and what he actually truly felt. He will tie it back into the lesson. He will sugar-coat it in a way of saying, well different cultures believe this and different religions believe that, and you have to take that into consideration. That is the basic of the lesson but he will try and sugar-coat it once he realizes that he has gotten a few looks and when he gets a few objections and hands raised....I mean, that is the professional thing to do when in writing papers and your personal opinion over facts and details are less important but yeah, it kind of bothers me sometimes. (Dante, 2, 11)

Dante was struggling with how his personal, spiritual beliefs could co-exist with what he had learned as the “professional thing to do.” He observed that the professor would strive to ensure that his comments were germane to the lesson but felt that that the professor’s attempt to be inclusive belied his true beliefs as a Baptist who believed in God and was a response to a few “looks” or “objections” from other students. However, unlike Isaiah,

Dante may not have been interested in examining multiple spiritual or moral considerations for events and actions.

Dante provided some examples to illustrate how he used the tenets of his faith tradition to inform his opinions and decisions about potentially controversial issues in class, noting how they inevitably entered into how he construed meaning:

...we had a discussion about abortion, we had a discussion about the difference between plain sex and sex with commitment, and we had a discussion about, um, people paying people for organs and people just donating them. We had a discussion about a lot of topics like that. There is no, because I am a Christian and because I am spiritual, both aspects, my religion being as strict as it is, and having so much information that it is basically packed into your head as a child, so, now, and the spiritual side of me that has made a connection with God, there is no way that I can hide it. It just comes out where I have to say no, there is no way that someone should buy an organ. From God, I gave you that organ. You cannot put a price on it and sell it to someone else. There is no reason why you should just have to have sex without commitment. It is meant to be making love to someone or even the Bible says it's just a matter of procreating and if it is not happening, if it is happening without the purpose of procreating or having, or being in love, then it is pointless. And, to have that view amongst college students (laughter) is the most [complex and difficult] thing in the classroom. (Dante, 2, 10)

The religion that is “packed into your head as a child” had for Dante greatly influenced how he made decisions on controversial issues such as casual sex or organ donation, even when it meant holding an opinion unlike that of what he perceived was held by most of his peers in the classroom (e.g., his view of sex only as means of procreation and/or product of being in a committed, loving relationship). In his Baptist faith tradition, “what you are born with is what you are supposed to die with” (Dante, 2, 25). Because your body is a gift from God, giving or selling it to someone else would resemble robbery or putting a price on something that God gave you. Another classmate who Dante described as vocal about having an atheist worldview opined that God did not give people

their bodies, but, instead, their mothers did, and she felt every person should have a right to have a say in the matter. Dante related what he called his rebuttal:

...and I did not want it to be a combative situation to disrupt the classroom, and my response back was...it is a matter of you being able to control your own body, but if you had religion of any sort, if you cherish your body you had and not think of it so freely and that was kind of the end of the conversation.... (Dante, 2, 25)

Dante indicated that he respected her opinion and even her delivery, as he said that while she was “not timid,” he understood her interest in asserting her opinion; he was equally forceful in vocalizing his:

She is an enforcer, and I don’t blame her, because I am a Christian, and I am an enforcer, as well. She believes, and she is a very opinionated person. She is articulate in what she has an opinion about, and so she is just not spewing out hate terms and stuff like that; she has a viewpoint.... (Dante, 2, 12)

Not all classmates abided by the unspoken guidelines to not be disruptive or disrespectful, however. He reported that they would challenge him as to how he could be so naïve or childlike to believe in a God who heals or responds: “There are some who are very harsh” (2, 12). These challenges allowed him to consider the differences in his life and theirs, concluding primarily that if those individuals had God in their lives, they would be more peaceful, less focused on the negative: “You wouldn’t think about half the things, not only would you not think about it, but you [would] have your answer” (2, 13).

When speaking in the classroom, Keshia (straight/African-American/female/junior majoring in sociology) had learned that when presenting her viewpoints, other students were more likely to listen to her if she presented the bare facts of her view first and followed with an explanation of how those views were grounded in her religion or spirituality. For example, when discussing why it was wrong to kill

someone, she would say that it was wrong to kill someone but then would probe: “Tell me why? Why is that how things are? Do you know how things are? Do you know where that came from?” (Keisha, 1, 18) That is, she would point out that “there are some things that are the same in most religions, like the commandments” (1, 18) and would explain that there are principles underlying the laws and social conscriptions against killing another person and that she followed the Christian commandment to not kill. Done this way, she had observed that classmates were not only more likely to listen to her and less likely to be “harsh” as Dante lamented, they often added to her points.

She had enjoyed how the veteran professor in her biomedical ethics course had, in her view, deftly played the devil’s advocate, allowing students to explore relevant topics and to learn to understand that how they viewed those topics depended on and were inextricable from their worldviews: “We talked about religion a lot throughout the whole class, because ethical issues always go hand-in-hand with how you see yourself in the world and that kind of thing” (Keisha, 1, 20).

Yet, Keisha vented her frustration about what she perceived as the lack of receptiveness of her fellow students in a sociology class to her viewpoints. In a discussion about Weber, one student was making the case in a “very extreme” manner that the world was all about materialism, and religion did not matter at all anymore. She did not feel safe to discuss her religious views in that class:

Keisha: ...so, it is so hard when they down religion because they do not believe or things like that. Honestly, when I disagree with something, I try to be like, you know, sympathetic towards other people, but sometimes, at least in my experience, in my favorite class this semester, people are just very rude, very rude and just (trails off)

TD: So, they are rude to you or to the teacher?

Keisha: Um, I would say very rude to anyone who has a belief in a religion....
(Keisha, 1, 17)

Even if she presented her basic premise first, she had learned in all classes to not follow up with the spiritual foundation for her viewpoint unless she knew that the classroom environment would not be disrespectful of her beliefs.

Because Banca (straight/White/first-year/female/art studio major) was very forthcoming in her opinions, she often experienced a sharp lack of acceptance of her viewpoints. She would have agreed with Josie (albeit for very different reasons) and Astin, Astin and Lindholm (2011) that public colleges operated from and had a de facto positivistic, atheistic climate. Banca stated that she did not like “state schools because they’re not religious. They’re not at all. They’re very, very atheist” (Banca, 1, 4). However, Banca might have been interpreting atheism more broadly, for example, than adherence to rational empiricism but, instead, as any viewpoint not aligned with her born again, Catholic beliefs. For instance, Banca said that instructors at public colleges said what she deemed were atheistic or “anti-God” (1, 10) things such as, “Christians think gays are going to hell” (1, 10). She was looking forward to attending a Catholic college where she felt she would experience a climate change; that is, she felt that public colleges taught things based on the changing ethics and morals of society whereas a Catholic college could offer teachings based on Catholic doctrine and what she believed to be the unchanging principles of the Bible:

I feel like you’d get a better education at a school that...teaches God, ‘cause they teach you about everything. ‘Cause [Northern State] is just like, it’s OK, you can do this, this and that. But, what are you basing this [do] anything [you want] on? You’re basing it on society? Society changes. (Banca 1, 15)

She offered the following example about evolution as explanation of how she planned to approach her learning in the future:

I already know. I've done my own research. I already know that evolution is not real. Also, if you believe in God, there isn't anything else. Like, there's nothing else. It's like, it's not very nice to say that you're right, but Christians are right. They've found God. They, if they believe in God and Jesus Christ, and you've accepted God as Jesus as your savior [who] has died for your sins and you accept all these things...we already know that we, we're right. And, I know it. And, like even though you might not believe me, I won't tell you that I'm right, but, um, I know that I'm right. So, learning about evolution doesn't phase me. I already know about evolution. I've researched it. I know all the debates about it 'cause I debate a lot, 'cause I like debating. I'm very pro-life, so I debate that and also evolution. And, you can get, if you want, you can get the [research] to learn that a school teaches you false things. Um, it's like when they talk about evolution in high school. I went to public high school, so they talked about evolution and like it was fact. Evolution's been proven wrong so many times, and I know that it's wrong, because I've done my own research, a lot of research. That's how I know it's been proven wrong. But, you don't need to learn about these things that are false. Um, what's the point of going to a school that teaches you false things? (1, 14-15)

From what she has learned as a Christian and what she has researched, Banca was certain that her understanding of evolution was right and she did not wish to consider other viewpoints. Broadly, Banca reasoned in a manner reflective of Perry's (1970) dualistic scheme and was not comfortable with different points of view. Unlike what she expected to encounter at the Catholic college, she described an English classroom conversation at Northern State about casual or pre-marital sex:

And, they'll say, if I said like you shouldn't have sex until marriage 'cause, um, if you have it, then especially girls 'cause I just like have so much passion towards females. I really think that they should not have sex until they're married. Guys, or course, I believe too. But, I just, I wanna help girls. And, I'm not gonna say it in a way that will offend them, but I want them to realize that they have a special gift. They have a special rose, and when I say these things, um, they just like [say], I don't disrespect [my body]. You're saying that I'm disrespecting my body, and I have perfect respect for my body. And, I'm like, you're sitting there talking about giving blow jobs in class and that you think it's fine, and you're explaining how you do it, and I'm like you shouldn't be doing that. Like you shouldn't be doing that, anyway, I don't think, but, um, especially like you can sit

around and talk about it like it's a normal thing. You shouldn't do that. Do you know how disrespectful that is to your body and um, and how you're really used? (Banca, 1, 7)

Banca wanted to talk about religion in the classroom, because being born again meant more than having God in your heart; it meant:

You have to show and help people, because that's so important. And, I can, if I, if it means talking about God in the classroom where they're all atheists, maybe one person sort of thinks about it later. Not that they will necessarily become Christian, but they'll just think about like maybe, maybe that girl in that class was right. And, I've done my job. (1, 6)

Showing and helping people, for Banca, constituted talking about God and referring directly to the Bible and what she gleaned from it; showing and helping people did not necessarily include caring or helpful actions or thoughts. Banca felt that expressing her views would demonstrate her care for others.

Banca did feel that religious matters were discussed in her English class but not in a way she believed appropriate, such as talking about God and referring directly to the Bible and what she gleaned from it. She did not hesitate to state her opinions and, while she described a classroom forum that often explored religion, to her it in no way appeared inviting or accepting of any variance of opinion or belief regarding religious or spiritual issues or, at least, of her religious views. Further, she felt that religious matters were discussed with little genuine interest in any opinions diverging from those held by the instructor and the majority of her classmates:

TD: Have you ever talked about your religious beliefs in the classroom?

Banca: Oh, yes I have. I always do. Um, well in art class not as much because they're very, very hostile. Um, like my English class, they talk about God all the time. And, um, I just, it's mostly about God and morality aspect....because he brings up religious, religion a lot in the classroom...my English professor. And, um, it's, when I speak, um, there's really, sometimes there's one other person that agrees with me, but not really on rel, religious aspects, on a moral aspect. Um, but

the, the rest of the class is just very hostile, but I say it anyway, because somebody has to disagree.

TD: What do they do that's hostile?

Banca: Um, well, they just think that, they think God and Christianity and religion are the root of all evil. (Banca, 1, 7)

I asked Banca what the other students did or said that led her to believe that they thought religion was the "root of all evil." To answer, she spoke of an instance in art class in which she had cried because of what some other students said such as "burn the Bible" and "God is evil." She related how one student was talking about the Book of Mormon one day: "Mormons, Christians, idiots, and, he goes, assholes" (1, 9).

She related an incident that had taken place in another class in which the instructor provided a(n intentional or unintentional) forum to discuss pre-marital sex and same-sex marriage:

...we were talking about having sex and sex and, um, I said I'd like a comment for the straight people in the world, I guess. I was just like saying it in general. I was like sex is for marriage. It was just a comment. You know what I mean? It was just like a joke around comment, cause everyone was commenting....And, um, [the professor] was like, sex is for marriage, just guys, like in a joking way. Like he's gay, and he says that he's gay. And, he's just like, oh, I guess I can't have, um, get married then because the, I'm not married. Guess I can't get married then because Christians think that, you know, gays are going to hell and this and that and all this stuff. And, I never said that, and I never would say that and if they say because God said to not judge people. You know, you could say that the Bible says, a man shall not lay, um, with a man the way a man lies with a woman and the only person a man lies with is his wife. So, therefore, the Bible says that gays, two males or two men, cause it applies to females as well, should not be together. Um, and I was just like, that's what it says. I'm not gonna tell you any more than that. I can say, this is what it says. Just stating the facts. Just stating what it says and that's it. (Banca, 1, 10)

Banca made what she defended to me as a "joking" comment about sex being only for marriage, but because it reflected her beliefs not shared by several others, she felt discomfort when her beliefs were challenged.

Banca described her reasons for speaking even when she felt others may have not agreed with or appreciated (and may even have felt hurt by) her observations:

I think everyone should be, should accept God, that God is the way. God is the light. God is amazing. And, um, I think everyone should, but not everyone is going to. And, that's OK if you don't. I'm not gonna judge you for that 'cause you're not supposed to judge people for that. And, um, I don't think it's right, either. But, um, if you start disrespecting me and my faith, disrespecting God when I haven't done anything to hurt you, um, I haven't said anything to hurt you, He's never said anything to hurt you, then I'm just, I feel the need to defend Him 'cause God says in the Bible that we'll be persecuted. That we will go through hardships, but we have to stand up and fight for what we believe in. And fight for God. Because, He won't fight for Himself. He waits for us to fight for Him. And, it is so important and I, why wouldn't you want to stand up and fight, not fight physically but, and argue, debate for like the most important person in your life....I know people don't do it 'cause they're shy or they're afraid of what will happen (pitch rises slightly). But, um, I think you should. (Banca, 1, 8)

I asked Banca what it would mean if she or others would “stand up and fight” for their religious beliefs in class. Reiterating how the students' hostility toward God and the Bible in her art class had brought her to tears, she indicated that she felt she could no longer defend her views in some classes:

And they know I don't defend myself anymore. Like, I do if they over-do it. But, um, I keep quiet mostly, which I think you'll find a lot in the public schools. The Christians and Catholics, they'll, uh, Christians, you'll most likely find a lot of them just keep quiet 'cause that's really what they do. They keep to themselves. (1, 9)

Banca was employing her religion and spirituality to negotiate what she perceived as hostile territory, torn between trying to “go and make disciples” and exiting the university for one she hoped would provide devout Catholics of whom she could be a disciple. Her degree of cognitive dissonance was so severe and her ability to manage it so limited (and unsupported) that it prompted her withdrawal from the university.

Evan (gay/White/male/senior politics major), who described himself as agnostic and searching, underscored the notion of tension around specifically what was perceived as Christian discourse in the classroom:

...like I said, in a college classroom, you should be really careful about like announcing if you're like a Christian or, or any of that stuff in a class, because a lot of people I think will kind of give you a look like (shows disdainful face). (Evan, 2, 13).

Evan had embraced the concept of spirituality after his alienation in Europe, but he differentiated between announcing oneself as spiritual versus Christian (or one who believes in God) when in the classroom, indicating that the former might not bring about as much resistance:

...if I said I, I'm a spiritual person, if I said to the class what I said to you, I feel like it really wouldn't be like, people would say, oh, what a terrible thing. But, if I were to go, if I were to announce to the class that I believe in God, like people would go after me kinda for that. And, then, I've seen it actually happen in class before. (Evan, 1, 15)

Evan provided an example of a time in class when one student criticized another:

Um, we were actually talking about Marx and his idea of religion and whether it divides people and if it's the opium of the masses and all that. And, then [Lori] said, well like I believe in God and all this, and I don't feel...that's...hurting humanity in any way or like I'm dividing [people] because I have this view. It's not going to affect anyone else. And, then [Crystal] who I know is atheist, she said, why did you have to announce that even. I don't really think that was necessary to announce. And, [Crystal] said that [Lori]...saying that she was a Christian made it sound like only Christians believe that or like Muslims or Jews didn't believe [in not dividing people]. Or, like you could have just said that you believe in God. So, [Crystal] was criticizing [Lori] for that. (Evan, 1, 16)

Evan felt that Crystal may have been critical of Lori's comment because Lori had stated she was a Christian which, he believed, generated resistance in the classroom as opposed to stating one was spiritual. In two different interviews, Evan described not only a

classroom but a generation scornful of any profession of belief in God or adherence to the Christian faith, explaining it as a result of disillusionment with the Religious Right:

...when you do say you believe in God or any of that, people automatically associate you with at least the far Right and like in my classrooms and like if you say you believe in God, I think people then assume or if you say if you're, I believe in God, and I'm a Christian, and I'm a proud Christian, people automatically assume oh this person must be pro-life and anti-gay marriage and must also like support like, these, these sorts of ideas. And, that I think makes people angry, because my generation, I think, is more open about some of those topics. (Evan, 1, 16)

...there's this mindset among like my generation, people who grew up under George Bush era, that you associate religious people with people who are like, kinda like idiots like (small laugh). I mean, like a lot of people are really like disillusioned with like the, the Right in the U.S. I feel, like at least my age. [unintelligible]. And, we kind of look at it like if you're religious, oh you're probably one of those type of people who are shoving it down your throat. It's sad, 'cause that's a stereotype, and it's an image, but it's an image that sadly like holds a lot of, like, a lot of people's minds.... (Evan, 2, 12)

He posited that it was the “mindset among” his generation to stereotype “religious people” as being “idiots,” as believing incorrectly about a number of controversial social issues (gay marriage), and as vociferously and belligerently “shoving” those views down others’ throats.

Still, being gay, Evan had significant experience being the one shunned, a victim at times of stereotyping which he summarized as “bullshit” and “discrimination. He commented on its application to those holding religious beliefs:

...I do sometimes feel bad for the religious people in my classrooms (pitch rises slightly), 'cause, I can't help but feel that they must feel like they're a minority. Because...the view teachers [express] in college and the classrooms sometimes really does seem to contradict the idea of religion itself. (Evan, 1, 14)

But, he noted what he deemed would be the time-consuming task of explaining to someone his social location, that is, that he might be a gay, liberal member of a civic

religion. It was a political ideas class that allowed him to explore some of his concerns about the Bible:

Evan: ...when you're gay, you have to kind of really be critical of the Bible, because a lot of people will throw that in your face and say like well, you can say whatever you want, but you can't, you know, you can't escape the eyes of God and the justice of God. And, you gotta kind of look at the Bible and say, OK, but this is what the Bible also says, and if you're gonna use this against me then what about these weird things that are in there, and that? So, I think you're also, it helps to be kinda critical, but also it's sad, because I remember sophomore year. There was this other gay kid in my class, and we talked about the Bible, and he simply just said I remember, like, oh, we should just get rid of it. We should get rid of the Bible. And, I just looked at him, and I, I raised my hand, and I said, well I know it hurts.

TD: This was a class discussion?

Evan: Yeah, political communication, and we were talking about religion, and I said, listen, I understand your frustration and anger, 'cause I'm gay too, I said. But, a lot of people find comfort in the Bible. You can't take it away from them and you, it simply just can't be taken away. (Evan, 2, 19)

As an outcome of his experiences as a gay man, Evan had been able to apply lessons learned about imposing viewpoints on others to broader circumstances, in this case removing the Bible. He concluded that while he did not want to be associated with people who are forceful about their religion (“shoving it down your throat”), he understood that maybe they were stereotyped - his unique intersections giving him insight: “But, at the same time, I, I sometimes find I identify with people who...face lots of negative stereotypes, like gay people” (2, 12). Evan perceived the college classroom as a chilly atmosphere for topics related to God or Christianity (controversial or not) but one perhaps warming to the broader concept of spirituality.

In a small class of restricted upper-division, major enrollment, one of Dawn's (straight/White/junior/female graduate student in fine arts education) art instructors regularly encouraged discussion of religion and specifically the Bible; however, Dawn

indicated that the discussions felt very confrontational to her. She described the instructor as a “grumpy” person with a “very genius-type mindset” who kept a Bible on his desk and whom she believed went to a local church. He knew that Dawn was a Christian from her conversations with other students in the class:

I remember once, he'd say, he'd pick out, I don't remember the specific verse, but he'd kind of say, well I was reading the Bible today. You know, I just decided to read it for the heck of it, as like an intellectual thing and, um, well it says this. Do you really believe that? (1, 13)

I asked Dawn if the instructor had addressed this question to her:

Oh yeah. We'd be, it'd be, and my [classmate] was also a Christian. He went to a different church than I did, but, um, yeah, sometimes he would just kind of do a little theological talk...he'd pick out this verse, and he'd say, oh, I know you're religious. I know you go to church. You know, I was reading this. Well, what do you think about this or, you know, can you believe it says this? Do you guys really do, or he'd just be, he'd pick out the most unhappy things or the most, um, controversial things in the Bible anyway to sort of debate with you. (1, 13-14)

Dawn reported that for the most part, she addressed the professor's questions as best she could, pointing out, for example, that context was important, that is, to “read what's around it” (Dawn, 1, 14). Sometimes she would simply say, let's paint now. She reported that sometimes it felt like it was an intellectual exercise but other times felt more like a challenge to her beliefs:

Well, because he knew I was Christian and went to church and so it was like, he'd bring his Bible sometimes....He would say something like....You believe in God, you know. Shouldn't you be working harder at what you're doing, and I'd be working at 110%. Shouldn't you be working harder at what you're doing or couldn't you just, you know, believe that, you can't just, you know, think that He's gonna solve all your problems. You have to do this for yourself. You can't, you can't be a better person and paint better with Him. This is a self thing. And I'd be like, I can't do anything by myself, you know? Those are some of the slap in the face moments that year that he was just being really judgmental of everyone. (Dawn, 1, 15)

Dawn sometimes felt singled out, the object of a focus on how an individual student's beliefs might impact her class performance. Though at times uncomfortable, Dawn was able to conclude that her experiences had helped her to be confident in her spirituality and able to consider other reasons, such as intellectual curiosity, for why the art instructor challenged her: "I'm confident. I wasn't gonna let his opinions, you know, change mine. 'Cause I knew he was just trying to get my goat, and I didn't want him to" (Dawn, 1, 14). I asked if she thought that he had been joking or serious, to which she answered: "Sometimes he was very serious, like an intellectual (prolonging last syllable)...sometimes it wasn't always in my face. Sometimes it was genuine, I'm just curious" (Dawn, 1, 15).

She remembered talking with her classmate about it who advised that the professor was "just an angry person. If he's not with God, don't listen to what he said" (Dawn, 1, 15). Dawn perceived that the instructor may have been having a difficult time, being "grumpy" and "really judgmental of everyone." To negotiate this challenge, she had drawn upon scripture when stating that she could do nothing by herself (John 5:30). She concluded:

...it kind of made me stronger, because it made me realize that there are people that are gonna' say things like that to you. You need to know how to (a) stand up for yourself (b) be confident in your faith and (c) you know... what to say in response to those things because they're gonna' happen. There's so many people out there that aren't religious, aren't Christian, aren't anything and that aren't as accepting of others. Because I accepted him for who he was, and he obviously didn't accept me for who I was. (1, 16)

As a graduate student, Dawn might have gained perspective not yet available to some of her younger peers, that is, she was honing her capacity to imagine the perspective of others and to evaluate and respond to sources of authority. Dawn saw

value in looking at both sides to issues. She related an example of the importance to her of knowing both scientific and Christian viewpoints as preparation for her anthropology class and discussions of evolution. Likening it to art, she indicated that it would be important to understand both religious and secular inspirations. She claimed to “believe in science” and understood what was being said about evolution in her anthropology class, but posited another tack in a similar vein as Azzam:

We don't know the order of what God created anything in either. I mean, maybe He did create a monkey person and then He said, oh, I'm gonna create a creature that more talks or whatever, so maybe He had that as his His plan. We don't know. And, I mean, they're all questions and you can't, I don't think you can deny either side but maybe try to find how they work together. (Dawn, 1, 22)

Like Azzam, she was attempting to find congruence between the secular and spiritual, between her religious and classroom identities. Dawn recounted how an instructor asked if anyone in the classroom held Christian beliefs in order to describe those beliefs for the rest of the class:

... and so I raised my hand and they said, so what do you believe just to give everyone else that perspective (pitch rises). And, I think a couple people said, you know, this is what we believe. There was no debate, no real discussion. I've had, I mean, I've had friends talk to me about their experiences in those classes...cause a couple friends have had classes where...a teacher will sometimes quote a Bible verse. You know, it says this in the Bible, but it's not really true. But, they won't even quote the right scripture, and they'll twist the words in it and, so the people come in and say, no, this is what it really says. And then the teacher gets really upset or whatever....It's really hard to choose when you stick up and when you keep your mouth shut in order to (a) not fail from your professor and (b) not cause an uprising. (Dawn, 1, 22-23)

Again, Dawn was learning to evaluate and respond to sources of authority. She was conscious of classroom decorum, not distracting from the lesson. But, like Selah who decided to not discuss her views on abortion in literature class for fear of the instructor lowering her grade (Selah 1, 11), Dawn seemed concerned that there could be retaliation

if she expressed an interpretation at odds with the instructor's. Though Dawn had this isolated experience with this instructor, she reported feeling that most instructors took care to either curtail topics or to exert appropriate control over the classroom environment so that a meaningful discussion could ensue.

This chapter first presented the ways in which some students used their worldview as a means by which to consider controversial issues. Lessons learned from faith traditions and spiritual exploration directly influenced other components of identity and daily life. A sub-theme surfaced in which Protestant participants assumed that other students actively "turned to" substance abuse and casual sex as coping mechanisms due to the absence of the inherent guidance and support provided by a faith tradition. Some students in underrepresented groups experienced additional challenges in reconciling issues amidst multiple oppressed identities. Some felt hindered by other students' views that spirituality and religion should not be applied to various aspects of student life on campus.

Several students actively explored their spirituality through both introspection and discussion inside the classroom, and some, in turn, used their spirituality to negotiate classroom topics. A number perceived that intentional discussions of faith or spirituality were either unacceptable (thus curtailed within the boundaries of the classroom) or were not a matter of disciplined analysis. Discussions often led to increased tensions rather than enhanced understanding. When spiritual issues were examined within the classroom, while some students reported feeling isolated or singled out - even fearful for grade retaliation - others indicated that they felt their instructors provided a classroom in which students could critically examine topics with spiritual overtones.

Some students appreciated the opportunity to genuinely and safely explore how their worldview integrated with their ideas about moral, ethical, political and other issues. However, not all appreciated instructors and content that challenged them to critically examine that worldview.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Participants in this study were engaged in the process of spiritual meaning making, or the search for meaning, purpose, and a way to make sense of things. Many reported navigating this exploration largely without reinforcement from student affairs, faculty, or other arm of the college. Some were searching, exploring expressions of spirituality through a variety of means (e.g., reason, science, world religions, atheism) in their attempt to locate meaning and purpose in life. Others defined themselves as being part of a spiritual, religious, and/or cultural heritage and attempted to maintain and practice that expression of this salient part of their identity. To be sure, the ethnic and cultural identities of students in my research clearly influenced their spiritual development; that is, the two identities were intertwined, with spirituality the means by which some students interpreted and understood their multiple identities.

In Chapters 4-6, I captured the complexities of the students' everyday lives and their identities in effort to illustrate that identities are often dynamic - continually constructed and re-constructed - and noted where there was evidence of how the students' lives were particularly influenced (helped or hindered) by systems of power and privilege. Students' spiritual identities reflected an on-going process of meaning making, of merging and sometimes colliding social identities.

Because education is the primary institution charged with socialization, it is a critical site for examination of and resistance to forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, and oppression resulting from religious or ethnic status (Weber, 2010). Given that spiritual development is a critical component in college student development, higher education has the responsibility to provide intentional conditions to encourage this

development. The findings and interpretations from this study have potential implications for pedagogy as well as for student affairs practice.

Findings

This study produced five findings of note which serve to enhance understanding of rural, public college students' spiritual meaning making. First, in the college choice process, students identifying with a faith tradition ascribed importance to the possibility for affiliation with others of like beliefs at prospective colleges. They sought spaces in which to be involved with groups of like believers or those with similar spiritual locations, as this affiliation was critically important to them. They assigned value to finding such a forum in a college through either formal or informal means. For some, affiliation concerns affected both their choice of college and their spiritual meaning making while attending college.

Second, students assumed it was their responsibility to find existing or to establish organizations for spiritual affiliation. That is, they felt that their college should be supportive but did not expect it to take the lead. Some students were at an advantage, helped by the quasi-institutionalized support systems already in place on campus and in the community (e.g., IVCF) to which they could turn. Others were hindered by a lack of existing support systems for affiliation. Third, participants' concern for affiliation transcended just a faith tradition and instead involved the intersection of spiritual, ethnic/cultural, and sexual identity (e.g., Jewish culture, "huge gospel music sound," pastor's implied acceptance of lesbianism). Research has indicated that all students benefit from the opportunity to explore their worldviews (Bryant, 2006). Colleges currently assign inadequate resources to support students' spiritual identity development

(Patton & McClure, 2009); they should, instead, be intentional about provision of support. Sections later in this chapter outline ways in which both faculty and student affairs professionals could provide that undergirding.

Fourth, students drew on their worldviews and spiritual understanding to negotiate everyday college life as well as to test their beliefs and assumptions about controversial issues. They used practices such as prayer, meditation, or singing praises for comfort in negotiating everyday life. They looked to their spiritual or religious beliefs as a lens to make sense of the world, to gain clarity and guidance on how to negotiate various aspects of life (e.g., what to do when you are stressed about a test). Because there are many systemic factors at work that erect barriers to students' spiritual development, such as socio-economic class dictating access to spaces in the surrounding community or lack of role models for students of color or students of non-majority faiths, some students in underrepresented groups experienced painful additional burdens not borne by their majority peers.

Fifth, some students perceived resistance in the college classroom to discussion or acceptance of spirituality or religious views. Two students reported feeling singled out and fearful about grade retaliation. When spirituality or religion was brought up or part of the classroom discussion, it often led to increased tension and resistance rather than enhanced understanding.

While students appreciated the opportunity to safely explore the intersections of their worldviews with, for example, ethical or political issues, not all appreciated being challenged to critically examine that worldview. Exposure to and challenge of divergent opinions is part of education and growth. If students are to grapple with new information

about any topic with an open mind, it is more likely to be accomplished in climates designed by trained educators to safely encourage opposing viewpoints. Given Bryant's (2007) finding that activities such as discussions of a spiritual nature were positively associated with spiritual development, such conversations are clearly important inside and outside the classroom. The personal is political, and colleges striving to educate the whole student could consider providing curricular (when germane to content) and co-curricular venues (both student- and community-led organizations as well as college-sponsored speakers, performances, and workshops) for students to discover and explore those intersections.

Trends in Support of Students' Spiritual Development at Public Colleges

College students are not disembodied intellects but whole persons - spirit, mind, and body. Both theory and research suggest that students are actively involved in finding meaning outside of the self. Spiritual development is meaning making. As illustrated by this study, students devise strategies to negotiate transitions to and success at college. For a number of participants, spirituality was a key strategy or means of coping and identity. Indeed, participants demonstrated creative agency in establishing venues in which to affiliate and/or worship with those of similar worldviews, an endeavor complicated by the rural setting of Northern State. However, these were students who were already motivated. Where is the climate of reinforcement for students with less self-advocacy and for students representing a wide variety of beliefs? Faculty and student affairs professionals were largely absent or played minor roles in this study's participants' spiritual meaning making. Why should fostering and support of students' spiritual meaning making be at the agency of the students? Certain campus environments

and practices can aid in fostering students' spiritual development (Hartley, 2004), and this section highlights some of the movement toward adopting both.

If faculty and student personnel practitioners avoid equating or not equating religion and spirituality and instead alter and broaden the discourse to include not only traditional notions of religiousness (e.g., trust in a higher power, praying) but issues of spirituality (e.g., search for meaning in life, charitable involvement), more students can recognize themselves and can attest to their journeys or quests. Parks (1986) recognized that in a "religiously pluralistic and secularized culture [with] competing languages of ultimacy" (p. 188), one must be willing to look at faith as a human universal. She called for the creation of a language of ultimacy that all can share and strongly promoted the concept of mentoring toward that end. She has more recently expanded on the important role of mentors in the lives of developing young adults. Mentors and mentoring communities create "networks of belonging" (Parks, 2000, 2011, p. 176) that act as crucibles in which young adults are supported amidst the hard work of making meaning. Students are encouraged to safely and strategically examine how they answer life's big questions. For example, a campus minister can create a climate in which students of various spiritual communities can express their spiritual identities while honoring those of others. While Parks acknowledged that students sometimes will no longer follow the faith tradition of their parents, many discover a renewed appreciation for their own faith heritage and spiritual meaning making as well as a deeper appreciation for the integrity of another's beliefs.

Nationally, the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, recognizing the spiritual diversity and quests of today's college students,

launched in March 2011 the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge to advance interfaith dialogue, cooperation, and community service programming on campuses. Colleges were issued a challenge to provide ideas for interfaith initiatives to create solutions to local needs while building greater understanding across beliefs. The challenge was sent to deans of student life, departments of religion, and offices of community service, not chaplains or campus ministers.

To properly respond, rural public colleges will need to sort out whether they will follow a traditional model of assigning spiritual development solely to the sphere of campus ministry and faith leaders, to an external expert to train the campus community in the language of interfaith dialogue, or to a mixture which embraces a multi-faith model (Edington, 2011). At Northern State, one campus minister was insufficient to attend to the varying needs of diverse worldviews. Cash-strapped rural, public colleges may be reluctant to underwrite ministry leaders but, minimally, could begin by assessing what is available to students and then informing both prospective and current students (on the website and in publications) about avenues for affiliation and worship on campus and within the community. The next step could include a needs assessment to determine what students felt would benefit their spiritual searches, data upon which the college could base decisions for pedagogy, programming, and even personnel.

Some public colleges are beginning to respond to the call to focus on, promote, and enhance students' spiritual development. Penn State sponsors the Center for Ethics and Religious Affairs and has constructed the Pasquirila Center for Religion and Spirituality. As part of the Spiritual Life Project at Florida State University, the Wellness

Building was designed to provide quiet, meditative space for students (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011). Such spaces, virtual or bricks and mortar, could be constructed on a smaller scale (or re-purposed) by rural, public colleges. The University of South Carolina's student affairs division has an official campus liaison that connects with chaplains from various faith communities, an endeavor that could easily be replicated by schools like Northern State which already has the MASS organization in place. What began as an initiative by the campus rabbi at Northwestern University, a private institution, has evolved into a very public, prominent website entitled "Ask Big Questions" (<http://askbigquestions.com/questions>) sponsored by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life in partnership with the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust. Rural, public colleges could spearhead and streamline student knowledge and use of as well as support from such resources.

The Secular Student Alliance, a network of campus groups organized in 2000, is a rapidly growing means by which students can explore ethics and meaning outside of the framework of a faith tradition. The network is comprised predominantly of public colleges but does claim a few religious-affiliated schools, as well (Supiano, 2011). The University of Alabama – Birmingham, East Tennessee State University, and California State University – Fullerton are three examples of colleges listed in the organization's website. Its stated mission is to:

...organize, unite, educate, and serve students and student communities that promote the ideals of scientific and critical inquiry, democracy, secularism, and human-based ethics. [They] envision a future in which nontheistic students are respected voices in public discourse and vital partners in the secular movement's charge against irrationality and dogma (<http://www.secularstudents.org/about>)

Such a resource might benefit a student like Carl who exhibited agency to both read *The God Delusion* (Dawkins, 2006) and attend the MASS panel discussion out of interest to explore meaning through scientific and philosophical as well as religious schema.

Some public universities are adding faith-based housing options. The University of Nebraska at Lincoln's Phi Kappa Theta fraternity house, while on private property, is considered part of the campus; however, the 65-bed residence is owned and operated by the St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Newman Center at the institution. Most members of the fraternity identify or claim an association with the Roman Catholic Church (Grasgreen, 2013). Troy University, Florida Institute of Technology, Texas A & M University at Kingsville, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign also offer residence options within buildings privately owned by faith-based organizations. Other schools, such as Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, have provided interfaith living-learning communities in which students learn about spirituality but are under no mandate to believe in any religion (Grasgreen, 2013). Whether faith-based or interfaith, such learning communities could be folded into rural, public colleges' palate of residential offerings.

While some courses and course sequences integrate contemplative inquiry and meditation, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) did not find programs that focused specifically on issues of faculty development for assisting students in faith development. Some faculty have initiated courses to foster dialogue such as Nash and Bradley's (2008) seminar on religious pluralism or LePeau's (2007) "Queer(y)ing Religion and Spirituality," in which students explore sexuality and spiritual identity development.

So, while some campuses are adapting their physical plant to include space for student faith exploration and some individual faculty have begun to adopt contemplative techniques and facilitated dialogues regarding spiritual matters as part of their courses, few if any intentional faculty development initiatives exist at rural, public colleges. Yet, as Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2010) clearly stated, opportunities for students to “touch base with their ‘inner selves’ will facilitate growth in their academic and leadership skills, contribute to their self-esteem, and psychological well-being, and enhance their satisfaction with the college experience” (p. 157). Whether a student leads an organization (Hillel, Daniel; gospel choir, Dante) or fulfills a leadership role within one (Bible study for IVCF, Amy), involvement and integration are central to a student’s development (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hyack, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980) and persistence (Tinto, 1993). Students with significant involvement in social aspects of college and university life are more likely to persist in college (Nora, 2007). If one of the ways some students wish to be involved is through groups that provide spiritual affiliation, colleges should be conscious of this need and interest. This is a strong argument, a call to action, for public institutions of higher education, even if only responding in a self-serving fashion to retain students who will stay when they are more satisfied with their college experience, having been provided opportunities for faith exploration and development.

In addition to colleges responding to students’ interest in spiritual exploration, researchers should respond as well. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn (2010) noted that most of the studies of faith development have been cross-sectional, and they called for more longitudinal studies to provide better understanding of development across the

life span. Cartwright (2001) and Love and Talbot (1999) proposed that more qualitative designs be implemented in order to better explore the sequence of changes in a student's spiritual understanding and the nature of events that promote the changes in order to glean a deeper understanding of individual students' experiences. Such insights might allow faculty and student affairs personnel to better challenge and support Karen whose beliefs were based on authority and not a critical analysis or to learn how to produce and employ the type of catalyst that prompted Isaiah to conduct the spiritual introspection he described. Such information would be critical to support not only students' spiritual journeys but, as in Banca's case, their retention at the college. Last, as this study focused more on how the students made meaning of their everyday lives (micro) and less on the influence of larger social structures (macro) on this process, future research should delve more deeply into the intersection of systems of power and privilege with students' spiritual meaning making.

Implications for Pedagogy and Student Affairs Practice

No matter their worldviews, concepts of spirituality, meaning, and purpose were vital concerns for students with whom I spoke. That a college student searches for meaning was illustrated by the students in this study and explicated by the literature which described the universality of the search. Participants reported several instances that reflected a lack of preparation of some of Northern State faculty to facilitate meaningful dialogue. While Keisha noted how her special program counselor helped her by listening, contributions to assist students in their spiritual meaning making from student affairs staff in the residence halls were absent or at least not noted by any participants.

Yet, students should have the opportunity to both weigh diverse religious and spiritual viewpoints represented by widely different types of people and to reconcile those viewpoints with and into their own worldviews in order to develop coherent, integrated selves. They should be permitted both inside and outside the classroom to discover and then voice their convictions to one concept and opposition to another in order to develop and present authentic selves. In order to truly educate the whole student, as Braskamp, Truatvetter, and Ward's (2006) asserted, the curriculum must include attention to a student's social, civic, political, moral, and ethical responsibilities as well as personal values, character, spirituality and practice of faith or religion. Faculty and student affairs professionals can provide forums for students' genuine participation in structured inquiry into concepts of spirituality as those concepts relate to classroom or programming content. By way of example, Bowling Green State University created a space in which both faculty and student affairs professionals could work together providing curricular and co-curricular opportunities for students to not only reflect on moral and ethical issues but to integrate their conclusions of meaning making into their educational experiences (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken & Echols, 2006). Critical thinking can and should include matters of faith.

While some faculty and student affairs practitioners may avoid introducing concepts of religion and spirituality into or beyond the classroom, the courts have grappled with the intersection of free exercise of religion and freedom of speech and have outlined the rights and limitations of instructors and students in their shared use of the college classroom and larger physical plant as the "marketplace of ideas," *Keyishian v. Board of Regents* 385 U.S. 589 (1967). Extending this notion, Kocet and Stewart (2011)

encouraged student affairs professionals to return to conscious consideration of spirituality as part of developing the whole student, similarly noting that Constitutional provisions in no way preclude student affairs practitioners from engaging students in discussions about how they find meaning, purpose, and direction in their lives. (The authors cautioned that this does not imply reifying a climate of religious hegemony within which some institutions practiced in the past.) Perhaps Amy's biology instructor - who began the semester acknowledging that some students might have difficulty with the concept of evolution – could have referred students, for example, to a panel discussion outside of the class sponsored by student affairs in which differing viewpoints were considered within in a structured and respectful atmosphere.

Working with campus legal counsel, universities can sponsor faculty and staff development opportunities to explore ways to integrate contemplative inquiry and the examination of moral and ethical questions into campus spaces. Training and development through such means as teaching and learning roundtables, guest speakers, and workshops could promote faculty discussions about what constitutes a reasonable regulation of classroom or workshop speech, how one can expand what is acceptable as public discourse in particular disciplines, or how much cognitive dissonance is too much. Working together, faculty and student affairs professionals can provide service learning opportunities, shared meals, or other events with opportunities for reflection centered on the common values of love and compassion, values championed by people of both religious and nonreligious worldviews.

Allen and Kellom (2001) suggested that student affairs professionals should first incorporate attention to the spiritual dimension of their lives and the lives of their staff in

order to best mentor and serve students. Only then should practitioners examine how to best facilitate similar means of interrogation for their students. The American College Personnel Association's (ACPA) commission entitled Spirituality, Faith, Religion & Meaning (CSFRM) is devoted to allowing members to "enrich their self-knowledge and professional knowledge about issues related to meaning-making, specifically spirituality, faith, religion, belief, and existentialism within the context of higher education" (www2.myacpa.org/spirituality-home). The Commission stresses the importance of identifying groups that support students' spiritual development, including secular humanist and non-deistic perspectives.

Students in this study did not expect the college to take the lead on identifying or providing spaces in which to explore spirituality. Yet, students have the right to ask for both support of and venues in which to explore their developing worldviews. Student affairs professionals in particular should carefully consider what physical and metaphysical spaces are available within which students can both celebrate and explore their means of spiritual expression. They should understand the importance prospective students assign to the possibility for affiliation with others of like beliefs and the implications this has for the recruitment of prospective students and the retention and persistence of current students. Such understanding could be reflected in attention paid to the topic at open houses and orientations and on the campus website. That is, personnel should provide information for both prospective and current students on the availability of campus and community opportunities for affiliation with those of similar spiritual expression.

To best serve the whole student, today's student affairs professionals would be well served to become familiar with both the rights and limitations of student academic freedom and student speech/religious expression and should apply their knowledge to establish best practices in the areas for which they are responsible, especially when crafting policy. They should communicate to students their inherent rights and limitations while presenting an affirming stance toward students' spiritual exploration. In particular, as exemplified by Dante and Daniel, practitioners must assist students of color and students of non-majority faiths in establishing connections to formal and informal student organizations that may be of interest to them and must support those same organizations, as such groups provide safe outlets for students to express frustrations with the majority culture, to socialize (and worship, as applicable) in ways that are comfortable, and to enjoy a link to home culture (Guiffrida, 2003).

Students should be afforded the opportunity to probe their understanding of controversial issues through engagement and involvement both inside and outside the classroom. For example, a more intentional forum on campus for exploring questions about the existence of God, the Bible's messages about sexual identity, and commonalities among faith traditions may have provided Evan with a more ready and accessible avenue than did a ten mile commute to the Unitarian-Universalist church. A student without transportation or a certain level of self-assuredness may not be able to travel the physical and psychological distance needed, hindering and delaying an opportunity for spiritual exploration of this topic. Further, such questions could have been explored prior to his senior year. Evan may have benefitted from campus forums

promoting exploration of gay marriage and other topics through not only a political but spiritual lens.

Entering the “postsecular age” (Subbiondo, 2011) of American higher education, colleges can begin to accept the responsibility to provide intentional, environmental conditions to positively influence college student spiritual development. Because of the emergence of college’s more secular identities owing to a distancing of religious affiliation and practices, the lack of faith leaders/campus ministers on many campuses, and the historical reality that college administrators and staff (not faculty) now largely bear the responsibility for student life and development outside of the classroom, student affairs professionals specifically need to be prepared to accept this co-curricular challenge.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has a knowledge community named Spirituality and Religion in Higher Education with similar goals (<http://www.naspa.org/kc/srhe/default.cfm>). The community created a comprehensive set of expectations and acceptable practices for practitioners assisting students of diverse religious, spiritual, and secular or humanistic worldviews with holistic identity development (Kocet & Stewart, 2011).

Thus prepared, student personnel professionals should provide opportunities for students to explore meaning, purpose, and wholeness plus opportunities for students to experience challenges to their spiritual beliefs and values (even when such exercises prompt in those same students cognitive dissonance) by employing facilitation guidelines for constructive engagement (Diamond, 2008; LePeau, 2007). In short, practitioners should follow the student affairs maxim of challenge and support (Sanford, 1962),

allowing students freedom of speech and exploration as they seek and find their own voices. Public college students should be able to have public spiritual personas (Dalton, Eberhardt, Bracken, & Echols, 2006). Practitioners must understand that it is important to students that their college supports them, whether with physical or metaphysical spaces in which to explore their spirituality. Moreover, this exploration must necessarily include those “neglected points of intersection” (McCall, 2005, p. 1780) in which multiple dimensions of students’ lives overlap.

Implications for Research

This study has implications for future research in higher education. For many students, spirituality is part of their core identity, a salient identity component acting as a lens through which they make meaning of the world. Because many students at this rural site navigated the meaning making journey largely without reinforcement from student affairs, faculty, or other arm of the college, future research could explore what avenues of curricular and co-curricular means of support would be most effective in assisting students’ spiritual quests. Particular consideration could be given to the constraints experienced in the rural setting by students with multiple oppressed identities. How can academic and student affairs best work together to provide intentional, environmental conditions to encourage students’ exploration of life’s big – and sometimes controversial – questions? Finally, future research on college students’ spiritual meaning making could include a study of the intersectionality of rural, public college students’ social locations as they are situated in larger social systems of power and privilege (macro) to better to understand the complex interplay between disadvantage and privilege.

Limitations of the Study

I attempted to understand the spiritual meaning making of 20 students at one rural, public university, limiting the generalizability of conclusions to other populations. The participants were a group of students who had expressed interest in matters of searching for meaning, most often through spirituality and/or a faith tradition. I interviewed students who identified as actively involved in a group being advised by one of the advisors I had contacted as well as students who had attended the MASS panel discussion and categorized themselves as “searching for meaning.” By only interviewing students expressing an interest in spiritual meaning making and searching for meaning, I consequently excluded the voices of those students who do not express such interests. However, rural, public colleges attempting to support students’ spiritual exploration would do well to implement the strategies proposed based on this study’s findings if they are to respond effectively to the increasingly pluralistic demographic of today’s college students.

Contributions of the Study

This study included the perspectives of students representing different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual identities, socio-economic statuses, interests, experiences, and geographic points of origin in relation to their spiritual meaning making. Previous research on college student spiritual identity exploration either excluded the perspectives of non-Christian students (e.g., students at private, Christian college; Byron & Miller-Perrin, 2009), focused on one component of student identity in relation to spirituality (e.g., gender; Bryant, 2007) or only focused on one faith tradition (e.g., Muslim; Peek, 2005). No other study examined the spiritual meaning making of students from a wide variety of spiritual expressions or worldviews in relation to the students’ other multiple

identity dimensions. No other study provided such rich insights into the particular obstacles faced in spiritual exploration by students with multiple oppressed identities in rural college settings. This study's findings deepen higher education's understanding of the importance to students of a "familiar" space within which to explore, worship and/or connect and the need for acknowledging and intentionally supporting the spiritual journeys of all college students.

Appendix A

Request to Advisor

I am requesting your assistance in identifying one to five students who would be willing to be interviewed by me as part of the data collection for my dissertation for Syracuse University. I am specifically reaching out to you as I wish to attain as diverse a sample as possible, and you are an advisor to the () student group, one of the many diverse groups whose advisors I am contacting. I would want to speak with the students individually for approximately three quarters of an hour for one or two meetings in a meeting room in the Student Union. (The Student Union at Northern State has several meeting rooms in a hallway that has minimal traffic. I am permitted to reserve a room for interviews. The room is neutral space with an element of privacy but not seclusion.) The study will examine the ways students may or may not draw upon their spiritual or religious beliefs as they negotiate college life. I will ask the students' permission for me to make an audio recording of the interviews.

Student participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and students are free to withdraw from the research at any time. Students' names will be changed to pseudonyms. Word processed records of this study will be kept private and confidential, stored securely under password protection. Recordings will be kept in a locked file.

I am asking if you are willing to identify one to five students that would see themselves as actively involved in religious meetings or worship or students who might categorize themselves as "searching for meaning" that might be willing to be interviewed. If you are willing, I would then ask that you secure the students' permission to be interviewed and to then ask them whether they would prefer to contact me or have me contact them. It does not matter what religion or denomination the students ascribes to or even if s/he identifies as agnostic or atheist.

I agree to ask students to participate in this research study.

Printed Name

Date

Signature

Appendix B

E-Mail to Potential Participant

Hello:

My name is Tamara Durant. You are receiving this e-mail because you expressed to (an advisor) that you might be willing to be interviewed by me as part of my doctoral dissertation research. I am looking to examine the ways college students may or may not incorporate their spiritual or religious beliefs as they negotiate college life. Your participation with this is entirely voluntary.

If you are willing to be interviewed, please respond to this e-mail, letting me know that you would still be interested in speaking with me. We will then work to set up a mutually convenient time to talk on campus for approximately 45 minutes. If you have any questions that you wish answered prior to committing to an interview, please do not hesitate to e-mail those questions to me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Tamara Durant

Appendix C

Potential Interview Questions

1. What were you like when you first came to college?
2. How do you think of yourself now?
3. Why did you choose Northern State?
4. As you know, I am interviewing college students who would identify themselves as religious, spiritual, or searching. You agreed to be interviewed, so in what ways do those characteristics describe you?
5. How would you describe your beliefs or how do you identify yourself spirituality?
6. Can you talk about the terms spiritual and religious and how they might or might not apply to you?
7. In what ways are your beliefs like or unlike those of your family?
8. As a (fill in the blank), in what ways are you similar and in what ways are you different from others who aren't (fill in the blank)?
9. How would you compare your life as a student who is (religious or spiritual) to the lives of other students - in terms of academic life? social life?
10. What does it mean to be (religious or spiritual) when you are in a college classroom?
11. What does it mean to be religious or spiritual when you are in a college residence hall?
12. Which if any campus or community groups/activities/entities assisted you in your spirituality?

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Zubernis, L. & Snyder, M. (2007). Considerations of additional stressors and developmental issues for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender college students. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 22(1), 75-79.

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QUALIFICATIONS

Multiple years' experience in progressively responsible higher education management positions with demonstrated growth of programs supervised. Instrumental in promoting cross-divisional collaboration to streamline overall operational effectiveness and promote student enrollment, success, and retention.

EDUCATION

Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York, December 2014

Ph.D. in Higher Education, 3.91

Dissertation title – “Is Faith on the Campus Tour? Rural, Public College Students' Exploration of Spiritual and Religious Identity”

Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, August 1986

M.A. in College Student Personnel, 3.81

Concentration in Counseling

Completed thesis (optional component for degree)

Ashland College, Ashland, Ohio, May 1981

B.S. in Education, 3.90

Major - English; Minor - Sociology

Lorain County Community College, Elyria, Ohio, June 1979

A.A. in General Studies

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

State University of New York at Potsdam, Potsdam, NY

Student Success Center (SSC) – Director, 1/03 – present (Extra Service, 5/01 – 12/02)

- Supervise an integrated set of student support departments and their directors - Academic Advising and Support, Accommodative Services, Bridges, Educational

Opportunity Program, Student and Family Transitions (Orientation, Adult Learner Services, Veteran and Military Services, Family Programs), International Education, Experiential Education, TRiO/Student Support Services

- Monitor multiple state, federal, and foundation budgets totaling 1 million annually
- Conduct and oversee the College's Academic Standards process each semester (warning, probation, and dismissal)
- Administer and grant approval for variety of academic services (e.g., late add/drop/S/U/course withdrawal); research and resolve related student complaints

Selected Contributions

- Facilitated multi-step physical and organizational growth of present-day SSC, from 11 initial employees to current 28
- Restored or developed study skills, career development, supplemental instruction and recitation courses, offering them out of Center along with 25+ sections of First Year Student Success course
- Envisioned and implemented:
 - Parent Interface ("Web for Guests")
 - Automated notification to advisors of advisee academic standing
 - Academic Intervention Request (AIR) – automated system enabling a faculty member to submit a concern about a student's academic progress for SSC follow-up and intervention
 - Automation of academic standards notification process for student viewing and action and committee review of dismissal appeals
 - Sophomore retention effort series orchestrated by cross-divisional team
 - Optional on-line transfer student orientation
 - On-line advising surveys
 - Cross-divisional team to examine billing and warning protocol in effort to improve communication between offices, encourage timely registrations, and decrease number of unregistered students utilizing campus services; instituted academic policy regarding registration time limits
 - On-going advisor training series
 - Intrusive advising/mentoring program for students whose appeal of academic dismissal is approved
 - Enhanced electronic early alert program

Student Support Services - Director, 6/99 – 12/02

- Responsible for implementation of federal (TRiO) grant to serve students who meet eligibility criteria and have need for academic support

- Wrote successful four-year grant (2002-2006 funding cycle) totaling \$1,012,000+
- Generated annual and continuation reports for submission to U.S. Department of Education
- Managed federal and state funding for department and payroll
- Supervised Counselor, Academic Skills/Tutor Coordinator and Administrative Assistant

Accommodative Services - Academic Coordinator, 8/94 - 5/99

- Reviewed documentation, determined need, and facilitated academic accommodations for students with physical, emotional, and/or learning disabilities
- Interviewed and hired readers, scribes, note takers; monitored 100+ exams per year
- Managed departmental and payroll budgets
- Assisted students in all aspects of academic access, e.g., physical access, assistive technology
- Wrote successful Seed Grant for internship (1996) and established credit-bearing graduate internship. Supervised intern and student workers
- Co-coordinated annual disAbility Awareness Days. Sponsored nationally-known speaker with disability, Nov. 1998

Educational Opportunity Program - Senior Counselor, 8/87 - 8/94

- Academic advisor for half of EOP freshmen, undecided students, and new transfers. Monitored students' academic performance
- Provided personal counseling and relevant referrals. Offered variety of workshops
- Assisted in operation of 6-week summer program, including hiring, training and supervising staff and counseling students. Taught non-credit Human Development course
- Wrote USDA grants for each summer program resulting in awards up to \$6,100
- Co-advised leadership group sponsoring conferences for students attending 4 area colleges, advised EOP Student Advisory Committee, and co-supervised St. Lawrence University counseling graduate interns

Potsdam/Akwesasne Talent Search Program - Counselor, 9/85 - 8/87

- Assisted in the start-up of a Talent Search (TRIO) grant to serve low income students and adults in rural, economically-depressed St. Lawrence Co. and St. Regis Mohawk Reservation
- Provided support services for completion of secondary education and college enrollment

Draine House Coordinator, 6/86 - 8/87

- Resided in and coordinated activities for experiential residence opportunity. Maintained budget and coordinated Resident Assistant involvement
- Sponsored programming for 90 students and chaperoned two trips per semester intended to increase cultural awareness

North Country Science and Technology Entry Program (summer program) - Assistant Director of Academic Programming, 6/86 - 8/86 & 6/87 - 8/87

- Assisted in design of and recruitment of students and staff for summer residential program serving minority and economically-disadvantaged students. Supervised teachers and tutors. Implemented diagnostic testing. Co-facilitated non-academic programming. Taught non-credit English course

Owens Technical College, Toledo, Ohio

Counseling Intern, 9/84 - 8/85

- Advised students in all Public Service technologies and developmental courses. Established academic and financial aid plans for advisees on probation
- Strong focus on personal counseling. Provided career and job search counseling
- Taught Career and Life Decisions course. Co-designed job search course
- Developed interventions for particular groups, e.g., blue-collar workers and career changers

Lorain County Community College, Elyria, Ohio

Counseling Intern, 8/83 - 6/84

- Assisted students with scheduling, career planning, and personal concerns affecting academics. Advised students in industry retraining program
- Taught Career Development course. Evaluated placement tests and interest inventories

Ashland College, Ashland, Ohio

Admissions Counselor, 8/81 - 6/83

- Coordinated own travel schedule with four state focus
- Helped to revive alumni/admissions recruiting program

UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Leadership Forum, Aug. 2010 – present
Middle States Self-Study Steering Committee, 2009-2012
Faculty Senate Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee, 2013 - present
Enrollment Management Committee – 2013 – present
Enrollment Management Division Group – 2013 – present
Retention Task Force, 2013-present
Behavioral Evaluation Committee, 2007 – present
Academic Standards Committee (Chair), 2003 – present
Faculty Senate Admissions Committee, 2007 – 2011
Academic Affairs Council, 2003 – present
The Potsdam Graduate Task Force, 2011-2012
Student Union Program Study Steering Committee, 2009-present
Veteran’s Task Force, 2009- 2012
Electronic Check-In Committee, 2009-present
Adult Learner Task Force, 2009 - 2010
Potential Attorney General Committee (Chair), 2007 – present
Sophomore Year Task Force (Chair), 2007-2008
Title III Working Group (b), 2013 - present
Title III Working Group (a), 2005 - 2006
Retention Management Committee, 2004 – 2005
Sophomore Retention Committee, 2004 – 2005
Planning and Resource Allocation Re-Visioning Task Group, 2004 - 2005
Student Data Committee, 2002 – present
Academic Advising Group, 2001 – present
Distance Learning Task Force, 2004
Achieving Diversity Task Force (Chair), 2004
Retention Steering Committee, 2003 – 2004
Distance Learning Advisory Committee, 2002 – 2003
Student Success Center Transition Team (Chair), 2001 - 2007
Student Services Center Planning Committee (Chair), 2000
United Cerebral Palsy Self-Directed Personnel Services Board, 1997-1999

TEACHING

Career and Life Decisions, Owens Technical College (OH), Fall 1984 and Spring 1985
Career Development, Lorain County Community College (OH), Fall 1983 and Spring 1984
Taught non-credit-bearing sections of *Human Development* for EOP 6-week summer orientations each
year from 1987-1994 and *English* for NCSTEP, 1986-1987

PRESENTATIONS

Annual, campus-based, e.g., *Academic Basics*, Orientation; *Undeclared Panel*, Open House; *Services for Students*, New Faculty Orientation Series; *Academic Services and Policies*, Academic Advising Workshop Series; *Academic Advising Survey Overview*, Academic Policies, Standards and Advising Committee; *Student Complaints and Problems*, Council of Chairs; *Student Success Center*, Arts & Sciences Council, Resident Assistant Training

Selected Previous Presentations

Roles and Responsibilities of Advisors, SUNY Potsdam, Sept. 2001
Cross-School Advising Issues: policies, procedures and tools, SUNY Potsdam, Sept. 2001
College Accommodative Services Conference, Lake Placid, NY:
Keynote panelist, Nov. 1998; *Student's Role in Transition: rights and responsibilities*, Nov. 1997; Panelist, Oct. 1996; Planner and panelist, Sept. 1995
Legally-Mandated Services for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education, EDLS 412 classes, SUNY
Potsdam, Spring 1996
A Summer Human Development Course for the 90's, Special Programs Institute XXI, Albany, NY, April
1990
Ethical Sensitivity and Moral Judgment of College Counselors, ACPA/NASPA National Convention,
Chicago, March 1987

CONFERENCES/WORKSHOPS ATTENDED

Legal Issues in Higher Education, Burlington, VT, Oct. 2013
National American College Personnel Association annual conference, Baltimore, Maryland, Mar. 2011
National Summer Institute on Learning Communities, Evergreen State University, Olympia, Washington,
June 2010
Creating an Early Alert Intervention Plan for At-Risk Students, Atlanta, Georgia, Dec. 2007
Retention: Removing the barriers which impede the success of African-American males in higher education, Albany, NY, Oct. 2006
National Conference on Students in Transition, Costa Mesa, California, Nov. 2005
National Academic Advising Association annual conference, Cincinnati, Ohio, Oct. 2004

Selected Previous Conferences/Workshops

National Academic Advising Association annual conference, Ottawa, Canada, Oct. 2001

National TRIO Conference for Project Directors, Miami, Florida, June 2000

Council for Opportunity in Education Proposal Writing Workshop, Miami, Florida, June 2000

Disabled, but Enabled and Empowered, Rochester, NY, Mar. 1998

Post-secondary Learning Disability Training Institutes; Saratoga Springs, NY, June 1997
and Farmington,

CT, June 1995

SUNY Disability Services Council, Troy, NY, Nov. 1995

The Responsive Campus, Association on Higher Education and Disability, San Jose, CA,
July 1995

NCEOA (TRIO), Washington, D.C., Spring 1986