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Catholic Students Intersecting with the Academy: an Exploration of Religious Identities

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ABSTRACT

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This study is a constructivist, narrative case study exploring the experiences of Catholic college students at a secular university. Eight student narratives are explored through the lens of intersectionality theory, in the context of classroom experiences. This study reviews the history of religion in higher education, Christian privilege, religious identity development, and sense of belonging in order to contextualize the participants' perceptions of being marginalized in academic settings. With consideration for current social issues and political debates, students reflected on their experiences and ultimately revealed that Catholic students are feeling marginalized in their classrooms, not only for their specific beliefs, but because of the lack of diverse perspectives shared in their learning environments. As a result, they are dropping classes, changing majors, and internalizing their feelings of confusion, frustration, and isolation.

Students have a need for multiple perspectives in their classrooms. Educators can foster this type of learning environment by making space for various views to be shared and respected in academic settings. Future research could include explorations of other religious identities or identity intersections in order to lend further understanding to how classroom learning could be more inclusive and effective.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to all students, faculty, and staff trying to live their Catholic identity in settings of higher education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As I was beginning to work on my research proposal for my doctoral degree, Pope Francis was preparing for his first papal visit to the United States. One year later, as I collected data for my study, Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump were campaigning in one of the most controversial and heated elections in United States history. The news headlines were preparing Americans to make history, to expect controversy, and were heatedly debating religion, politics, and the age-old arguments about how and why the two should interact. I felt comfortable sitting in my private office, able to sort through the rhetoric with a clear appreciation of my identity as a Catholic student in the United States. However, I felt a twinge of anxiety for the Catholic students sitting in college and university classrooms across the country, wondering if it was safe and acceptable to share their Catholic identity with their professors and classmates. In a day and age of acceptance, inclusion, political correctness, and diversity celebrations, students are still expected to "check their religious beliefs at the door", keeping their religious beliefs and traditions to themselves (Porterfield, 2008, p. 187).

Religion is often considered a social identity which should remain private, especially in academic settings (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007). However, intersectionality theorists suggest religion is inseparable from other social identities and should not be marginalized in educational settings because "Religion is a part of the

multicultural composition of our schools, and we need to develop ways of fostering intelligent, respectful conversations on our campuses that include religion as part of the discussion" (Nash & Bradley, 2008, pp.135-136). Other theorists go so far as to say the topic of religion, if left unattended, will eventually create deep divides in campus communities (Nash, 2001).

In this constructivist narrative case study, I explored the intersection of Catholic students' religious identities with their other social identities. The setting for the study was a land-grant university in the Midwest, using individual and group interviews as the primary source of data collection. Eight students participated in the research. My hope is that the findings from this study will help inform our understanding of religious students' experiences on college campuses, helping students and educators learn how to appreciate and respect religious diversity in academic settings.

Statement of the Problem

Since the 1970's, students' religious beliefs have been considered personal ideas having little connection to higher education (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008c). Religion is considered by some to be "beyond the scope of rational discourse" (Harris, 2004, p. 13). Others go so far as to describe college campuses as "actively anti-religious" (Mahaffey & Smith, 2009, p. 82; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008a, p. 9). Currently, religious dialogue, or even welcoming religion as a topic into other types of dialogues, is not a widely-accepted practice in academic settings (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). My own educational experience leads me to believe the acceptance of religious dialogue may vary by the type of institution and institutional mission of the college or university.

Faculty are sometimes blamed for this lack of religious dialogue in academic settings, being so devoted to their academic disciplines they cannot make room for both academic and religious identities in the classroom (Edwards, 2008). A 2006 survey of professors, politics, and religion suggested faculty are less religious than the average American (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008b). Additionally, a 2002 UCLA survey showed only 8 percent of faculty encouraged dialogue on religion or spirituality (Riley, 2005). In 2008, Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen conducted a survey of 2,958 college faculty members in an effort to gather some unbiased information regarding faculty in higher education and their views on religion. The study indicated most faculty members are personally religious, but the majority of them believe in the secularization of education and oppose "efforts that would blur the boundaries between religion and science" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008a, p.26).

Scholars defending religion's place in higher education suggest sharing religious perspectives is one way to make students feel their social identities are welcome in an educational setting (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008c). It is a common perception among college students that religious identities are not welcome in the classroom (Mahaffey & Smith, 2009; Marsden, 1994; Nash, 2001; Riley, 2005), which seems contradictory to the fact that most first year college students align themselves with some type of religion (Braskamp, 2008; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008c; Riley, 2005). In fact, most students are willing and able to talk about religious diversity, regardless of their personal beliefs on the topic (Nash, 2001). Additionally, there is little evidence to suggest that religious discussions or involvement undermine the educational purposes of higher education in

any way (Braskamp, 2008). My educational philosophies tend to align with these scholars who believe religious students should feel wholly welcomed in academic settings.

Much of the current literature investigating religious identities focuses on religious minorities and their experience in a predominantly-Christian society. While I agree Christian privilege undoubtedly exists, students from majority and non-majority religions are reporting experiences of marginalization and oppression on college campuses (Nash, 2001; Moran et al., 2007). Most people have prejudices about one or more religions (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008b). These prejudices are not based in ignorance or fear; they are judgments based on bits of truth or assumptions about religion. Social activist Allan G. Johnson emphasizes this point when discussing privilege and oppression, stating, "There is nothing inherently frightening about what we don't know. If we feel afraid, it isn't what we *don't* know that frightens us, it's what we *think* we *do* know" (Johnson, 2006, p. 13). My observations in academic settings, specifically in my doctoral classrooms, would support the idea that people often speak fearfully based on their assumptions or negative personal experiences with religion, not based on unbiased, objective information-gathering on the topic.

One religious example emphasizing Johnson's message is Catholicism. Because Christians are a majority and extremely privileged population in the United States, and because the Catholic Church takes very public stances regarding social issues, it can easily be susceptible to public judgments. Anyone with access to the internet could read speculations and reactions regarding Pope Francis's visit to the United States, which some say even overshadowed the similarly-timed visit of China's president Xi Jinping. Claims, opinions, and reactions to the Catholic Church were blasted throughout

mainstream media for weeks, and may be warranted, given the Catholic Church's firm stances against some political movements gaining momentum in the United States. Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia is just one of a multitude of Catholic scholars who regularly publishes columns addressing issues such as health care reform, religious liberty, marriage and family, and immigration.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

In the past two decades, religion has become more visible among students in higher education, and student-centered pedagogy makes "paying attention to… religion a necessary part of any quality program of higher learning" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Religion and higher education scholars Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen have traveled the country studying this alleged return of religion, and make the bold claim that giving religion a place within classroom discussions may be a way to revitalize higher education entirely (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). Their research motivated my research; I explored the current status of religion in the classroom by working with one group of religious students to gain a better understanding of their experiences.

The purpose of this study was to explore the academic experiences of Catholic undergraduate students. Catholic students self-identified as practicing Catholics. The study was qualitative, constructivist in nature, guided by narrative case study methodology, with intersectionality as a theoretical framework. This combination of theory and research structure allowed for authentic exploratory research to take place. It is my hope that my findings will inform future students and educators how to incorporate religious diversity into academic settings.

As I worked to establish one central exploratory question (Creswell, 2007) to guide this research, I reflected upon my own experiences as a Catholic student, recognizing that my religious "defenses" were usually triggered during discussions of current events or politics. In order to keep the research exploratory, with no preconceived notions of the participants' experiences, the central research question (RQ) was:

Q1 How do Catholic undergraduates experience their religious identity in academic settings?

In order to break down this broad question for more specific examination (Creswell, 2007), I developed two additional questions which gave me the opportunity to address particular issues within Catholic student experiences. The second question developed directly from my experience as a student. I was much more aware of my hidden religious identity when topics of religion or current social issues arose in class. Hence, my second research question was:

Q2 What roles do current social issues and political debates have in shaping these experiences?

As I began this exploration, I understood that not all participants would have an awareness or understanding of their social identities. As they learned my research language and reflected upon their identities, I anticipated their perceptions of their experiences may change. In order to specifically include and address these changes throughout the research process, my third research question was:

Q3 How does reflecting on their Catholic identity shape students' perception of their experiences?

Significance of the Study

The ways in which students discover, experience, and interact with their own identities plays a major role in how open they are to learning throughout their college experience. Social identities can be defined as "one's personally held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation)" (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 577). Students do not learn effectively if they feel self-conscious, marginalized, or judged based upon their social identities (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Torres et al., 2009; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Harper, 2008). When students feel marginalized, they lose their motivation to learn. Educators have a responsibility to foster student learning and can maximize students' experiences by understanding the role social identities play throughout the college years (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009).

For most of the last century, students' identities have been a major theme in higher education. The civil rights movement of the 1960's led to more racial diversity on college campuses; the women's movement of the 1970's resulted in more gender diversity while the gay rights movement also gained momentum (Evans et al., 2010; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Torres et al., 2009). In the 1980's and 1990's, theorists gave more attention to ethnicity and the experiences of all minority groups in higher education, and current research suggests all students' social identities play a critical role in shaping their personal and academic success in college (Evans et al., 2010; Abes et al., 2007; Torres et al., 2009). Today, college students are more diverse than ever, and educators have a responsibility to create environments in which students can learn and grow holistically without feeling limited by their social identities (Abes et al., 2007;

Evans et al., 2010; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Museus, 2008; Rice, 2008; Torres et al., 2009).

Such learning is often referred to as "cross-cultural" (Taylor, 2010) or "culturally responsive" (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009) and requires courageous educators. Educators who encourage cross-cultural learning give students control over much of the learning environment as they share their own perspectives and personal stories (Rice, 2008). When students are able to engage in respectful dialogue about difference, they often start to build trust in their own experiences and thoughts. This type of independent thinking builds confidence, increasing students' willingness to concentrate, participate, and put effort into their learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). In order to educate cross-culturally, it can be helpful for educators to understand the concept of cultural pluralism and the controversy and dissonance which result when students talk about difference (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Quaye, Lin, Cullen, Abad, Labonte, Greenberg, & Hall., 2008).

Cultural Pluralism

Pluralism is a style of knowledge, the view that "reality is far too complex to be captured adequately by any one philosophical or methodological point of view" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012). *Cultural pluralism* expands on this definition to promote individualism, allowing individuals to maintain their unique social identities while still sharing a common political organization, economic system, or social structure (Banks, 2006). Cultural pluralism is considered a more current and appropriate philosophy than the outdated philosophy of the cultural melting pot, in which individuals might have to

assimilate to blend in with the majority identities in a given culture (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009).

Contrary to the assimilation of the melting pot, an educational system embracing cultural pluralism would "allow the integrity of every learner to be sustained while each person attains relevant educational success and mobility" (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009, p. 21). Religion is one aspect of cultural pluralism. As American universities become more culturally pluralistic, genuine religious difference will become difficult to avoid in the classroom (Nash, 2001; Taylor, 2009). For this reason, it is important to examine the role religion currently plays in higher education.

Religion and Higher Education

The first institutions of higher education were rooted in Protestant religious traditions. Harvard University, the first institution of higher learning in the United States, began as an educational and training center for ministers in 1636. For the next 200 years, higher education grew out of the Protestant faith; in the late 19th century church services were often mandatory, and by the 1950's, most universities still claimed to be Christian institutions (Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield, 2001; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008a; Marsden, 1994; Steinberg, 1974). The original purpose of higher education was to educate students in lessons of theology and morality, preparing young people to be productive citizens of the United States (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008a).

As the portrait of the American college student changed, so did the purpose of education. Students seeking college educations did not all desire the Protestant educations offered. In the late 1800's and early 1900's the surge of Jewish and Catholic immigrants began to challenge Protestant public education, wanting more perspectives

included in the university curriculums. By the 1960's, consensus was that religious perspectives would be excluded from the academy of public higher education altogether (Marsden, 1994; Steinberg, 1974; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008a). For at least the past 50 years, colleges and universities have strategically determined their own purposes and missions, and continue to evolve based on the diversified needs of today's college students.

Despite the secularization of public colleges and universities in the mid-twentieth century, religion has a prominent presence among students today. In 2003, a national survey of 112,242 students at 236 colleges and universities in America revealed 80 percent of students were interested in religion, 81 percent attended religious services occasionally or frequently, and 48 percent described religion as "essential" or "very important" that students be encouraged to express their religion at college (Astin & Astin, 2003, as cited in Mahaffey & Smith, 2009, p. 86). Another national survey measuring the attitudes toward religious diversity showed college graduates respected religious diversity as a component of diverse cultural traditions (Wuthnow, 2008). Notably, most young Americans, especially students, "believe in God and consider religion indispensable to everyday life" (Braskamp, 2008; DiIulio, 2008, p. 57; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008a).

While most students have some sort of belief in God or a higher power and/or appreciation of religion, they are diversified in their specific convictions. For instance, some students describe their spirituality as a general belief in a higher power but do not participate in any specific religious traditions, while other students identify as a specific religion and observe traditions and doctrines accordingly (Cherry et al., 2001; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008b). Students value this religious diversity and feel it should not be ignored

on college campuses, nor treated as a neutral topic of equality (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008b). Students have a desire to learn about their religious differences, especially Christians hoping to gain a better understanding of non-Christian denominations (Cherry et al., 2001). Religious diversity plays a major role in political and global issues; students should have time in college to learn and prepare for working in an increasingly diverse workforce where religious pluralism is a daily reality (Riley, 2005; Taylor, 2010; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008b; Porterfield, 2008).

In order to take a closer look at the religious climate on college campuses, three researchers conducted one of the most well-known qualitative studies on religion in higher education, *Religion on Campus* (Cherry et al., 2001). In this study, the researchers completed 30 days of ethnographic research at four different institutions of higher education over the course of one year. Their findings emphasize the importance of religion on today's university campuses:

> Certainly it is true that church oversight of church-related colleges has declined. The shame involved in not being religious has also declined. But we found both the practice and the study of religion to be vital aspects of the slices of American higher education that we observed. Indeed, we found religion on the four campuses sufficiently vital and inviting to make us wonder if it had ever been more so in the past. It is possible that young people in American culture have never been more enthusiastically engaged in religious practice or with religious ideas (Cherry et al., 2001, pp. 294-295).

Although the researchers' qualitative approach was unique in comparison to other studies on religion, the results emphasize the same point: religion is an integral part of today's college students' experiences (Cherry et al., 2001; Marsden, 1994; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008a; Mahaffey & Smith, 2009; Braskamp, 2008; DiIulio, 2008; Nash, 2001; Nash & Bradley, 2008).

Researcher Perspective

As a qualitative researcher, I was the primary research instrument for this study (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). As such, it was crucial for me to engage in reflection to identify the values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases I bring to the research process. In addition to an initial reflection, it was important for me to monitor these values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases as the study progressed, to be able to "determine their impact on the study's data and interpretations" (Mertens, 2010, p. 249). In the spirit of qualitative, constructivist research, it was also essential that I was forthcoming with my interest in the topic under investigation (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

While some researchers begin their journey toward a doctoral degree with a research topic firmly in mind, my research interests evolved continually throughout my coursework until it was time to choose a topic for my doctoral comprehensive exams. Initially, I wanted to explore my identity as a counselor and what that meant as a professional in higher education. Fortunately, the more I learned about research methodologies, the more I realized that my counselor identity would strongly guide my research, no matter the topic. My identity as a counselor fits naturally with qualitative research. Because counselors tend to

> …Understand the world narratively, as we do, then it makes sense to study the world narratively. For us, life – as we come to it and as it comes to others – is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17).

Once I realized my counselor identity would be a strong component of any research I conducted, I felt free to research any topic that would make a meaningful contribution to

the world of higher education. As I reflected on my educational journey, a research topic emerged from the uncomfortable moments in my graduate school experiences.

After completing my undergraduate and graduate work at a university committed to social justice, I knew my future in education would involve social justice work. I was initially drawn to my doctoral program because of the faculty's commitment to incorporating social justice issues throughout the coursework. As I began taking classes, I felt extremely comfortable engaging in dialogue about social justice issues in class, but over time, I began to feel the need to stay quiet – privatizing my thoughts and opinions on issues of privilege and oppression. When I realized the inauthentic nature of my participation in class, I reflected on my discomfort and realized it was directly related to my identity as a practicing Catholic.

One day in class, my colleagues and I were discussing the nature of spirituality, and my professor mentioned being "raised Catholic". She continued to share her personal faith story, which included her departure from the Catholic Church. Immediately, I felt uncomfortable sharing my identity as a practicing Catholic. Would my professor think less of me if she knew I practiced a faith she had abandoned? I became sensitive to comments about religion in class, and within the semester, heard other professors and classmates make negative comments about Catholicism, referring to "Catholic guilt" and the "sexism" of the Catholic Church. I decided to keep my religious beliefs to myself. I felt conflicted and confused by the discussions of "Christian privilege", because I felt increasingly marginalized because of my religious, Christian/Catholic identity. I witnessed classmates and professors working hard to be

sensitive to other religious identities, but then turn around and make jokes about Catholics.

Then one day, as I was talking to an old friend who was also in graduate school studying student affairs, he expressed his frustration at the judgments he faced regularly for being Catholic. Immediately, I realized my negative experience with religion in higher education was not isolated and may even be specifically related to my Catholic identity. Talking to one other Catholic person about their experiences in higher education made me want to explore the topic further, motivating me to focus my future research on Catholic students in higher education. However, I realized Catholicism did not mean as much to other educators as it did to me. Why would it? Why would the experiences of Catholics matter to other educators in higher education? Taking a broader perspective on my specific research concern helped me realize the historical and global nature of the issue I wanted to investigate. If the intersection of my religious and educational identity was causing conflicts for me, perhaps that intersection was causing tension for others, too. My research topic, exploring the intersection of religious and educational identities, started to form.

I was immediately concerned about what my non-Catholic and more liberal colleagues would think of me if I not only admitted to being Catholic, but took a public research stance in line with my Catholic faith. On a commute to school one day with a brilliant and valued classmate and friend, who also happens to identify as gay, I discussed my potential research topic. I do not remember much of the discussion other than his statement, "If I had known you were Catholic, we probably would not have become friends." But we did become friends. And I was Catholic. Was it okay for him to say

that because he is gay and the Catholic Church does not support gay marriage? What if I said, "If I had known you were gay, we probably would not have become friends"? For some reason, anti-Catholic statements felt accepted in my academic setting, which was quite troubling to me. My friend's statement scratched the surface of a very complex issue. While the purpose of my research is exploratory in nature, I hope it opens the door to further research, critical in nature, which investigates the complexity between diversity, human rights, and religious freedoms.

Beyond the anti-Catholic sentiments I experienced personally and academically, I felt a defensiveness for my faith. I knew the Catholic Church to be accepting, charitable, and committed to social justice. I felt a responsibility to live publicly as a Catholic educator who practiced inclusion, acceptance, compassion, and dialogued respectfully because of my deeply-rooted faith. After all, it was from the Catholic Church and my Catholic education that I had developed a passion for human rights, compassion for those in need of social welfare, and a devotion to serve those less fortunate than myself. I could not separate my Catholic self from my student self, no more than I could separate any of my other identities. The more I reflected on the idea of religious identity, anti-Catholicism, and intersectionality, the more passionate I became about exploring the topic further. Hence, my first major independent research project began.

I feel it is worth noting that my Catholic identity snuck up on me in graduate school. Although I was raised in a Catholic family and grew up attending Mass weekly, celebrating major holidays as religious events, praying before meals and bed, and attending Catholic schools, I took my Catholic identity for granted. This is what privilege feels like. I never worried about what other people would think when they

found out I was Catholic or if I would be able to practice my religion. I even started my career in higher education at a Jesuit university, so religion was comfortably incorporated into my professional life. Until it wasn't.

My first job at a public institution was at a state university in the Midwest. I advised the fraternity and sororities, and it just so happened that their Greek Week was during Holy Week, the week before Easter. As a Catholic, Easter is the most important holiday of the year. I was surprised that a student organization would hold the bulk of their annual events during a recognized Holy Week among many Christian denominations. I was frustrated. I asked my supervisor about the scheduling and if we could change it the following year, and she said, "Sara, you can't push your religion on the students like that."

Hm.

I ended up leaving that job before the issue came up again, and was working at another Jesuit university where I worked among other religion-conscious professionals. My colleagues were not all Catholic, nor Christian, but people who were generally conscious of religious identities and who were not afraid to ask questions about how to best serve our religious and non-religious students. I was able to complete my day-to-day tasks without ever feeling the need to hide my religious identity. During this time, I started my doctoral studies at another state institution. Studying higher education and student affairs leadership, topics of social identity, privilege, and oppression were commonplace. As I already shared, it was during my years as a doctoral student in the classroom that I started to experience discomfort with my public identity as a Catholic individual. I was a strong student and felt I had a reputation to uphold as a scholar – what

would happen if my professors and advisors found out I was Catholic? And not just raised in a Catholic home, but a practicing Catholic who still attended Mass weekly and participated in the sacraments?

This discomfort with my religious identity came at a time of major identity crisis in my life. My husband and I had relocated for my job in higher education in 2007, right before the economy took a dive. We were newlyweds, living on campus, I was starting my doctoral studies, and I was 9 months pregnant when I lost my job, which also meant we lost our place to live. We quickly bought our first home, making us new homeowners right before our daughter was born and I was denied unemployment benefits. I had put so much heart, soul, sweat, sleepless nights, time, and energy into my job that I went through a mourning period where I was unsure if I would ever be able to (or want to) work in higher education again. I had already put enough time into my doctorate studies that I decided to continue, regardless of whether or not I truly wanted to return to work. I had a lot of identities to my name, but quitter certainly was not one of them. However, I was struggling to balance my identities as a new mother, newlywed, freshly unemployed, religious doctoral student attending a secular university.

It was during this time that I learned intersectionality theory, the theory that our social identities cannot be separated (Lutz, Vivar, & Supik, 2011). Instantly, my life as a student made a lot more sense to me. I was a talented scholar, but perhaps it was normal that I was constantly struggling to balance my other identities within the classroom. My Catholic identity was not the only one causing me discomfort, I also struggled to balance my identities as a wife, mother, daughter, first-generation graduate student, working class individual who really did not even like school and did not particularly desire another job

in higher education! Looking around my classroom, I became curious about my classmates and what identities they were sharing, hiding, enjoying, or struggling to balance. Some identities seemed acceptable to discuss. A pregnant classmate would cheerily share her expectant news and a gay classmate could happily tell us about his 5-year anniversary with his boyfriend, but I had no idea if anyone else in my cohort went to church. Any church. I had spent over two years in classrooms with these people, and I had no idea if any of them were religious.

I could not help but think that our many hours of conversation could have been more authentic if more social identities were included in our discussions. It became my passion to explore the topic of religious identities, and it made the most sense for me to start with Catholic students, since I would be an insider as a researcher who shared that aspect of my identity with my participants. Since starting this research journey, I have had three more children, relocated, lost a pregnancy, endured surgery, returned to work in higher education as an advocacy counselor. I work with students who are struggling to succeed in college, and most of their struggles stem from their non-student social identities.

Many of the students I counsel are single moms, gang members, homeless individuals, felons, victims of assault, learning disabled, mentally ill, and those falling well below the poverty line. My job is to help them understand how their identities as students intersect with their other identities, and how to succeed in school, no matter how many of those identities are competing for their attention in the classroom. Intersectionality theory has become a part of my daily conversations with students, which makes it a natural theory to also guide my research. It is truly my hope that my research

with Catholic students will have meaning for any student or educator trying to balance multiple identities in the classroom in a meaningful way.

Yet, the intersection of religious individuals at secular institutions causes some tension. In fact, the first person I approached about being on my research committee said, "Good luck finding someone to chair that research topic." The idea of religion causes polarizing views, and I anticipated the resulting dialogues could be frustrating and emotional at times, but I was still hopeful they will be meaningful, respectful, and that everyone involved would be able to value others' perspectives. I approached this research with an uncertainty of what would be discussed, and even after completing the research, am unsure what will be welcomed in discourse regarding religion in higher education, especially in regards to the Catholic faith I hold dearly. Obviously, I did find someone to chair my committee, but he often shared his personal views challenging religion's place in society. Throughout the entire 6 years of this journey, his efforts to have me consider multiple perspectives felt like pushing me to focus my research on social identities other than Catholicism. Every day of my dissertation research felt like a defense of religion as a legitimate social identity. While there is definitely an important place for research on marginalized populations, this study was not it; I purely wanted to explore my students' experiences based on their Catholic identities.

One part of this journey which consistently challenged me was sharing my own faith. As a trained counselor, there are very specific times it is helpful to share my own perspective. I have grappled with publicly sharing my personal views, for I currently work at a secular institution of higher education. However, as I defended my research over and over, I realized how important it was to share my Catholicism. I live my

Catholic faith in every aspect of my life. Yes, I attend Mass every Sunday. I send my children to Catholic school. We hang crucifixes in our house, say prayers before meals and bed, honor the saints, and celebrate Catholic holidays. I also strive to live my faith in every interaction I have with others. My friends often begin talking to me with the phrase, "I can only tell you this because I know you won't judge me." I am non-judgmental because I have been taught to love all people. Yes, I believe there will be a judgment day, but on that day, I will not be the judge. Phew!

However, along this academic journey, others have continually reminded me the Catholic Church oppresses some marginalized populations. Two members of my committee, one being my committee chair, state this as a fact. Not open for debate. I am taking a firm stance that my dissertation was not the place to try and debate this belief. I purely wanted to give Catholic students the opportunity to explore and share their experiences in academic settings. It is important that readers know I realize the Catholic Church has some public stances regarding health care, marriage, and other social issues. I agree with some stances and struggle with some stances, but ultimately believe all people deserve access to basic human rights. In fact, my professional work exemplifies this belief. Throughout the writing process, I had a meeting with a convicted felon who has distributed drugs on our campus. I responded to a young female student who needed help returning to school after recovering from a traumatic abortion. In between these meetings, I supported a friend who recently gave birth to a baby conceived using in-vitro fertilization and the use of a donor egg. I was the primary point of contact for a man who was released from prison after enticing minors into sexual relationships on the internet. I helped a gay man who was kicked out of his home find new housing and social support

services. I am honored to help these individuals, despite the Church's stance on the social issues affecting each of them. I do not see any of them as better or worse than each other, or better or worse than me.

My beliefs were a filter through which I viewed my research. This time, for this project, I hope this filter gave me the ability to share the experiences of eight individuals who were also no better or worse than any other students, but were sometimes made to feel less-than. Less deserving of their place in the classroom, less qualified to declare particular majors, and less able to understand particular academic material than their non-religious peers. My hope is that all readers, reviewers, educators, peers, and students are able to empathize with the participants – I am a counselor, after all – and make an effort to consider the issues raised from multiple perspectives.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the problem of religion in higher education, the purpose of my research with Catholic students in academic settings, the significance of the study, and my perspective as a researcher on the topic of religious identity. I brought these topics together to demonstrate the need for culturally responsive education, and explained how it would be relevant and transferable to other populations in education. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Catholic undergraduate students in academic settings. In this constructivist, narrative study guided by intersectionality theory, I explored the intersection of Catholic students' religious identities with their academic experiences. My hope is the findings from this study will help inform our understanding of religious students' experiences on college campuses, helping students and educators learn how to appreciate and respect religious diversity in

academic settings. In the following chapters, I will review the literature related to this topic, outline the methodology and methods I followed to gather and analyze the research data, and share the findings and implications of my research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Catholicism in Higher Education in the United States

When considering the current status of Catholicism in higher education, it is helpful to understand its complex history. Before the early 20th century, higher education in the United States was unmistakably Protestant. At that time, there was an influx of Jewish and Catholic immigrants who started to change the composition of the population in the United States. A limited number of Jewish students were accepted into colleges and universities due to their reputation as intellectuals, but Catholics were not initially accepted, nor were they interested in Protestant education. In fact, Catholic leaders outwardly expressed their hostile attitudes toward public education and were not shy about denouncing the Protestant education system (Steinberg, 1974).

One of the most notable studies on Catholicism in higher education examined the history of Catholicism and Judaism in the US educational system. Steinberg (1974) conducted a quantitative survey analysis seeking to assess the validity of "Jewish intellectualism" and "Catholic anti-intellectualism" (p. 167). More than 40 years later, the study is still relevant for its assessment of the history of religion and anti-Catholic sentiments within US higher education. Steinberg analyzed data previously collected by the National Surveys of Higher Education and also conducted surveys of undergraduate

students, graduate students, and faculty in “hundreds of institutions of higher learning throughout the United States” (p. xix).

Steinberg suggests that the historic conflict over religion and education can only be understood within the context of the larger historical influence of the Protestant-Catholic social division. Beginning in the 1840’s, over a million Irish Catholics immigrated to the United States, triggered by the potato rot in Ireland. This immigration was different than any other wave of immigration in US history for three reasons. First, the number of Irish Catholics immigrating nearly quadrupled any other immigration surge in US history. The second difference was the education and skill level of the immigrants. The Catholics arriving were impoverished and famine-stricken, unlike the more “respectable class of immigrants who came with surplus cash or occupational skills” previously (Steinberg, 1974, p. 35). Finally, the Catholics emigrating from Ireland were unique in their religious devotion. As a result of centuries of religious prosecution by the English, the Irish immigrants were devoted, “almost militantly”, to their Catholic faith (Steinberg, 1974, p.36).

The immigrant population included hundreds of thousands of Catholic children, yet the US educational system was based in protestant beliefs. In the 1840s, the public educational system began to change, through democratic votes that resulted in Catholics controlling the public education in the wards with concentrated Catholic populations. Such votes also resulted in riots and mob attacks on Catholic churches. By the 1850s, the educational landscape of the country had changed completely – evolving from a Protestant system filled with prayers and religious traditions to a secular institution completely void of religious beliefs (Steinberg, 1974).

Steinberg's research suggests a national anti-Catholic sentiment resulted from the nature of the Catholic immigration and the immediate tensions it placed on the US educational system. He states, "It is no exaggeration to say that anti-Catholicism was part of the political and cultural fabric of the new nation" (Steinberg, 1974, p. 34) but also suggests, "Catholics have accommodated themselves to the secular currents in American society" (p. 54). Ultimately, Steinberg found Catholics to be equally capable scholars whose representation in the field of education was indicative of the length of involvement in higher education.

The historical nature of Steinberg's study leaves a gap between his research and mine. Catholic student populations were growing and gaining credibility when his research concluded, but the literature does not give a clear indication of what has happened with the educational attitudes toward Catholic students since that time. His research suggests American higher education was strongly anti-Catholic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. My hope is to bridge the gap and explore how students are experiencing their Catholic identity in higher education today. Certainly, just as the political and social issues of the time influenced Catholic students from the 1800s-1900s, students today will also be influenced by current issues facing the Catholic Church and its members.

Christian Privilege

Christian privilege is the idea that Christian individuals and communities have some unearned benefits merely because they are Christians (Evans et al., 2010). Christianity is the dominant religious tradition in the United States, and Christian traditions are publicly acknowledged and openly celebrated. Christian privilege is

evident in higher education, as school breaks align with Christian holidays and symbols of the Christian faith such as crosses, Christmas trees, and nativity scenes are publicly displayed (Evans et al., 2010). Even the Pope's recent visit to the United States and the massive amount of press coverage the events received are indicative of Christian prominence and privilege in the United States.

The idea of Christian privilege partially inspired my research. In 2007, a research team investigated Christian students' academic experiences and coined the term "social status ambiguity" to describe the contrast they discovered between students' undeniable Christian privilege and their feelings of exclusion and marginalization in academic settings (Moran et al., 2007, p. 23). I can relate to the concept of social status ambiguity and undeniably experienced it myself in the classroom, especially during discussions of current events and social issues. In my study, Q2 grew directly out of my experience with social status ambiguity and seeks to explore other Catholic students' experiences in the classroom by asking: What roles do current social issues and political debates have in shaping these experiences [in academic settings]?

Catholic Church and Contemporary Social Issues

In order to address my second research question: What roles do current social issues and political debates have in shaping these experiences? It is necessary to review the contemporary social issues affecting Catholic individuals. The participants in this study will strongly guide which issues we explore, discuss, and further review in the literature, but an introductory scan of current literature suggested issues of abortion, gay rights, and politics are primary concerns for Catholics. In this section, I review several studies related to these issues and their relation to the Catholic Church.

Attitudes Toward Abortion and Homosexuality

Clements (2014) quantitatively examined the attitudes of British Catholics toward abortion and homosexuality using a 2010 national survey of 1,636 individuals age 18 and older. The high Catholic response rate for this particular survey was untypical; a majority of previous national surveys had low response rates from the Catholic population. Survey questions specifically addressed abortion, homosexuality, frequency of church attendance (as an indicator of religious commitment), sex, age, ethnic group, region, social grade, educational level, employment sector, which daily newspaper participants read, and which political party participants supported. The results for this study indicated abortion and homosexuality are issues for which the Church has clear moral teaching and has taken public stances, but where significant proportions of Catholics currently hold opposing views. The researcher found noteworthy connections in the roles played by sex, age, and religious commitment in individuals' supporting attitudes toward social issues, while party political affiliation only affected attitudes toward homosexuality. The Catholic population most likely to hold views in line with official Church teaching included men, older people, and those who attend religious services more frequently.

Table I

Summary of Views of Catholic Respondents

Percentage of Respondents	View Represented
69.4	Women's right to choose an abortion (against Church teaching)
22.3	Women should not have the right to an abortion (in line with Church teaching)
30.5	Women should always be allowed an abortion before 20 weeks (against Church teaching)
44.4	Women should be allowed an abortion on the grounds of rape, incest severe disability to the child or as an indirect consequence of life-saving treatment for the mother (against Church teaching)
6.4	Women should never be allowed an abortion (in line with Church teaching)
40.9	We should celebrate loving relationships, whether gay or straight*
18.8	I am in favor of equal rights, but in general I think straight relationships are better than gay relationships*
27.6	I don't like homosexuality, but accept that what consenting adults do in private is their business, not mine*

Note. *church teaching has a clear stance against gay marriage but Catholic Social Justice Teaching clearly defends the rights of ALL people. For the purposes of this particular study, any views in support of gay rights were viewed as going against Church teaching.

Overall, Roman Catholics in Britain, in relation to views on abortion and homosexuality, demonstrate a significant divergence from official Church teaching on these issues of personal morality. This study highlights some of the current social issues Catholics are facing globally, but would be more relevant to my study if the survey was from the United States, where my research will be taking place. Additionally, the study fails to

address the Catholic Church's official stance on these social issues, in which I found some error in their claims. Specifically, the researcher makes broad statements of the Catholic Church against homosexuals without documenting where the Catholic Church makes such claims.

Secularism and Gay Rights

Hichy, Gerges, Platania, & Santisi (2015) conducted a study aiming to test the mediating effects of state secularism on the relationship between Catholic identity, political orientation, and gay civil rights. This quantitative study was based on a survey of 197 Catholic Italians age 18-70 born and living in Italy. In this study, the researchers tested the following hypothesis:

H1 Religiosity, defined as strength of identification with the Catholic group, should be negatively associated with support for same-sex marriage, adoption by gays and lesbians, and a secular state.

H2 Right-wing political orientation should be negatively associated with support for same-sex marriage, adoption by gays and lesbians, and a secular state.

H3 The effects of religious identity and political orientation on attitudes toward same-sex marriage and adoption by gays and lesbians should be mediated by the desire for a secular state.

Italy is a constitutionally-secular country where marriage is not specifically defined as limited to a man and woman but legal documents use the terms husband and wife. National law limits adoption to couples who have been married at least three years, which automatically excludes same-sex couples who do not match the national definition of marriage.

The researchers found religiosity and political orientation were both predictors of attitudes toward same-sex marriage and adoption by gays and lesbians, although they

varied by issue. Religiosity was found to be the more powerful predictor of the two variables in influencing views of homosexual marriage, while religiosity and political orientation demonstrated the same strength in predicting attitudes toward homosexual adoption. Overall, these attitudes proved to be mediated by a cohesive desire for state secularism.

The researchers for this study note one major implication: Individuals who identify as gay or lesbian seeking support for civil rights in Italy will need to persuade people who endorse the Catholic religion and right-wing ideology that state laws cannot follow the Church because of the secular promise of equal rights to all citizens. Limitations for this study include the limited population and location of participants. The remote location may not directly relate to my study in the United States, but the connection between the Catholic Church, politics, and basic human rights could be relevant for my participants.

Catholic Voters

In 2010, Kicku Huckle completed dissertation research examining Catholic voting, because "In American politics, beliefs about implementation are represented by how we *vote*. Voting requires that we compromise our principles, as no candidate nor policy proposal will perfectly compliment one person's moral agenda" (p. 22). The political issues Huckle (2010) examined were: when abortion should be legal, spending on the poor and welfare, use of funding for the military. The researcher identified "good voter" qualities in line with Catholic Social Justice Teaching (CSJT) and determined a "good" Catholic voter would prioritize public order (anti-abortion), social welfare, foreign affairs and national defense, followed by economics, business, and consumer

issues. Huckle (2010) analyzed statistics from the American National Election Studies (ANES) for all Catholic voters from 1980-2004.

Huckle's first hypothesis was that high religiosity leads to an agreement with the Church on a multitude of political issues, but found no statistically significant difference between the groups. The statistically insignificant difference which did exist indicated the opposite to be true; Catholics with low religiosity held positions closer to Church teaching than more devout individuals. The second hypothesis involved high income leading to disagreement with the Church on economic issues. On this topic, the researcher found a statistically significant difference between socioeconomic groups on all issues except willingness to use military force. In terms of socioeconomic status, high income individuals tended to be less in line with the Catholic Church. Further analysis indicated that lower income Catholics' political beliefs, generally, are more in line with CSJT than their higher income counterparts). The next hypothesis Huckle tested was: Democratic voters will be pro-choice, pro-government spending on poor/welfare, anti-increased government spending on defense, less willing to use military force. Republican voters will be anti-abortion, anti-(increased) government spending on the poor/welfare, pro-increased government spending on defense, and more willing to use military force. The survey analysis indicated the Democratic party falls more in line with CSJT, although the Republican party as more of a reputation for being religious. Actually, the only CSJT stance supported by Republicans is the one against abortion (Huckle, 2010).

Overall, neither the Democratic or Republican parties could be described as "good" voters by the Catholic Church, according to Huckle's study, nor could any ethnic group. The final hypothesis tested was: Latino ethnicity will lead to an agreement with

Church on a majority of political issues. The research indicated Latinos come closer than any other ethnic group to voting in line with CSJT, but are still not "good" voters as defined by Huckle. In conclusion, no Catholic voters were found to be predominantly aligned with CSJT, but some populations are better than others. Latino Catholics, lower income Catholics, and Democrats (in that order) most often vote in line with CSJT (Huckle, 2010).

This study exemplifies the complexity and unpredictability of religion in politics. The researcher's definition of "good voter" made Catholic doctrine manageable within the confines of the study, although future research could include more interpretations of CSJT, especially in regards to human rights issues including same-sex marriage and health care rights. The quantitative data provided gives a glimpse into a highly complex issue I hope to explore in more depth through my qualitative study.

One gap I found in the literature exists between empirical studies and anecdotal publications regarding the public view of the Catholic Church and its members. The term anti-Catholicism is used frequently when describing the history of Catholic education or anecdotally among writers reflecting on the current social status of the church. However, none of the research studies I found address the existence of anti-Catholicism or the effect it may have on their study. In my study, I will explore the concept of anti-Catholicism in a group conversation with participants as a way to deepen our discussion on Christian privilege. In the next section, I review the current literature on anti-Catholicism, its roots, history, and place within education.

Anti-Catholicism

The phrase “The last acceptable prejudice” (Massa, 2003; Jenkins, 2003) describes anti-Catholic sentiments that have survived in America since the first pilgrims arrived in the New World (Jenkins, 2003). Other derogatory terms and phrases used to describe Catholics and their Church throughout history include “anti-intellectuals” (Steinberg, 1974, p. xvii), “un-American” (Edwards, 2008; Jenkins, 2003), “culturally suspect”, “religiously corrupt” (Massa, 2003, p. 2), “outsiders” (Massa, 2003, p. 15), “papists” (Massa, 2003, p. 19), “hypocrites” (Hinshaw, 2000, p. 95), “Catholic menace” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 23), “foreign evil” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 25), and “pedophiles” (Jenkins, 2003, p. 138). One book chapter was even entitled “The trouble with Catholics” (Marsden, 1994, p. 400), which included a story of Catholicism being paralleled to Communism, since both were hierarchies with foreign leadership (Marsden, 1994). Regardless of accuracy or intent, this anti-Catholic language has survived throughout American history and is still causing controversy today. Harvard professor Arthur Schlesinger Sr. famously called anti-Catholicism “The deepest bias in the history of the American people” (Massa, 2003; Jenkins, 2003; Hinshaw, 2000); more recently, Hinshaw (2000) described anti-Catholicism as “The last respectable bias” (p. 89).

Although most religions and social institutions have been criticized at some point in history, no such prejudice has been as publicly tolerated and accepted as the bigotry against Catholicism (Massa, 2003; Jenkins, 2003; Hinshaw, 2000). Jenkins (2003) summarizes the acceptance of anti-Catholicism:

> At least in public discourse, a general sensitivity is required, so that a statement that could be regarded as misogynistic, anti-Semitic, or homophobic would haunt a speaker for years, and could conceivably destroy a public career. Yet there is one massive exception to this rule, namely, that it is still possible to make quite remarkably hostile or vituperative public statements about one major religious

> tradition, namely, Roman Catholicism, and those comments will do no harm to the speaker's reputation (pp. 4-5).

To explore the nature of anti-Catholicism, I provide a review of anti-Catholic literature, beginning with an overview of the history of anti-Catholicism in America. I then investigate Catholicism within the public educational system before examining possible reasons for the acceptance of anti-Catholicism in today's society.

History of anti-Catholicism. The fabric of the new nation of America was woven with anti-Catholic beliefs as the first settlers in the New World were escaping the religious corruption of England and Europe (Steinberg, 1974; Massa, 2003). In the 1600's, there were laws against the settlement of "papists" who had any loyalty to the Catholic Church or the pope (Massa, 2003, p. 19). Children even played anti-Catholic games such as "break the pope's neck" and learned to memorize their ABC's with phrases such as, "A, Abhor that abhorrent whore of Rome" (Massa, 2003, p. 19). Some credit the American Revolution with ending anti-Catholicism in the United States, because the Catholic country of France entered the conflict in 1778 on the side of the American colonies (Massa, 2003). However, the surge of Irish immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century re-ignited the anti-Catholic public opinion in America (Steinberg, 1974), especially since the Irish Catholics represented the largest group of immigrants the country had ever experienced. Catholics quickly became societal "others", known for their lack of education, illiteracy, and hard-drinking habits (Massa, 2003). Once again, some believed anti-Catholicism resolved with the outbreak of World War II, as Americans joined together in pride and were united in "the American Way of Life" (Herberg, 1955, pp. 38-39).

Anti-Catholicism in education. Anti-Catholicism may have died in World War II if it had not been kept alive and well in the American educational system. When Catholics began immigrating to America, the public school system was based in Protestant beliefs. To make matters worse for Catholics, they generally had a low literacy rate and came from peasant backgrounds. Additionally, the Catholics who sought an education desired an educational atmosphere promoting their ethnic and religious heritage (Steinberg, 1974; Massa, 2003; Jenkins, 2003). The combination of these factors created the problem of "Catholic anti-intellectualism" that continued into the middle of the twentieth century (Steinberg, 1974).

The establishment of Catholic schools and the secularization of public schools added to the bias against Catholics, but the anti-Catholicism of higher education grew directly out of academic concerns (Steinberg, 1974). After the mid-1900's, many scholars viewed religious education as a violation of academic freedom and rejected the idea of colleges teaching principles of morality. Additionally, Catholic higher education focused on the humanities while public universities focused more on scientific research. As a result, Catholics quickly became underrepresented in research (Steinberg, 1974; Massa, 2003). Although formal actions of anti-Catholicism may have subsided, "leadership in higher education treated Catholics as second-class for persisting in having their own schools" (Marsden, 1994, p. 5).

Reasons for anti-Catholicism today. Scholars give various explanations for the persistence of anti-Catholicism in today's prejudice-sensitive society. Some attribute anti-Catholic sentiments to actual Catholic teachings and beliefs (Jenkins, 2003) while others blame the public and authoritative nature of the Catholic Church (Massa, 2003).

Despite these differences, researchers agree the media supports anti-Catholic rhetoric because the Roman Catholic Church does not always comply with mainstream cultural values (Jenkins, 2003; Massa, 2003; Hinshaw, 2000). The media has also contributed to the "pedophile" reputation of Catholic priests despite research suggesting clergy have no higher rate of sexual abuse than any other population (Jenkins, 2003). Finally, former members of the Catholic Church contribute to anti-Catholicism by inaccurately representing the beliefs and practices of Catholicism (Jenkins, 2003). The following section explores each of these reasons for anti-Catholicism more specifically.

Public stances and beliefs. The secularization of American culture united the country in one popular sentiment: the privatization of religion. Various religious beliefs can be tolerated, as long as they are shared, practiced, and celebrated privately (Massa, 2003; Hinshaw, 2000). As one scholar noted, "Catholicism as a magisterial religious tradition has resolutely refused to play by the rules of the privatized religious game" (Massa, 2003, p. 17). The Catholic Church adds to its "religiously corrupt" or "culturally suspect" practices by taking public stances on political and cultural issues such as homosexuality, abortion, contraception, and education (Massa, 2003, p. 2; Hinshaw, 2000; Jenkins, 2003). Such public stances upset much of the American population for two reasons. First, religious views are valued as private beliefs, not public claims. Second, authoritative religious teaching threatens the democracy and freedom of American people (Massa, 2003).

While Catholic beliefs certainly fuel anti-Catholic bias, the public nature of the Catholic Church authority seems to be at the heart of anti-Catholicism. Catholic positions on many political and social issues are targeted and publicly ridiculed much

more than other religious groups who share the same nonmainstream beliefs. Massa (2003) notes "That a palpable but indefinable something else can reasonably be going on" (pp. 41-42), and "something else" is likely prejudice against the Catholic Church, its members, its beliefs, and its customs (Massa, 2003).

"Pedophile" priests. Since the 1980's one statistic has been haunting Catholic clergymen; Five to six percent of all Catholic priests are pedophiles, meaning several thousand predatory clergymen are active at any given time (Jenkins, 2003). These frightening statistics have been blasted all over mainstream media for over 25 years, without any explanation of the source or credibility of the numbers. Further investigation reveals a logical explanation; the Catholic priests who contributed to the 5-6% statistic were already seeking psychological or psychiatric treatment for various problems (Jenkins, 2003, p. 138). In the 1990's, a team of researchers conducted another research study to gain a better understanding of the same issue; they acquired longitudinal data from 1951-1991 from the archdiocese of Chicago. The data was representative of 2,252 Catholic priests and suggested only 1.7% of the researched individuals were sexual abusers. Furthermore, only one priest in the entire group was diagnosed as a pedophile, demonstrating there is no evidence linking Catholic priests to be likely abusers, much less pedophiles (Jenkins, 2003, pp. 139-141). Jenkins (2003) summarized the findings more specifically:

> There is strikingly little evidence that clergy of any kind are any more or less likely to abuse than non-clerical groups who have close contact with children, for instance teachers, Scoutmaster, or supervisors in residential homes and summer campus. And though a sizable number of clergy have been implicated in this kind of abuse, no evidence indicates that Catholic or celibate clergy are more (or less) involved than their non-celibate counterparts (pp. 141-142).

While the media certainly plays a role in how Catholic abuse scandals are publicized, there are others contributing to anti-Catholic language in the way they describe their Catholic and formerly-Catholic experiences.

"Members" & former members of the Church. Some of the biggest supporters of anti-Catholicism actually claim to be members of the Catholic Church, or claim credibility because of their former involvement with the Catholic Church. "Lapsed Catholics" who speak out against Catholicism spread anti-Catholicism and are viewed as credible sources because of their former involvement with the Church, not necessarily because of the accuracy of their statements (Jenkins, 2003). Additionally, current "members" of the Catholic Church contribute to anti-Catholicism by expressing their disagreement with Catholic beliefs. In fact, several Gallup polls from the past twenty years demonstrate the majority of Catholic individuals disagree with the Church's stance on birth control and the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In regards to the surveys, it is important to note that participants were self-identified Catholics who may or may not be actively pursuing their Catholic faith. Additionally, the survey questions were not screened by a Catholic authority. The survey questions may have been open to a certain amount of participant interpretation (Jenkins, 2003). Still, Gallup shared the statistics as trustworthy information about the Catholic Church. Such controversies have contributed to a Catholic "civil war" among Church members who practice their faith with various levels of regard for Catholic doctrine (Jenkins, 2003).

Anti-Catholicism summary. The acceptance of anti-Catholicism and the lack of religious dialogue on university campuses create a problem for today's diverse students seeking cross-cultural educations. Specifically, Catholic students face publicly-accepted

prejudices without being able to dialogue with their peers or educators about their experiences with the Catholic Church or the way it intersects with their other social identities. This experience creates social status ambiguity in the ways Catholic students simultaneously experience Christian privilege and religious oppression within their Catholic identity (Moran et al., 2007, p. 23). Educators have a responsibility to address this issue while ensuring students of all backgrounds feel welcome, validated, and safe to dialogue with their peers (Museus, 2008; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Rice, 2008; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2008c; Harper & Antonio, 2008; Quaye et al., 2008).

Identity Development

College can be a time of intense personal development. Developmental theorists have examined a multitude of different ways in which students grow and change during their college years. In this section, I review some of the studies contributing to the larger body of literature on the topics of student identity development, religious development, spiritual development, faith development, and intersectionality. Reviewing previous studies on these topics will inform my research as I work with students exploring their own identities and religious development in college.

Student Identity Development

The term "student development" is defined as "the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education" (Rodgers, 1990, p. 27). Concern for student development has existed since the first universities in the 1630s coined the term *in loco parentis*, which referred to university administrators' responsibility to be *in place of the parents* (Rhatigan, 2000). Since the time of *in loco parentis,* student development has

evolved into a concern for students' holistic development inside and outside the classroom (Evans et al., 2010).

Social identity development theory grew out of student development theories during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. During this crucial time, black identity models and the women's movement were gaining momentum, which led into the gay rights movement of the 1970s, the cultural development models of the 1980s, and multiple identity development models of the 1990s and 2000s (Evans et al., 2010).

Spiritual Development

Educators are being called to "focus more on the spiritual development of students" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 211), as students tend to become more spiritual in college (Astin, 2008). Student development theorist Alexander Astin (2008) describes spiritual development as students' "search for meaning and purpose, with their values development and with their self-understanding. Spirituality is primarily an interior quality… [having] to do with values, attitudes, and beliefs" (p. 1).

In a 6-year longitudinal study conducted at UCLA, Astin's research team found students' overall levels of spirituality to increase by 10-20% between their first and third years of college. This spiritual growth was contrary to religious practices, which decreased 18% over the same time period. The researchers found the greatest influence on students' beliefs and practices during this time to be their peer groups (Astin, 2008).

Peers are not the only influence on students' spiritual development. A 2011 study of first-year students highlighted institutional characteristics positively correlated to spiritual development for students. Using data from the 2004 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), researchers analyzed a sample of 7,172 first-year students from 442

institutions of higher education in the United States. The researchers found the following characteristics to be positively correlated with spiritual development in the first year of college (Lovik, 2011):

- Students with International, Asian, and first-generation backgrounds at all institutional types
- Underrepresented groups
- Students' perception of institutional support for social and nonacademic needs
- Students identifying as Baptist, Roman Catholic, nondenominational, and select Protestant religions
- Institutional requirement of attending chapel or religious service of any type
- Commitment of faculty to religion: institutions hiring only faculty who agree with the college's statement of faith
- Institutional mission statement including religious or spiritual development
- First-year required general education course on theology or religion

As demonstrated by the differences in these two studies, spiritual development is a broad and highly interpretive topic of research. Both of these studies were quantitative in nature and had no narrative qualities. My study would benefit from more qualitative discussion on the topic of spiritual development. As such, I will continue to address this concept in my review of faith development in college.

Faith Development

Hoffman (2012) conducted an analysis of faith development models and summarized the emergent themes in three phases. Individuals may move back and forth between phases and may even increase their spirituality within a phase. The first phase

of faith development is concrete. Individuals in the concrete phase of faith development are not accepting of discrepancies or disagreements. They dedicate themselves to a belief system without questions or doubt. The next phase of faith development is a transitional phase. In this phase, individuals may struggle with doubt, questions, or may even regress back to the concrete phase occasionally for the comfort of certainty. Sometimes individuals are able to work through the transitional phase to move into a more advanced stage of development, but others fluctuate between the transitional and concrete phases indefinitely. Final stages of faith development involve deep conviction, acceptance, less dependence on the "correctness of belief" (p. 1028), and an acceptance and openness to others' belief systems. Keeping faith development in mind could help me interview participants in a more meaningful way for my study.

Religious Development in College

Spirituality and religiosity may connect for some students, but for others, religiosity is an experience completely separate from spirituality. For this reason, in this study, I will follow Jacobsen & Jacobsen's (2012) definition of religion:

> "All the different ways in which human beings seek to understand the world and order their lives in light of what they believe to be ultimately true, real, and important. Religion in this sense of the term includes all the ideas, values, rituals, and affections that people reference when they are focusing on things that really matter" (p. 14).

College is a natural time for students to experience religious development (Hoffman, 2012). In fact, one scholar claims addressing religion during college may have several benefits. In his query on "the god image", Louis Hoffman reviewed current research on religious and spiritual development and made several conclusions regarding the experiences of religious college students. First, a student's religious beliefs have the

potential to serve as a "protective factor" for students (Hoffman, 2012, p. 1026), promoting resiliency and effective coping strategies. Additionally, adolescents and adults who are religious tend to engage in fewer risky behaviors than their peers. Most importantly, according to Hoffman's analysis, religion and spirituality may promote well-being and positive psychological health for students (p. 1026).

Religious Development Contributes to Healthy Identity Development

Leak (2009) also connected faith and religious development to healthy identity development. The researcher surveyed 266 undergraduate students self-identified as "theistic", which was defined as "believing in a God as personal God or as a transcendent life force" (Leak, 2009, p. 207). The participants, with an average age of 20, completed an identity development scale, a faith development scale, a religious maturity scale, and a negative religiousness scale (which measures how beliefs are conceptually problematic or correlated with negative personality traits). The surveys indicated a correlation between early stages of individual development with lower levels of faith development. The study revealed a connection between faith development and personal identity crisis or struggle, and not with achieved identity status. In fact, those students in moratorium status – experiencing crisis, questioning beliefs, and exploring alternatives – were higher in faith development and lower in negative religiousness than any other identity status (Leak, 2009).

Religious Identity Development at Secular Institution

For his dissertation, Timothy Wilson (2004) conducted a constructivist case study asking the questions: does attending a public university impact an undergraduate's faith

development? If so, which institutional elements do respondents cite as being most influential? The researcher ultimately found that yes, attending a public university does impact an undergraduate student's faith development, and interacting with mentors in religious student organizations was the most influential institutional element in their development. Described as a constructivist case study, the researcher met with each of seven participants one time for about 45 minutes to ask a very specific list of questions (Wilson, 2004). The researcher identified implications of his study as a need to diversify his sample pool in terms of race, religion, and institution (Wilson, 2004), but failed to recognize the limits of his study in terms of ethnographic inconsistencies. With such limited exposure to the participants and close-ended questions, the study had many qualities of post-positivism. Despite these limitations, Wilson's study was one of the few I recognized addressing a similar population to my study – religious students at a secular institution.

Religious Identity Privilege vs. Institutional Type

Bowman & Small (2010) also addressed institutional type when investigating religious development for students. Using a longitudinal data set they completed a quantitative study asking the questions: How are religious minority status and institutional type related to spiritual development? To what extent do any individual-level effects differ for students attending religiously affiliated (versus secular) institutions? To what extend are precollege dispositions and college experiences associated with spiritual development? (Bowman & Small, 2010).

The researchers had several predictions for the study. They predicted double minorities (students with minority identities both on campus and in society) and non-

religious students would experience less spiritual development than mainline Christians. Catholic students were expected to have greater spiritual development at Catholic institutions and born-again Christians were expected to have greater spiritual development at non-Catholic Christian schools. Students at religiously affiliated institutions were predicted to have greater spiritual development than at secular schools.

Analyzing data from the Spirituality in Higher Education Project conducted by Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the researchers came to the following conclusions:

- Students attending a Catholic or non-Catholic religiously affiliated school experienced more spiritual development than students at a secular school
- At secular schools, there were no developmental differences between double minority students and mainline Christians, but there were negative effect for double minorities at all types of religious schools
- Catholic students experienced significantly more religious development at Catholic schools than secular and more negative development at non-Catholic religious schools than at secular schools
- Faculty support for spiritual/religious development and student engagement in religious activities were positively related to gains in spiritual identification at all institutional types (Bowman & Small, 2010)

This study was thorough and addressed many identifiers for religious students in higher education. As a quantitative study, the limitation is the depth of the data. Religious development is a deeply personal issue; I hope to fill a gap in Bowman & Small's study by exploring religious student identity at a secular institution narratively.

Religious Identity Internalization

Ryan, Rigby, and King conducted a quantitative study in 1993 examining religious internalization. Defining internalization as "the process through which an individual transforms a formerly externally prescribed regulation or value into an internal one" (Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993, p. 586). The researchers suggest two types of religious internalization exist: introjection and identification. Introjection is a partial internalization of beliefs characterized by pressures of approval by self and others, while Identification is the adoption of beliefs as personal values, with awareness (Ryan et al., 1993). One primary question guided the research: How does religious internalization affect mental health?

The study included 4 samples of students:

1) 105 undergraduates at a secular institution who identified as Christian
2) 151 students at two religiously-based institutions
3) 41 adults from a Sunday school class at a Protestant church
4) 342 adolescents participating in a summer evangelical project in NYC

   *subset of 105 evangelical subjects were drawn at random to establish a sample matched for age and sex with sample 1, for the purpose of testing differences in introjection and integration between this behaviorally engaged group and their Christian counterparts from a secular college (p. 589)

The researchers used a self-esteem inventory, a self-actualization index, a general health questionnaire, a social-desirability scale (measures tendency to display social desirability-oriented responses), and five scales for measuring religiosity and commitment to religious doctrine to answer their research question. Ultimately, the researchers were

able to conclude that religious identity was "positively associated with psychological adjustment" (p. 594), but introjection, "when predictive, related negatively to such outcomes" (p. 594). Limitations included religious population and types of internalization examined. For the purposes of my study, it was informative to see an examination of internalization, since my own religious internalization motivated my research and may also be an influence for the participants in my study.

Intersectionality

As research on the multiple dimensions of identity has increased, so has the understanding that one social category cannot be considered in isolation from other social categories. Studies using intersectionality as a theoretical framework are increasing, especially for the purposes of exploring the interaction between privileged and oppressed social identities. One such study was an examination of race and gender in Black adolescent males (Rogers, Scott, & Way, 2015). This quantitative study surveyed 183 participants age 13-16 from predominantly low-income backgrounds. Racial identity was measured using two subscales from the multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity – Teen. The researchers also measured psychological well-being and academic adjustment. The study examined whether racial and gender identities were interrelated, changed over time, and predicted psychological and academic outcomes among lack adolescent males.

Strong positive correlations between race and gender were highly central and positively regarded, significantly correlated with each other, and each played a unique role in shaping boys' adjustment over time. More simply stated, the boys' racial and gender identities were strongly connected. The surveys also indicated racial identity increased over time while gender identity and the privatization of racial and gender

identities declined over time. Finally, "racial *and* gender identity uniquely contributed to higher levels of psychological well-being and academic adjustment" (Rogers et al., 2015, p. 407).

This particularly study examined two particular identities – race and gender – but also considered the variance in the boys' identities. The researchers acknowledged social factors and environmental influences also impacted the boys' identity development. Similarly, I will need consider social factors, environmental influences, and variance in identities despite the shared identities of the Catholic students participating in my study. Once again, reviewing this study reminds me the value of qualitative data when researching identity development. Participant stories can add depth and transferability when discussing personal topics such as social identity.

One example of a more personal exploration of intersectionality is Shams's (2015) qualitative exploration of Bangladeshi Muslims in Mississippi. In this study, the researcher explored how Bangladeshi Muslims negotiate their identities to navigate interactions with Mississippi's predominantly White Christian society. The researcher, a Bangladeshi Muslim himself, described the value of intersectionality as a guiding framework, stating, "Individuals within [the intersectionality] matrix are simultaneously members of several dominant and subordinate groups, thus having varying balances of both oppression and privilege" (Shams, 2015, p. 385).

For this study, the researcher interviewed 12 Bangladeshi Muslims, 7 women and 5 men, and identified several themes in their stories. First, Shams noted the intersection of the participants' visible genders with their ethnicity and religion. For Muslim men, their beards are a strong visual representation of their religious identity. For Muslim

women, the veil they wear is an indicator of their religion. Both the beard and veil are stigmatized, but women were able to hide their veil if they desired, choosing to internalize their religious identity. On the other hand, the men's beards were not removable. The only way the Muslim men described they could hide their religious identity was to publicly distance themselves from their religion by laughing at Islamophobic jokes and ignoring offensive comments from others. Several participants also described methods for highlighting their Bangladeshi culture in order to distract from their Muslim identities. Some participants felt these actions were necessary, especially the men, who reported feeling more likely to be stereotyped as a terrorist. Despite these public challenges with their religious identity, all of the participants described full participation in their Muslim prayers and traditions at home (Shams, 2015).

Visibility emerged as another theme from the participants' stories. As visible "Brown people" (Shams, 2015, p. 389), the Bangladeshis did not fit the mold of the prominent population of color in Mississippi nor the White majority population. One participant stated, "Shado rao nein a. Kalo rao nein na. [The whites don't accept me. The blacks don't accept me.]" (Shams, 2015, p. 390). While several of the participants expressed this sense of rejection, others had only slight concerns of fitting in with the majority population. The individuals less concerned with acceptance were also white-collar workers with college education, adding education and socioeconomic status to the intersection of influencing identities.

Although this study addressed a marginalized population, it is a strong model for integrating intersectionality theory into a narrative study on identity. As I explore the religious identities of students who may be navigating different intersections of privilege

and oppression, it will be helpful to have a recent study as reference. Shams smoothly represents the shared and unique experiences integral to narrative studies (Creswell, 2007).

White Racial Identity Development

Critical researchers began using intersectionality as a guiding theory to explore the intersection between race and gender for Black women. In this study, I intended for intersectionality theory to guide my research of Catholic students of various identified genders and races. However, 7 out of my 8 participants identified as White. For this reason, it is important to review previous research on White identity development.

One of the first and most commonly used measures to examine White identity development is the White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (WRIAS). In 2003, two researchers analyzed the WRIAS and found four factors that did not correspond to the original scales of the WRIAS (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003). The original WRIAS quantitatively measured individuals' contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, and autonomy with their Whiteness. Mercer & Cunningham tested the reliability of the WRIAS by surveying 430 college students. The researchers tested the reliability of the students' results, then developed 4 new dimensions of White identity that fit conceptually into the original WRIAS survey but had higher reliability factors. The four new factors developed were: White superiority/segregationist ideology, perceived cross-racial competence and comfort, interest in racial diversity, and reactive racial dissonance (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003). Ultimately, the researchers concluded that even using their new dimensions of White identity, the WRIAS would be best used in conjunction with other evaluation tools for White identity development. In summary,

"White racial identity needs to be conceptualized and studied developmentally. In doing so a multifaceted approach should be taken" (Mercer & Cunningham, 2003, p. 227).

In 2005, another research team examined the WRIAS in conjunction with several other identity development models in order to find correlations between racial and gender identities affecting the overall ego identities of college students (Miville, Darlington, Whitlock, & Mulligan, 2005). A sample of 300 White college students participated, including 175 women and 125 men who completed the WRIAS, Womanist Identity Attitude Scale or Men's Identity Attitude Scale, and the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status. Ego identity was defined as "those identifications pertaining to oneself as a unique individual living in the larger society" (Miville et al., 2005, p. 159).

Findings revealed that college women who had evaluated and felt positively about being a woman also experienced positive ego identity. Conversely, college women who were more naïve about racial issues had positive ego identity development, which demonstrated "conscious awareness about privileged racial group membership may not necessarily serve as a "guide" to resolving personal identity for White college women. Instead, adopting traditional White standards regarding race is apparently associated with ego identity Achievement" (Miville et al., 2005, p. 171). For the male participants, results indicated positively resolving conflicts of gender and race led to successful ego identity development (Miville et al., 2005).

Results varied slightly between White college men and women in regards to the influence of "external demands or conformity to others' standards such as one's parents" (Miville et al., 2005, p. 51). For the White college women in the study, conforming to others' views led to distress in their ego development, whereas the White men did not

seem influenced positively or negatively by external influences. Overall, the researchers found gender issues to be more relevant to ego development than racial issues for White college students, perhaps because issues of gender may have been more prevalent in the participants' lives surrounded by other White people. Additionally, the research team suggested college White college students would benefit from programs incorporating several dimensions of identity at once in order to demonstrate how resolving conflicts in one social identity could lead to resolutions in other dimensions of the students' identities (Miville et al., 2005). The social insulation these White college students have experienced by living in a social environment free of racial stress can lead to White Fragility, which may also impact their White racial development (DiAngelo, 2011).

White Fragility

White individuals who have lived in environments free of racial stress may have a reduced ability to cope with racial stress, also known as White Fragility. White Fragility is

> "A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium" (DiAngelo, 2011, p.54).

Two studies addressing White Fragility helped contextualize my study. In 2015, a researcher specifically addressed the guilt, shame, and fear of White college women by exploring the experiences of six White, feminist, antiracist college women (Linder, 2015). This qualitative study based in the transformative paradigm used intersectionality theory to guide a narrative methodology. Participants were either seniors in college or

had graduated within two years with a minor in women's studies. The result of the study was a conceptual model of antiracist White feminist development that explains how the participants moved through a linear development process of being introduced to racism through sexism, experiencing resistance, anger, and defensiveness, and then accepting the realities of racism (Linder, 2015). After moving through the linear developmental process, the women moved into a phase of development in which they would cycle through phases of guilt and shame, fear of appearing racist, and distancing themselves from their Whiteness. Between these three phases, the women would also engage in antiracism activism (Linder, 2015).

The narratives of the six antiracist White feminists in the study "illuminate the need to further understand the process of development between understanding privilege and translating that knowledge into action" (Linder, 2015, p. 548). The researcher suggests future research exploring the intersection of privileged and subordinated identities could further contextualize her findings. Although my research questions do not directly address racial identity development, Linder's study can serve as a model for exploring the intersection of my participants' privileged Catholic identities with their other social identities.

While Linder (2015) did not use the term White fragility, she clearly addressed her participants' experiences of feeling defensive. Similarly, Hines (2016) conducted an exploration of White fragility by asking six White, pre-service principals to reflect on the relevance of their White privilege without directly using the term White fragility until sharing his findings. The participants were all participating in a master's level class on cultural proficiency, with the final two weeks of class focusing on the relevance of White

privilege in teaching (Hines, 2016). The researcher used the participants' responses to reflection questions to answer his research question, "To what extent do white, pre-service principals' responses to discussion board prompts demonstrate white fragility?" (Hines, 2016, p. 131).

He found White fragility was embedded in the pre-service principals' answers, although the responses "did not completely reject the presence and prevalence of white privilege in society" (Hines, 2016, p. 136). White fragility emerged in the way the principals acknowledged White privilege and then minimized it through discussion on individualism, meritocracy, and innocence. He summarized, "For these pre-service principals, being white has privilege. But the privilege does not hold more importance than individualism and meritocracy" (Hines, 2016, p. 143). The suggested participants spend more time reflecting on race in order to better facilitate dialogues about race in their schools and classrooms (Hines, 2016).

Past research on White racial identity development and White fragility can inform my research on Catholic college students, as a majority of my participants identified as White. Additionally, these previous studies provided meaningful context for the intersection of privileged and subordinate social identities, as well as suggestions for why individuals may experience defensiveness regarding their White identities. Furthermore, the past research on White identity development caused me to reflect on my own racial identity development, which helped me identify how my lens as a White woman may affect my interaction with my participants and their stories. Racial identity development is a component of social identity development, which leads into a body of research

exploring how students navigate their social identities to feel accepted in their college environments.

Sense of Belonging

Along with the increase in social identity and intersectionality research, theories surrounding students' sense of belonging on college campuses is a quickly growing body of research. One major theorist on the topic of belonging is Terrell Strayhorn, who has conducted research on multiple diverse student groups in order to theorize what influences students' sense of belonging on college campuses. Strayhorn (2012) synthesized these studies into a book that is growing in popularity as a textbook among professionals in higher education. In his book, Strayhorn (2012) shares how students' intersecting identities produce various experiences of belonging in different settings. Students' sense of belonging is unique to their individual needs, identities, and experiences. Synthesizing seven of his previous studies on sense of belonging for Latino students, gay students, first-year college students, STEM students of Color, Black male collegians, graduate students, and clubs and organizations, Strayhorn (2012) presents a model for sense of belonging based on the following definition:

> In terms of college, sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers). Indeed, it is a cognitive evaluation that typically leads to an affective response or behavior in students. (Strayhorn, 2012, p.3)

Strayhorn's studies have prompted many others to conduct studies of their own, including a dissertation study exploring the ways in which Black gay men experience sense of belonging at predominantly White colleges.

In 2016, doctoral student C. Gonyo conducted a dissertation study exploring the question: Do Black gay men feel a sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions of higher education? Gonyo (2016) explored this topic by interviewing 16 Black gay men at 3 different 4-year institutions following a constructivist, anti-deficit methodology. The researcher used intersectionality theory to inform his findings and ultimately identified seven major themes influencing Black gay men's sense of belonging at predominantly White institutions of higher education:

- Positive work experiences: ten participants identified their jobs as places where they could develop positive relationships
- Faculty relationships: participants identified more positive relationships with faculty than negative
- Role of university programs: six participants identified various orientation programs helping develop their sense of belonging
- Importance of friend groups: all of the participants mentioned having a group of friends helping them feel like they fit in at college
- Student organizations: a majority of the participants credited student organizations for helping them build new relationships with students with common interests
- Black masculinities: in an effort to fit in, most participants mentioned working to live up to social stereotypes regarding Black masculinity
- Intersectionality: the majority of participants described needing to separate their various social identities according to different college environments

Including Gonyo's dissertation, studies regarding sense of belonging are often tied to social identities and institutional issues of privilege and oppression.

While Gonyo was studying sense of belonging for Black gay men, Vaccaro and Newman (2016) were conducting a grounded theory study in an effort to further clarify and define sense of belonging for college students. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 51 first-year college students and identified three contributing factors to students' sense of belonging: environmental perceptions, involvement, and relationships. The researchers also noted a strong correlation to students' privileged and oppressed identities and how differently these students spoke about belonging. Defining students as privileged if they did not belong to at least one minority group, the researchers described privileged students' sense of belonging to include "feeling comfortable", "fitting in", and enjoying "fun and friendly" environments on campus (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016, p. 937). Contrarily, students who self-identified as belonging to at least one minority group commonly used the word "safe" as a way to describe their feelings of belonging on their college campuses, while no students from the privileged group ever used the word safe to describe their sense of belonging (p. 932). This study contributed to the larger body of literature on sense of belonging by suggesting that the definition of belonging varies by student population (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of literature relevant and meaningful for my proposed exploration of Catholic student experiences. I reviewed studies including the history of Catholicism in the United States, the Catholic Church and contemporary social issues, religious identity development, multiple identity development,

intersectionality, and sense of belonging theory. Many of these studies address issues related and connected to my study, but a gap remains in the literature. I was unable to find any empirical explorations of Catholic student experiences in secular higher education. In the next section, I explain how I plan to address this gap in the literature.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methodology is the link between research philosophies and research methods (Schwandt, 2007). Through methodology, a researcher answers the question, "What is the process of research?" (Creswell, 2007, p.17) by sharing their plan for conducting research as well as their rationale for their selected methods (Crotty, 1998). In this chapter, I will outline the research paradigm, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods for this qualitative study. Because of the emergent nature of qualitative research, the methodology outlined evolved as the study progressed, based upon the needs of my participants (Mertens, 2010).

Paradigm

A paradigm is a way of viewing the world (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010; Mertens, 2010). It is the guiding assumptions that direct our thoughts and behaviors (Mertens, 2010). Researchers identify their paradigm because, "More encompassing than a theory, a paradigm gives us a way to think about our world and how to gain and interpret knowledge about it" (Guido et al., 2010, p. 3). The paradigm I chose for this study is constructivism (Creswell, 2007; Guido et al., 2010; Mertens, 2010; Schwandt, 2007).

Constructivism

Constructivism is often associated with qualitative research because its purpose "is to make sense of human experience and to understand and derive shared meaning within a particular context" (Guido et al., 2010, p. 15). Constructivist researchers want to make sense of the world through varied and multiple meanings of experiences; they value complexities over generalizations (Creswell, 2007). Constructivist research is narrative in nature and requires high involvement from researchers, who obtain knowledge by interacting with research participants (Mertens, 2010). Researchers using this paradigm find meaning in the social and historical situation of participant views (Creswell, 2007).

Because constructivist research is emergent and naturalistic, research questions emerge and transform as the research occurs (Mertens, 2010). Questions are broad and general to allow for participants' interpretations, which can be influenced by social interactions and discussion (Creswell, 2007). Research participants are strategically chosen for the study based upon their ability to provide data relevant to the study, voice, representation, and relationship with the researcher (Mertens, 2010). The research participants in constructivist studies are often involved in reviewing data analysis results to add validity to the researcher's findings (Guido et al., 2010).

Constructivist researchers are responsible for interpreting the participants' stories and experiences. Hence:

> Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they "position themselves" in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal cultural, and historical experiences. Thus, the researchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

In this study, constructivism allowed participants to explore their shared experience of being Catholic college students. This paradigm also allowed me, as researcher, a high level of involvement and interaction with the students, their stories, and their community. Because the purpose of this research was exploration, a constructivist approach allowed for the flexibility needed as the research evolved. Despite this flexibility, as a constructivist researcher I worked to uphold constructivist axiology, ontology, and epistemology in order to maintain authentic processes and findings.

Axiology. Axiology is the "nature of ethical behavior" (Mertens, 2010, p. 11). The close working relationship between constructivist researchers and their research participants creates a need for ethical guidelines. These researchers must remain authentic and trustworthy in their research relationships, allow the participants to be involved in the entire research process, and constantly be aware of issues of power, privilege, oppression, and marginalization that may arise throughout their research interactions. Constructivist researchers must be transparent in their motives, findings, and in their intended use of collected data (Mertens, 2010).

As a researcher, my natural tendency is transparency, and I highly value authenticity, which were both supporting factors in selecting constructivism as my research paradigm. I involved research participants in the following ways throughout the research process: by providing written interview questions at least 24 hours prior to interviews, giving participants the opportunity to review their interview transcriptions, sharing emerging themes and questions throughout the research process, and providing all participants with copies of my findings and final research manuscript.

Ontology. Ontology is how researchers perceive the "nature of reality" (Mertens, 2010, p. 11). Constructivists believe there are multiple realities which are socially constructed, may conflict with one another, and are subject to interpretation (Mertens, 2009). Reality depends upon the researcher and participants' perspectives and is fluid throughout the research process (Mertens, 2010). The goal of a constructivist's research is to "understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge" (Mertens, 2010, p.18). Knowledge emerges throughout the constructivist's research process and is transferable rather than generalizable (Mertens, 2010). There is no Truth in the constructivist paradigm; there are many truths that will change according to varying circumstances (Guido et al., 2010). A constructivist researcher values multiple voices and world views and adds credibility to their data by forming genuine relationships with research participants (Guido et al., 2010).

Due to the highly personal and individual way people experience religion, constructivist ontology allowed me to honor each individual participant's experience. I was not seeking one specific answer to my research question; I was interested in the varied and diverse ways students were experiencing their religious identities in the classroom. My interest in the topic goes beyond Catholicism, making the transferable nature of constructivist research meaningful for this study. My hope is that my research will contribute to a larger body of knowledge regarding religious students' experiences in the classroom.

Epistemology. Epistemology is the "nature of knowledge" (Mertens, 2010, p. 11) and encompasses the relationship between the researcher and the participants. The constructivist researcher interacts with their participants and values personal relationships

throughout the research process (Mertens, 2009). "The researcher and researched cannot be separated" in constructivist thought, nor can knowledge be separate from values (Guido et al., 2010, p. 15). Constructivists are reactive and value the highly personal nature of knowledge (Alkove & McCarty, 1992). Constructivists appreciate perspective and context. They do not strive for objectivity; constructivist researchers maintain validity by utilizing multiple sources and methods for collecting and analyzing data throughout their research process (Mertens, 2010). My background as a counselor and student affairs professional make constructivist epistemology feel very natural to me. I value the ability to remain student-centered in my work and recognize that my values will unavoidably be woven throughout the research process. To do impersonal or hands-off research would have been inauthentic to me as a researcher and professional; this constructivist research was more authentic because it is meaningful and personal to the participants and me. The participants' experiences as Catholic students were greatly influenced by history, culture, and society, and as a constructivist researcher I was able to seek understanding of their multiple and varied experiences within the context of education. In order to make this research more meaningful to a larger audience, I conducted this research through the lens of a theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework: Intersectionality

In qualitative research a theoretical framework identifies the stance a researcher brings to their study (Merriam, 2009). Theoretical frameworks provide a lens through which a researcher views their study; it allows them "to see in new and different ways what seems to be ordinary and familiar" (Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. xiii). The theoretical framework helps researchers identify the topic of their study, create research questions,

inform research methods, and interpret findings. Conclusively, "All aspects of the study are affected by its theoretical framework" (Merriam, 2009, p. 67).

In the past twenty years, one of the most influential concepts to emerge from social identity research is the theory of *intersectionality* (Abes et al., 2007; Crenshaw, 1989; Johnson, 2006; Lutz et al., 2011; Mahaffey & Smith, 2009; McCall, 2005). The concept of *intersectionality* emerged from a legal case, *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* (1977), in which five black women filed suit against General Motors (GM) for discrimination. The courts refused to hear the case as a sex *and* race discrimination case, only allowing the case to be filed on the basis of sex *or* race discrimination. When the women insisted GM's discrimination was based on their identities as black women, the court reasoned, "The prospect of the creation of new classes of protected minorities, governed only by the mathematical principles of permutation and combination, clearly raises the prospect of opening the hackneyed Pandora's box" (*DeGraffenreid v. General Motors,* 1977).

Legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" as a way to describe how black women experienced their racial and gendered identities, specifically through racism and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989, pp. 385-386). Intersectionality is a metaphor for how individuals can simultaneously experience multiple social identities. In a traffic intersection, traffic is moving in all directions. When a collision occurs, it can be from two or more cars traveling in any or all directions. Similarly, people can have varied experiences based on how two or more of their social identities intersect in any given situation (Lutz et al., 2011).

Since Crenshaw's initial use of the term, intersectionality has become a multi-disciplinary topic of research world-wide. Some scholars view intersectionality as a developmental theory, while others use it as a research paradigm, epistemological approach, or theoretical framework (Davis, 2011; Lutz et al., 2011). For the purpose of this research, intersectionality is a theoretical framework through which to understand how individuals in higher education experience their social identities in relation to each other and their academic experience (Davis, 2011; Ferree, 2011; Hearn, 2011; Lutz et al., 2011; Johnson, 2006; Mahaffey & Smith, 2009; Kosnick, 2011; McCall, 2005; Walby, 2007).

One complicated idea included in intersectionality theory is how privileged identities exist in relationship with other social identities. A person could potentially experience privileged and marginalized identities simultaneously; they could even experience privilege and oppression within the same social identity in different environments (Johnson, 2006). For example, a 2014 study examined the dependent relationship between the gender and racial identities of Black adolescent males who experienced privilege by sex and oppression by race (Rogers et al., 2015). Similarly, in 2010, Anderson & McCormack (2010) explored the privileged and marginalized intersections of Black straight and White gay male athletes who experienced privilege by through their athletic, white, straight identities but marginalization through their Black and homosexual identities. In my study, participants experienced privilege through their Christian identity while feeling marginalized as Catholics.

Understanding social identities and intersectionality is an effective way for educators to create welcoming learning environments for their students. In fact,

educators who once looked to student development theories to guide their pedagogy are finding intersectionality theory to be a more useful and current way of understanding students. Intersectionality does not "settle matters once and for all… [it encourages] further discussion and inquiry" (Davis, 2011, p. 50). Intersectionality is interactive (Ferree, 2011); it leaves room for individual experiences, social structures, and cultural environments to fluidly interact in ways "that help us grasp the complex interplay between disadvantage and privilege" (Davis, 2011; Lutz et al., 2011, p. 8). Contrarily, student development theories can be limiting, determining students' developmental status by their social identities. For instance, some student development theories would categorize students with particular religious identities into low developmental stages without consideration for their other identities or experiences (Nash, 2001).

When researchers utilize intersectionality as a guiding framework, it allows them to embed a specific research question into recognizable language, making the research understandable and transferable to a wider audience (Ferree, 2011). For instance, when framed in the context of intersectionality, individual Catholic experiences can contribute to the larger body of scholarly work on social identity, privilege, and religious identity in higher education. As educators gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of these topics, they can be more intentional in the ways they work with students.

While intersectionality theory encompasses issues of power and oppression, this study will remain constructivist in nature. The transformative paradigm is often used by researchers addressing social justice issues. Transformative researchers align themselves with the oppressed population and seek social action (Mertens, 2010). This study addressed issues of power and marginalization, but Catholics remain a privileged

population. The purpose of this study was exploration, rather than social reform, making constructivism a more meaningful approach for the study.

Methodology: Narrative Case Study

Researchers strategize, plan, and design their research with methodology (Crotty, 1998). Methodology is both theoretical and practical in the ways it informs research and specifies methods for research; it is "a theory of how inquiry should proceed" (Schwandt, 2007). The governing methodology for this study is narrative case study. Because the truth of anyone's theology, religion, or spirituality can be found in their story (Nash, 2001), I chose a narrative methodology for this study. This narrative study was bound by the participants' affiliation with a particular student organization housed at one Midwest University, making case study an appropriate methodology to bind the findings of the study (Schwandt, 2007).

Narrative

Narrative inquiry is "stories lived and told" and can be interpreted as a partnership between the narrator (participant) and researcher to share and explore stories of past and present (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Narrative research is best used to gain a detailed understanding of the experiences of a small number of research participants (Creswell, 2007). Narrative inquirers want to learn the complexities of a particular life experience. One strategy for honoring such complexities is to fill a "three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" throughout the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). Researchers can use the three-dimensional approach to continually look inward, outward, backward, and situated within a space when gathering data and composing field texts. Each person's story, as well as the researcher's interpretation of it, is influenced by

their inner thoughts, outward expression, previous experience, and settings of time, space, and environment. A narrative researcher observes and records as much of the three-dimensional experience as possible, because small details which seem insignificant in the moment may contribute to deeper understandings of participant experiences later in the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As I describe in the upcoming methods section of this research proposal, a researcher journal and participant reflections signify the inward and backward dimensions of narrative inquiry, because they allowed the writer, myself, time to reflect on my inner thoughts and feelings while looking back through my experiences. Individual interviews and group discussions allowed the outward and backward dimensions to emerge as the participants outwardly expressed their previous experiences. As researcher, I recorded as much of the time, space, and environmental details as possible throughout my interactions with research participants.

A researcher using narrative methodology does not try to pull information out of one specific event or place in time. Rather, they contextualize an event or phenomenon along the "continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). Both words and actions are seen as narrative signs; narrative researchers need to be sensitive to all types of shifts that may occur at any point in their research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In order to stay sensitive to such shifts and to explore participants' stories authentically, I attended to the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000): *temporality* – the past, present, and implied future of participants' experiences, *sociality* – the relation between the personal and social experiences, and *place* – the environments in which participant stories were lived and

told. The most important of these three elements is temporality, which is an integral part of any narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Temporality is the way narrative inquirers contextualize their participants' stories within the grand narrative of participants' lives. To honor the nature of temporality, researchers need to gather stories beyond their participants', to explore the history and culture surrounding the stories. In this way, researchers are able to embed their participants' stories in the story of a larger social landscape. For qualitative researchers working with a small group of participants, temporality is how we establish *transferability*, which will be discussed in the data analysis section of this chapter. Additionally, attending to temporality is one-way narrative inquirers can ensure their research methods are authentically narrative, a methodology known for having few boundaries (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Case Study

While the narrative aspect of my methodology guided the depth of my research, the bounds of case study research provided context as I analyzed the data obtained (Schwandt, 2007). Case study methodology afforded me the opportunity to "discern and pursue understanding of issues intrinsic to the case itself" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 28), which was particularly important given the broad nature of religion and social identities involved in my research questions. Binding the study as a case allowed me to examine the particular dynamics of the participants and student organization involved in my study, rather than situating my study and participants into a more global community of Catholic college students.

Methods

Methods are the techniques, tools, and procedures a researcher uses to gather and analyze data (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2007). In qualitative/emergent research, research questions may evolve throughout the research process, but the methods should remain consistent within the inquirer's chosen methodology and be specifically outlined in the research plan (Creswell, 2007; Crotty 1998). Observers and readers may look at a researcher's methods to ensure the soundness of the research inquiry (Crotty, 1998). Methods include the setting for the study, participants, data collection techniques, data analysis, trustworthiness, and authenticity (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Methods framed within the methodology of narrative inquiry are boundless (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Yet, researchers need a specific plan to support their inquiry. For these reasons, I explored two primary questions through my research methods:

1. How will I attend to the commonplaces of narrative inquiry (temporality, sociality, and place)?
2. What is the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space?

Data Collection

The first step of this research study was to submit an application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of my educational institution. The application was approved with minimal edits. I began contacting participants the same week my IRB application was approved, in August of 2016.

Setting for the study. This research took place at a mid-sized Midwestern university in the United States, pseudonym Midwestern University (MU). It was the

second land-grant campus in the state, founded in 1968, and is integrated into the center of the city. In 2014, the university enrolled 12,000 undergraduate students and 3,000 graduate students and is considered a commuter campus with only 2,000 students living on campus. The university had 17 student organizations centered on faith and religion. Of these organizations, 14 were Christian, 3 were Catholic, 2 were non-religious, and 1 was Muslim. There was a Newman Center for Catholic students on campus, which had a new residence hall, community center, and chapel which opened during the 2016-17 academic year.

The three Catholic organizations were the Catholic Student Group (CGS), MUCatholics, and the Newman Center. The three organizations were highly integrated, involved the same students, and took turns hosting various Catholic events on and off campus. MUCatholics was a type of umbrella organization over CGS and the Newman Center. CGS had a chapter on campus involving approximately 75 members who held a weekly community night and daily Mass, along with a weekly evening Mass followed by a community night activity. The Newman Center was a residence hall and community center housing approximately 160 students. Students were not required to be Catholic to live in the Newman Center. At the time of my data collection, the evolution of the Newman Center and the re-location of Mass and the students' home church was an integral part of their community development. I included questions about the university history and culture in my participant interviews, because places have stories and narrative histories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000),

I chose MU as the location for this study for many reasons. First, it was part of the only public university system in the state. It was also local, which was crucial for me

to be able to have a high level of involvement with my participants. I was also easily able to connect with a gatekeeper, who invited me to become a part of the FOCUS community and gave me access to research participants. I did not attend MU, but it was the first public institution I worked at, as a Greek Life Advisor. At the time of this research, I did not have any personal ties to the university.

Participants and participant selection. Gatekeepers are key informants who provide a researcher with access to participants (Creswell, 2007). One year before starting my research, I contacted the MU FOCUS missionary and met with him to discuss my research. He agreed to ask permission of the campus priest and to help me with my participant recruitment. While I completed my research proposal and IRB application, the gatekeeper started talking with students about my research and asked individual students if they were interested in participating. I had explained to him that I could not interact with the students until my research was approved. Once I received IRB approval, I privately messaged the students he had already recruited via group message on Facebook. Two students, Emily and Dennis, reached out to me immediately to express interest in participating. I met with Emily first as I continued to plan my recruitment efforts. She immediately referred two more students to me – Maria and Mary. I met Dennis next and he also referred another student to me, Paul. Meanwhile, I planned with the FOCUS missionary to attend a community night to recruit more participants. Next, I attended a Thursday night student Mass where the priest announced my attendance, that I was a graduate student researching Catholic student experiences, and that I would be staying after Mass to speak with anyone interested in participating. Eight students approached me after Mass. I shared my research questions with them and collected their

contact information. I handed out informational flyers (Appendix B) and emailed all eight of them that night (Appendix C).

This recruitment method used both criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Criterion sampling means all participants needed to meet certain criteria: they were required to be undergraduate students who self-identified as active participants in the Catholic Church (Creswell, 2007). Snowball sampling occurred as Emily and Dennis referred other students to my research who they felt had "information-rich" stories to share (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). I also strove for maximum variation in participant selection to include as many diverse social identities as possible in this study, in order to meaningfully explore the way students' Catholic identities intersect with other identities (Creswell, 2007).

When the FOCUS missionary started recruiting students without me, I was concerned maximum variation would not be attained because he was individually selecting students he felt had compelling stories to share. However, since only two of the students he referred actually ended up participating in the study, I was able to continue striving for maximum variation by publicly recruiting and through snowball sampling, in which Dennis and Emily referred students to me from diverse social backgrounds. The participants' stories shared many themes, despite the various ways they joined my study, so I do not feel the results were affected by the initial gatekeeper's individual recruitment of particular students.

In order to honor the personal relationships and depth of data needed in narrative research, I sought eight students for this study. Drawing from my experience as a group counselor and educator in higher education, this group size allowed for meaningful

individual and group dialogue and relationships, which are crucial for effective constructivist research (Mertens, 2010). Participants were all adults over the age of 18 and signed consent forms (Appendix D) explaining the voluntary nature of participating in the research and any risks and benefits of participating in the study. I asked participants to choose a pseudonym in order to protect the confidentiality of their identities.

Field texts. Field texts are the narrative inquirer's way of gathering data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Innately, field texts are influenced by the researcher's interpretation of events, which means field texts "in an important sense, also say much about what is not said and not noticed" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 93). For this reason, it is important for narrative researchers to collect field texts in more than one form, regularly and rigorously. I addressed the three-dimensional narrative space by including field texts of the inward, outward, backward, environmental influences of the study.

Researcher journal (inward and backward). In qualitative research, the researcher becomes a tool through which all data is analyzed and interpreted (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2010). In order to continually reflect on my position as researcher and to keep record of my personal assumptions and biases, I maintained a written researcher journal throughout the research process. I started the journal with my researcher reflexivity, and I continued the journal through the data collection and analysis processes of the study. In the findings from my study, I share summaries from my journal for each research participants' interviews.

Participant reflection (inward and backward). Participant reflection can be a meaningful way to collect field texts from the participants' point of view (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this study, I started asking participants to complete a written reflection to gain an inward perspective of their experiences (Appendix E). I emailed the participants prior to their interview and asked them to write their first reflection before we ever met to answer the question: How do you experience your religious identity at college? This written reflection was meant to give the students an opportunity to think about the research topic before meeting with me for our first interview. However, Emily did not complete the reflection, and Dennis mistakenly answered the research questions in writing rather than answering the research question. After the third participant also did not complete the written reflection, I omitted the written reflection from the research process. Instead, I emailed them the reflection question along with the interview questions as a way for the participants to mentally prepare for our first interview. The purpose of having the students write the reflection prior to the interview was to give them time to reflect before we speak, but I discovered the students were extremely capable of sharing well-composed and deeply reflective thoughts without completing a written reflection prior to interviewing with me.

Semi-structured individual interviews (outward and backward). Individual interviews and group discussions can be meaningful ways to gather information and may be turned into field texts through transcribed recordings and field notes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I conducted two individual interviews with each participant, which I recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were semi-structured and conversational, allowing participants to ask questions and encouraging them to share their

personal stories and experiences (Merriam, 2009). The interviews ranged from 40-75 minutes and took place in a quiet location conducive to private conversation and comfortable for the participants. Seven of the students met me at the Newman Center, while one off-campus student asked to meet with me at a local coffee and pastry shop.

The purpose of the first interview was to begin developing a relationship with the participants and learn about their experiences as Catholic students in higher education. I emailed interview questions to each participant at least one day prior to the interview. The questions guiding the semi-structured interview included:

1. Tell me your written reflection (for the first three participants, before omitting).
2. To you, what does it mean to be Catholic?
3. How do you feel being Catholic at an academic institution?
4. Why did you decide to join this Catholic organization?
5. Tell me about your social identities.
6. How are your social identities affirmed or not affirmed in the classroom?
7. Do you feel your other social identities affect your Catholic identity? How or how not?
8. What do you think are the current social issues affecting the Catholic Church? Do these issues affect you as a Catholic college student? If so, how?
9. How was your experience of reflecting on these ideas and sharing them through the written reflection and our interview today?

Question one was meant as an ice-breaker and was intended to let the participant guide the direction of our conversation. Questions 2-4 gave me the opportunity to let the

participants define what it meant to be an actively practicing Catholic while also explaining more about their own Catholic identities. Questions 5-7 opened discussion for the participants to share their understanding and experiences with the concepts of social identity, privilege, and marginalization, which all relate to my research questions but may be new concepts to the participants. Question 8 was meant as an open-ended way to find out if the participants' experiences aligned with the current literature addressing social issues and the Catholic Church, and to see if and how these issues were affecting them as students. Question 9 related to social status ambiguity and directly connects to Q3: How does reflecting on their Catholic identity shape students' perception of their experiences?

Each of these questions was meant to inspire deep reflection and sharing. My intent in giving the students questions at least a day in advance was to allow them time to reflect on the information and questions before being required to speak on these potentially-new concepts. Because of the in-depth nature of the questions and the variation in student development, I piloted the research questions with Dennis and Emily before interviewing the remaining participants. The questions worked well in opening dialogue pertaining to my research questions, and I did not edit them throughout the research process.

The second interview was meant to encourage participants to explore their identities further in the context of privilege and oppression, and to examine how their perspectives may have changed or evolved as a result of participating in the study. It also served as closure for the participants in the study, giving them the chance to share their final personal thoughts with me. My initially planned questions for the second interview included:

1. What ideas remained with you after our first interview?
2. What are your reactions to the group conversation? Group dynamic?
3. After we departed last time, was there anything you wish you would have shared?
4. After re-listening to our first interview, I noticed (fill-in-the-blank) theme(s) emerging. What do you think?
5. (after intersectionality activity) Tell me about this activity for you.
6. Before being Catholic in a classroom, had you ever felt marginalization or oppression before?

Because the nature of the group interviews evolved throughout the research process, which I discuss next, I also included an intersectionality activity in the second individual interview and asked students to reflect on the activity (Appendix F). This activity was originally intended for a group interview but worked well as a closing activity during the second individual interview with each participant. It also gave me a better indication of each participant's privileged and oppressed identities, which was very helpful. After the activity, I had the opportunity to ask students about their oppressed identities and specifically, if they had ever faced oppression before. This question actually led students to share parts of their identities and experiences that had not come up anywhere else in our two individual or two group interviews. I also added the following questions:

7. What is one thing educators could do to create a safer environment for Catholic students in the classroom?
8. What is one thing you want to make sure people know when they read about this research?

These final two questions added a natural closure to the research process with each participant.

Group interviews (outward and backward). Group interviews are a way to facilitate a conversation among participants on a particular topic (Schwandt, 2007). For this study, I planned 3-4 group interviews I led on campus. Over the course of all 3-4 group interviews, I planned to introduce the topics of intersectionality, Christian privilege, anti-Catholicism, and current social and political issues facing the Catholic Church for group discussion. However, upon beginning to meet with participants, I quickly realized finding group meeting times would be nearly impossible. I still felt the group interview process was integral to the research, so I modified my plans to include two group interviews. Questions for the group interviews included:

1. Group interview 1: Please introduce yourself and share why you wanted to participate in this research. What is Christian privilege? How have you experienced Christian privilege? How have you experienced Christian privilege in higher education?

These introductory questions were meant as ice-breakers for the group to meet one another, establish trust, and also begin to develop as a community of Catholic student participants in this study. In this case, most of the students had already met one another in other contexts or were at least familiar with the other participants in the study. This familiarity was helpful in quickly building trust in the group, which was crucial for the students to share at the deep and personal level needed to create authenticity in the study. The participants present at the first group interview were: Alabaster, Felicity, Maria, Mary and Paul.

2. Group interview 2: What is marginalization? What is anti-Catholicism? How have you experienced marginalization or anti-Catholicism in higher education? What are the current social and political issues facing the Catholic Church? How do these social and political issues affect you in academic settings?

The questions for the second group interview were meant to introduce more critical discussion among the group members. By allowing participants to discuss these questions as a group, we built a sense of community as students shared their stories and recognize their experiences were not isolated. Students were also able to discuss the hostile political climate as well as Church teachings on discussed topics. Group interviews were recorded, and I took field notes during the discussions. I also shared my personal reactions after each group interview in my researcher journal. Dennis, Emily, Felicity, Maria, Paige, and Paul participated in the second group interview.

Due to the ongoing nature of the research and the significant time commitment for participants, I anticipated attrition. However, no student decided to cease participation. In fact, some participants were still in contact with me at the time of study publication.

Field notes (outward and environmental). Researchers may take field notes of their observations while in the field or actively participating in data collection (Schwandt, 2007). Throughout this study, I took field notes during individual interviews, group interviews, and while listening to the recordings of both sets of interviews. Keeping the three-dimensional narrative space in mind, I paid particular attention to the settings of time, space, and environment in my field notes. I also wrote my personal reactions to each interview in a researcher journal.

Data analysis. Data analysis was ongoing; I audio-recorded and transcribed each interview verbatim. Concurrently, I maintained a research journal to keep track of my thoughts, experiences, and reactions to each phase of the research (Mertens, 2009). After the first round of interviews, I conducted preliminary inductive analysis (Patton, 2002) to identify emerging themes and patterns based on key words, concepts, and notes from the first round of interviews. In the second interviews, I shared my preliminary findings with participants and asked for their reactions as a way to include them in the data analysis process.

After a second round of transcriptions and inductive analysis, I engaged the process of crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) as a data analysis method. Crystallization is a process of data analysis in which researchers utilize several different data analysis methods to glean the most meaningful interpretations of the data possible. Researchers who use the crystallization approach are able to analyze their data through multiple lenses, or genres, much like the lenses of a crystal (Ellingson, 2009). I used three genres when crystallizing the data, as determined by my research questions and other themes emerging throughout the research process. The three genres I used for the crystallization process were: 1) Psychological Genre: Religious Identity Development (Hoffman, 2012); 2) Feminist Genre: Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989); 3) Social Justice Genre: Privilege, Power, and Difference (Johnson, 2006).

To employ this method of crystallization, I analyzed the data from this study many times. First, I conducted an inductive analysis to identify emerging themes from the transcripts and field notes from the study. Next, I analyzed these findings using my first lens of crystallization, the psychological lens of religious identity development.

Looking at the data with this lens will gave me the opportunity to see where each student was on their personal journey of religious development. I followed this same process using the feminist lens of intersectionality to examine each participant's identity intersections and identify comfortable and/or points of tension within their identities. Finally, I examined the data using Johnson's (2006) definition of privilege and oppression. The crystallization method allowed me to see that the intersectionality lens and the privilege/oppression lens highlighted most of the same data, so I present these to lenses together in my findings.

After completing a full analysis with all three genres, I had a more holistic view of my data set and was able to make my findings more transferable to other fields of study. For instance, in my first inductive analysis of the data, the participants' faith formation phases did not surface organically. However, crystallizing the data with a faith formation lens easily brought the participants' faith development to light. The intersectionality and power and privilege genres both connected more directly to my research questions, so the findings from those two analyses confirmed my original inductive analysis more than they shed light on new emerging themes from the data. Still, the crystallization process definitely increased my awareness as I analyzed the data and also encouraged a more thorough examination of the field texts than I might have conducted by only conducting an inductive analysis for emerging themes.

In a recent study of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender student identity development, Smith (2015) used crystallization as a method for data analysis. In his study, the researcher conducted individual interviews with 12 individual participants, transcribed the interviews, identified themes from each interview, and then analyzed each

theme through the scientific, middle-ground, and art/impressionist genres. This process enriched the data analysis process by enabling the researcher "…to see not only where each participant [was] coming from in terms of sexual identity development, but also their perspective on the impact of oppressive rhetoric" (Smith, 2015, p. 79).

Trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness in a qualitative study ensures findings are transferable and meaningful to a larger audience of scholars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers establish trustworthiness by meeting the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I achieved credibility with member-checks. Member-checking is a process of "playing back" or summarizing participant's words in an interview to make sure I understand their meaning and intent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a counselor, this is a skill I practice daily; any authentic research I conduct will naturally include member-checking, as it did for this study. Part of establishing credibility also included me sharing my personal motivations for conducting this research with participants and making sure they knew my researcher perspective so they understand the lens through which their stories would be shared.

Transferability ensures the findings from a qualitative study can be related, or transferred, to individuals beyond the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is an integral part of the purpose of this study – to be meaningful to populations beyond Catholic students. The temporality required of narrative inquiry helped establish transferability by embedding my participants' stories in the story of a larger social landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Using a theoretical framework also added to the transferability of my study by linking it to the larger dialogue of intersectionality.

Dependability can be established through credibility, for "A demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Finally, I ensured the confirmability of the study by keeping an accurate data trail of research notes, correspondences with participants, transcriptions, and audio-recordings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Authenticity criteria help determine rigor in a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The five authenticity criteria are fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. I ensured fairness by representing all of the research participants in the findings of the study. Through ontological authenticity, I hoped to raise individual participant's awareness of Catholic social status ambiguity so they could take personal action to influence their learning environments. Similarly, through educational authenticity, participants gained and expressed an awareness of social identities, intersectionalities, and social ambiguities unique to themselves. Furthermore, through catalytic authenticity, this research prompted participants to engage in social action as a response to participating in this study. Most of the students shared in their final interview how their behaviors and conversations had changed as a result of participating in this study. Finally, I ensured tactical authenticity by providing appropriate training and resources for participants interested in the further pursuit of positive social change (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). Each student expressed an interest in continuing to follow my research project through publication and to stay involved if I pursued any additional research.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the paradigm, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods I used to implement my study with Catholic student experiences in higher education. Working within the constructivist paradigm allowed me to freely explore the experiences of Catholic students, and a narrative methodology honored the deeply personal, varied, and complex nature of the topic. My data collection methods aligned with the requirements of temporality and three-dimensional narrative inquiry spaces, and I followed the inductive analysis protocols of crystallization. I established trustworthiness by meeting the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the rigor of the study was validated through the five authenticity criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS: PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

In this chapter, I share the findings from my study. In accordance with narrative methodology, first I will share each student's unique story and experiences. Each narrative includes an overview of the student's stories, an analysis of their individual faith development, their perspective on intersectionality, privilege, and oppression, and final thoughts each participant wanted to share with the research audience. To help establish the trustworthiness of these findings, each narrative has been shared with the appropriate participant, so they may see how I represented their stories and make any corrections, if necessary.

Emily

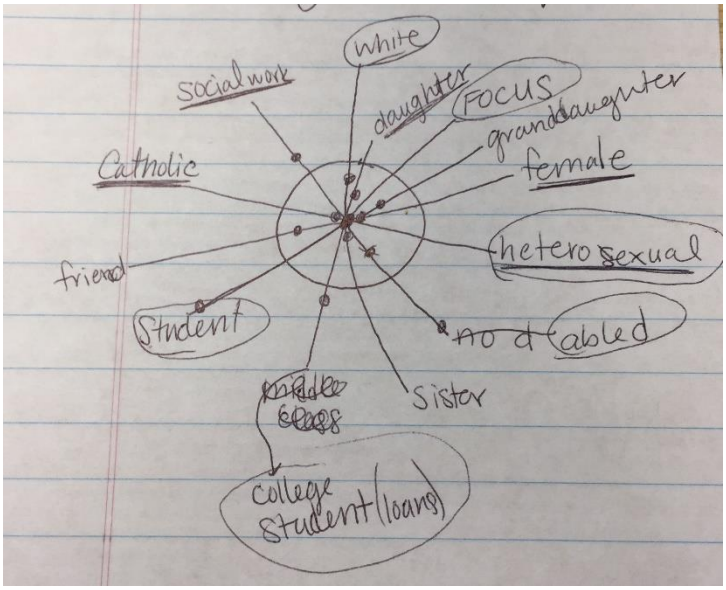

Figure 1. Emily's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Emily was the first participant interviewed for this project. When her CSG group leader messaged a few members of the organization asking if anyone was interested in participating in my research, she responded quickly and we met within a week. Emily suggested we meet at MU's Newman Center, which had only opened a few months prior. I was excited to see the new building and impressed with its modern design, open community spaces, and Catholic décor. Emily greeted me at the door. Immediately, I noticed Emily's demeanor. She was gracious, polite, and spoke in a soft voice. She was so sweet and positive that one could almost overlook what a confident Catholic woman she was, with strong convictions and an equally strong sense of empathy. Raised in a small Oregon town by an interfaith couple along with two brothers and two sisters, she received her education at public schools and by working on the family ranch. When we

met, she was just starting her senior year at MU as a social work major, undecided if she wanted to pursue a graduate degree or work after graduation.

When asked what made her interested in my research, Emily responded, "Because it finally gives voice to all those struggles in the classroom." I was surprised by her response, because I had only used neutral language of exploration to describe my research. It quickly occurred to me that I had not seen the recruitment message the CSG group leader had sent to students, because he had sent it before I had IRB approval. He had been so interested in my project that he began recruiting students on his own, months before I was ready to formally recruit participants. In an effort to move forward with the interview from an informed perspective, I asked Emily to share the recruitment message with me. It was a group message on Facebook, from which I was excluded, which read:

> I've been approached by a PhD student who wants to interview Catholics about their experiences on campus. She wants to give voice to the difficulties you face with professors and peers that stem from your beliefs as Catholics. Her belief is that we have to leave our beliefs at the door and that it is acceptable to openly bash and mock our faith. Please let me know if you are interested in meeting with her and being part of her research.

I was disappointed that recruitment had started this way, using someone else's language to describe my research. I had intentionally used neutral language to describe my research and articulate my research questions. When I spoke to the CSG leader, I had been especially cautious, and presented the tension I felt between Catholic privilege and discomforts in the classroom. He had relayed a more negative message and left privilege completely out of the description. Regardless, I moved forward with the interview, knowing I would need to keep this recruitment message in mind as I analyzed data from interviews. I hoped the CGS leader's language would not shape the way participants

approached the interviews or answered research questions. Fortunately, Emily did not seem affected by the semantics of her recruitment.

Right away, Emily told me about her upbringing in a home with a Catholic father and Baptist mother. Her tone was filled with admiration when she spoke of her mother, who she described as having a "strong passion for Jesus." Despite agreeing to raise their five children in the Catholic Church and attending weekly Mass with her family, Emily's mom never converted to Catholicism. Still, Emily described her mom as a "powerful witness" who let prayer guide her decision to marry a Catholic man. Emily described her parents' decision to get married with a matter-of-fact tone:

> Before they got married, my dad was like, "You know, I'm gonna raise my kids Catholic, so if you are not okay with that, we shouldn't get married." And [my mom] prayed about it, and she was like, "No, I want to respect my husband in this way and I'll be okay with that and I'll support it." …So she didn't become Catholic, she always just received the blessings instead of the Eucharist. She always went to church with us. I didn't really talk about Catholicism with her, because I knew she wasn't comfortable with like, Mary, and some other things. But she had a very strong passion for Jesus.

Emily's relationship with her non-Catholic mother, as well as her exposure to the Baptist faith, both seemed to influence her openness to other religions.

Emily's open-minded nature started to show through as she spoke about experiences with the various non-Catholic Christians who helped raise her. She credits her grandfather with helping ignite her personal journey of faith. She lovingly described him as, "Very Protestant, very Baptist, and he loved the Lord with all his heart." The open-minded theme continued as she spoke of various classmates with differing belief systems. She never spoke negatively of anyone with a different faith background or lifestyle from herself. In fact, she articulated empathy multiple times. For instance, in speaking about a classmate who openly shared negative opinions of the Catholic Church,

Emily stated, "There's a lot of hurt coming from where he is." She could have responded defensively for her religion, but instead, she took time to truly consider her classmate's perspective.

Religious Identity Development

Re-reading Emily's transcripts using the lens of Hoffman's (2012) analysis of faith formation helped me pick up on clues she shared regarding her personal religious identity development. Emily's words and ideas indicated she was in the transitional phase of faith formation, actively progressing toward an advanced level. However, there were still some clues buried within her words hinting that she may still fluctuate back to the first phase, known as concrete faith development.

Concrete faith development. Several times throughout the individual and group interviews, Emily indicated the concreteness of her faith formation. The first concrete clue surfaced during a conversation regarding spiritual versus religious individuals. Emily's appreciation for the rules and accountability of the Catholic Church were evident when she discussed others who said they were not religious, only spiritual. She said,

> Other people will say, "I classify myself as spiritual," and I'm like, so how is that really different? It kind of just sounds like it's faith on their terms. Like [they] love God, but that's all [they] need to do. And I'm like yeah – love God. But loving Him means following His commands… You have to have accountability and I think that's what we're losing.

She continued, describing what it meant to her to be Catholic,

> To me, to be truly Catholic, I think is having a foundation of Truth. To look to, to guide you… It's been around for 2,000 years, and I believe that it is what Jesus established on earth as our way to gain eternity with Him. Just to be with Him. And I think everything that the Church teaches, there's a lot of reason for it. And a lot of history behind it. And so I think to be Catholic, I know it means – universal Truth… It's kept me grounded. [I see Catholicism] as the one True faith.

Emily's need for one Truth, which I indicate with a capital T, is a prime example of concrete faith development.

Another example of Emily's concrete faith development arose when disagreements about her beliefs came up in her American Government class. Emily had a difficult time coping with the tension. Her teacher, who was openly pro-abortion, discouraged Emily from giving a presentation sharing pro-life arguments. Her professor distinctly spoke in favor of abortion, not just in favor of women's choice, presenting articles and arguments for how abortion had improved society. After one particularly frustrating day in class, Emily said, "I just left class and started bawling. She was so adamant about it. You know? And so many people [agreed] with her. I got really mad. I was like, this is not okay." The enormity of the situation was nearly overwhelming. She described how a classmate disclosed his girlfriend's decision to have an abortion without his support, and how he suffered as a result, still carrying a sonogram image of his aborted baby around with him. Emily recalled feeling, "This is so much bigger than a class. And so much bigger than any grade." At this point in the conversation, as Emily recalled hearing her classmate's story, it became clear she had developed a personal motivation to further the prolife conversation in class. In fact, she pursued this situation with the academic dean, and was eventually able to present the history of the prochoice movement in the United States, including prolife stances. She was frustrated that her instructor "constantly interrupted" her when she shared the prolife perspective, but was satisfied with being able to share with her classmates the reasons why some people stand against abortion.

Despite some frustrating moments like this at MU, Emily started to advance in her personal faith formation. She credits connecting with CSG and a spiritual mentor for her personal religious growth. Invited by her spiritual mentor to participate in the CSG Thursday night Mass and community night, Emily responded, "I was like, Mass on Thursday? My family only went to Sunday church, you know? And holy days of obligation, so it was kind of like an easy-to-go through the motion kind of thing." Emily began attending CSG events, meeting regularly with a spiritual mentor, participating in a Bible study, and began leading multiple Bible studies of her own. One of the Bible studies is a joint effort with a non-Catholic Christian, a true indication of Emily's growth into the transitional phase of faith formation. Instead of concretely clinging to her Catholic beliefs, Emily was able to connect with a person of another faith background.

Transitional to advanced faith development. Throughout her four years at MU, Emily grappled with questions regarding her faith, major, career, and life balance. She would consult her spiritual mentor or a campus priest to help her sort through the conflicting ideas presented to her through her academic program. Her spiritual mentor was a missionary with CSG, trained to work with college students to continue developing in their faith. Emily also turned to prayer, which is where she credits her biggest turn toward the Catholic faith. Emily shared,

> Honestly, after childhood, I was like, I don't know if I want to be Catholic… and that's what I struggled with coming from high school to college. I believed that there might be a God that exists, and I wasn't sure, and I felt like I had been going through the motions. And I prayed. I was like, "God, I want to give you a chance to really show me the beauty of the Catholic Church. Because I believe others live out their life like that, being excited and it can be good and truly beautiful, but I don't know what that looks like. And I don't want to live out my life like my parents lived, like an obligation. And so, I was like, I'm gonna give it a chance and if it doesn't go through, then I'm gonna leave the Catholic Church. And like, holy cow… God moved.

Her ability and willingness to question the faith in which she was raised indicated her growth toward transitional faith development.

The transitional phase of faith formation is often where individuals struggle to understand their faith in relation to other individuals and other aspects of their own lives. One such struggle for Emily was the difference between people actively practicing their faith versus being a Christian "in name only." She recognized religion coming up as a topic in multiple aspects of her life, and learned when it was important for her to speak on behalf of her beliefs, and when it was appropriate for her to keep her personal thoughts private. She shared examples of hearing girls talk in the restroom about the differences between religion and spirituality, as well as hearing co-workers talk about the same issue while serving tables at a restaurant. When pressed for her theory on why people might want to disassociate spirituality from religion, Emily simply stated, "I think they want to separate themselves from the stigmas associated with religion." As we continued talking, Emily's faith development became more evident. She articulated acceptance of many religious stances and showed empathy toward others who spoke negatively about religion and Catholicism. She recognized many people had been hurt by other Christians or Catholics.

After her frustrating encounter in American Government class, she had consulted a priest and again turned to prayer. Ultimately, she decided to go ahead and do the presentation, objectively, respecting her instructor's stance as well as her own. She approached the topic sensitively, recalling,

> [After I was able to spend time in prayer], I realized she wouldn't be this passionate unless she was really hurt by [the issue of abortion]. So either she has

> had an abortion or somebody very close to her has. And I don't want to hurt her. I don't want to touch upon something that would wound more than heal.

I was surprised by Emily's statement, as it assumed why her professor was pro-abortion, but I could see Emily's attempt to empathize with someone with different beliefs from herself. As she progressed through her academic program in social work, she encountered many more frustrating conversations regarding faith, but she handled them graciously. She never backed down from her personal beliefs, but she was able to respect others' perspectives and even engage in dialogue with them.

During one of our exchanges, she recalled a discussion in class where a classmate felt stereotyped, and was able to see a connection between his transgendered identity and her Catholic identity.

> Emily: I think [in class, my classmates] were talking about transgendered individuals, like as a group of people. And my [transgendered classmate] was having individual views… and so the professor was like, we need to have this conversation.
>
> Me: Can you relate to that?
>
> Emily: In what way?
>
> Me: What stuck out to me about what you said was, "There's this group of people" but then, "He's an individual that's being categorized into this group and was offended by what people were saying about this group." It seems like you two might actually have some things in common.
>
> E: I really do respect him. We've had a couple of conversations; we actually talked about faith.

This exchange was an example of Emily's willingness to consider other perspectives. While she did not address this situation again specifically, several other times throughout our conversation, she referenced conversations with peers holding differing viewpoints

and articulated an ability to see and consider their perspectives. Her respect for others' beliefs also showed when she spoke about the good in other religious denominations.

She explained how she started a Bible study with another social work student who was not Catholic. She and the other student connected through their values. Emily described the importance of having a support system in class,

> It's hard to be in those classes and feel like you're the only one or something. Me and this one girl, she's Protestant, we became friends because we're Christian. And we've had discussions about how much [classmates] attack faith and how hard it is, and how the heck we're gonna practice social work with our values… We just need a support system. We need to talk about our views… we [also] want to be very open and welcoming.

Emily's openness also showed when she encouraged me to seek out a Baptist worship service. Growing up, whenever her family visited her maternal grandmother, they attended Protestant services. As she talked about her grandmother and mother's faiths, she had a sense of awe in her voice. I could tell she equated passion for one's faith and evangelization of one's faith as a deepness or conviction of faith. She spoke with admiration,

> I'm constantly reminded. We need what they have… They're so much better at evangelizing. And it's because they're welcoming and they're inviting and they're excited about their faith. And they have the Holy Spirit. And they love Jesus. All very great things… and we're missing that as Catholics.

As Emily spoke, I could see her Truths as truths; she was able to appreciate multiple perspectives and appreciate the value in other belief systems, despite her personal attachment to Catholicism, her one True faith. Her simultaneous conviction and openness are true indications of her movement toward advanced personal faith formation.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

Emily was very direct in telling me she was motivated to participate in my study because she had struggles in the classroom as a Catholic. As a senior in MU's social work program, she had engaged in dialogue regarding social identities before, but had never examined her own identities beyond the occasional mention of White privilege and the frustrations she felt as a Catholic. Still, during our intersectionality exercise, Emily identified her privileged identities as White, CSG member, heterosexual, non-disabled, and student. She classified her oppressed identities as daughter, female, Catholic, and social worker.

She explained the reasoning for her decisions as we de-briefed from the activity. There were several social identities she had been tempted to underline as an oppressed identity, but talked herself into leaving circled as a privileged identity. For instance, being a student felt conflicting for Emily. She shared,

> Student, I mean, there's been times when like, I was bullied and stuff, but I didn't underline it because it doesn't compare to other instances. Like with my Catholic identity, I've had to stand up for that a lot more. It's something I can decide to do or not to do, whereas like a student, you know, everyone gets teased...

When I asked her to elaborate on why social worker was underlined, she spoke about the criticisms she has received from her family and their concern that it would not be a lucrative career.

As our conversation continued, Emily talked about her White and heterosexual identities, which she had both circled and underlined. She described being White and being heterosexual as being "under attack." She elaborated,

> A lot of times, there's sayings about White privilege… it's always talked about. Like White person this and that and like, you know White people do this and this

> and it's a White person saying it and I'm like – alright, like, okay. Let's just assume we're all evil because we're White.

What Emily was describing made me question how the topic of privilege had been taught or presented to her. In fact, as interviews with other participants continued, I began to ask this question to myself frequently. Several participants spoke of their privileged identities defensively. Emily's defensiveness seemed to stem from being told she had White privilege without ever truly receiving an explanation or definition of privilege. I discuss this issue further in chapter 5, as it emerged as a theme from the narrative discussions.

Emily continued, explaining why she considered being heterosexual both a privileged and oppressed identity. She circled it as privileged because her heterosexuality is never impairing for her, but she did explain that heterosexuality is "shoved aside" while homosexuality is almost glorified as the social norm during classroom discussions.

As she circled back around to her privileged identities, she spoke highly of her involvement with CSG,

> The way CSG is run, those missionaries come to campus and they mentor a few people that they invest heavily in. And without being involved in that, without getting asked into that mentorship program, I wouldn't be where I am in my faith life today. And so it is a privilege that somebody decided to invest their time in teaching me… I mean, there's a lot of people in the communities… so yeah. I was lucky to be one of the people that was invested in like that.

The way Emily spoke about privilege with CSG confirmed her misunderstanding of the definition of social privilege. She was speaking of it and viewing it as an honor or opportunity, instead of a component of power and oppression. She spoke of oppression in the same way, describing it as uncomfortable or unfortunate situations instead of true,

systematic oppression. When she described her oppressed identities, Emily admitted she used her abused identity as a daughter to determine "the standard" for whether or not she considered other identities oppressed. She stated, "It was kind of rough, like abusive stuff… and that's kind of where my standards are for everything else. Like social work – I can handle that because it wasn't as bad as something else (being a daughter)." When I encouraged Emily to elaborate, she talked about her childhood and her father's emotional abuse towards her and his occasional physical abuse of her brothers. She described her father as having a "perfect standard" and recalled times she and her siblings were called names or forced to re-do their work on the family ranch.

Even with a standard of abuse and a knowledge of Christian privilege, Emily identified her Catholic identity as oppressed. She said that she hears anti-Catholic and anti-religious remarks in college classes frequently and shared an example from one of her social work classes,

> We had this huge discussion in my social work class about people feeling oppression or like that their views weren't heard or whatever. And we had all these talks because we have somebody in our class who is transgender, someone in our class who is gay, someone in our class who is lesbian, we have diversity of races, stuff like that. And nobody brought up religion. And so I was crying, because I was so emotional, like you know all of these things have been brought up and talked about, but nobody every talks about religion. And I have felt for so long that I can't say my beliefs and that they're not supported, and that they're not respected. Like, I understand if you don't agree with me. But, (pause), I just need them to respect it. And we took a class break and the first thing out of this lady's mouth [when we returned] was a negative story about her "religious" grandmother… People don't think about it. And I think we've just been silent for so long, people don't understand.

As my first interview, Emily surprised me with how readily she was able to provide stories of feeling marginalized by her Catholic identity. I was also struck by the depth of

her faith and her ability to articulate her complex ideas and feelings regarding her faith, identity, and classroom experiences.

Emily's Final Thoughts

Before I asked Emily her final thoughts, I asked her to share one thing educators could do to create a more inclusive classroom environment. She shared,

> Really? Doing what they do for minority issues like, saying "Hey guys, that may not be true." Or you know, calling students out and being like, no. And being aware of their biases. Because they're always encouraging us to be aware ant to listen to other views and stuff like that. But I don't know, I mean they're used to doing it on certain issues, but they don't stop and reflect. Nobody's ever gonna be perfectly happy with what's said, because to have an opinion, means you go against something else. But to like, create a space for dialogue where I mean, teachers may not realize that they have more power than students do speaking, but they do. I mean, they're standing, first of all, and we're sitting. And you know, we listen to them and we already trust them to instruct us in the subject matter as experts… They are in a position of power. I mean, they determine if you succeed or fail.

I had never mentioned the power dynamic between professors and students, so Emily's comments regarding the power educators have in the classroom was both intuitive and insightful, and demonstrated that perhaps she had a better understanding of power dynamics than of systematic privilege and oppression.

When I asked Emily to share her final thoughts - what she really hoped readers would glean from this research – she shared after a long pause:

> I just really want people to think about religion as being something that is attacked, too, just like things they hold close to their identities. I don't expect them to understand if they don't hold those views. I don't expect them to bend over backwards to make us comfortable. Because that's not going to happen. But I'd just appreciate them taking a moment to think about, hey, if I was Catholic in this class, which may actually happen, it's assumed a lot of times that there's no Catholics that are practicing or whatever. You know, there's been a lot of Christians in my class that are upset too. There's always going to be somebody in there.

What Emily described was not only a desire for a more inclusive classroom environment, but also a longing for empathy regarding her experiences as a Catholic student.

Overall, I was moved by my interview with Emily. It was evident as she shared her stories from class that she was hurt by some of her professor's words and perspectives. She did not feel welcomed as a Catholic pursuing social work, which caused an internal conflict, for she saw her desire to help others as a Catholic value. Emily demonstrated an ability to empathize with others who had different beliefs and experiences than herself, but I wondered if her urge to defend her faith was blocking her ability to see more systematic issues of power and oppression at play in society. In my mind, I could analyze her comments and experiences critically, but I still got into my car and cried at the end of our interview. I empathized with her confusion. Emily felt she had to defend her religious identity in class, while her professors seemed to be willing to freely defend other students' social identities for them. Without a true understanding of systematic privilege and oppression, her religious identity felt oppressed.

Dennis

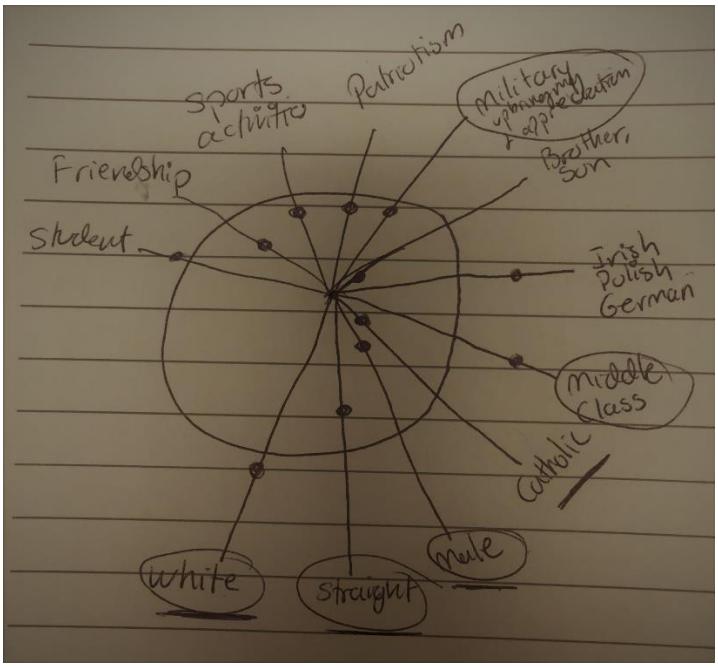

Figure 2. Dennis's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Dennis was the second person to volunteer as a participant for this research, responding to the same group message the CSG leader had sent. Immediately through electronic correspondence, I could sense Dennis's diligence, attention to detail, motivation, and strong communication skills. Whenever I felt the need to follow-up with Dennis, he would be one step ahead of me – there would already be a message from him in my inbox. He confirmed every meeting the day prior and was the only student to actually complete the written reflection portion of my interview protocol. When I finally met Dennis, he struck me as a gentleman and oozed "Resident Advisor", welcoming me to the Newman Center and interacting with every person we passed in the hallway. As we sat down and started talking, he immediately identified himself as, "Heavily involved in the Newman Center community," while he downplayed involvement with CSG. With

that, we dove right into the content of Catholicism, and Dennis described what it meant for him to be Catholic:

> So, being Catholic, I think, is more about a way of life. A lot of people focus on like, oh Catholics follow these rules or Catholics have to do this. I see that all that is true, I'd say yeah, if you're not doing the precepts of the Church, you're not going to Church, you're not building a life of community and a life of faith. Then yeah, you're suffering in that aspect of Catholicism. But, doing those things alone, I would say that you're also suffering. Because there's a whole kind of new world of Catholicism that a lot of people, I feel like especially Cradle Catholics, miss out on. They miss out on, just really diving into it and owning the faith, and really seeking out a relationship with Christ. And seeking to bring that to others… if you're not doing anything else besides Mass on Sunday, then how Catholic are you? [Being Catholic] is also doing all of that while at the same time being very intentional about the way you're living your life, and the way that you're relating with people and interacting with people as well. And really trying to bring Christ to everyone.

This definition was a theme throughout our entire conversation, as Dennis continually shared experiences of the different ways he interacted with people, determining appropriate ways to share his Catholic identity with them.

Dennis was raised in a Catholic military family, the 7th of 9 children to two devoutly Catholic parents. His deep involvement with the Catholic Church started at a young age; he was teaching religious education class by high school. He admitted,

> For a while it was, you know, we go [to Church] because mom wants us to go… and then okay well I want to do good at this because mom and dad want me to do good at it… and then kind of as it grew, it kind of became more.

So much more, in fact, that Dennis "took more personal ownership of the faith," and in exploration of his relationship with Christ, felt the call to the priesthood and decided to pursue studies at a Catholic seminary. The seminary was located on a Catholic college campus, CathU, where the seminarians lived together in a residence hall, but attended classes like typical college students - albeit fairly recognizably as seminarians. He described his experience at the CathU as part of the seminarian group:

> So all the seminarians at CathU, we're always wearing business casual to all our classes and stuff. So everyone on campus knows if you're a seminarian or not because the seminarians are dressed up. Everyone else is in jeans and shorts and stuff, and the seminarians are… identifiable. We travel around in groups, it's like, "Those guys are the Sems."

Dennis was relating his experience as a seminarian as being visibly Catholic. He continued to describe his time at CathU as "a little biased", because he was guided to take classes from Catholic-friendly instructors. The academic advisor for the seminarians would say things like, "Don't take that professor because they're a little 'jank' and they're not going to be very [Catholic-friendly], so take this professor instead." Dennis compared his publicly-Catholic identity at CathU to his more discreet Catholic identity at MU,

> [At CathU] it was very easy to have a religious identity, because everyone knew you were a seminarian. People knew. Whereas here, you don't know from one person to the next person, who is Catholic… we walk past each other in a crowd and there's no way of knowing who is Catholic and who isn't.

At MU, Dennis also had his first experience with an anti-Catholic professor. She would make unflattering remarks about the Catholic Church in class. When I asked Dennis if he ever told the professor he was Catholic, he recalled a lesson from his days in the seminary. He learned, "If you have a professor who isn't supportive of [Catholic teachings], don't argue with them, because that's going to affect your grade." He also noted the hypocrisy with the theory, because he felt other classmates could say whatever they wanted in class, with no negative repercussions.

As the conversation turned toward social identities, Dennis thought I was asking about his activities. When I clarified what the term "social identities" meant, Dennis shared his identities with me. He identified himself as male, White, heterosexual, Catholic, and military. When I pointed out how much of his time was spent talking about

his time in the seminary, he realized "former seminarian" was also an integral part of his identity. The conversation deepened quickly when I asked Dennis how his other social identities affected his Catholic identity. Dennis shared,

> So like as male, heterosexual, Catholic, middle class – there's so many stereotypes. Like, "Oh my gosh, let me back away from you before I get bitten because you're Catholic and you're a man and you're heterosexual. You're the oppressor." Like, so much of that. Like, "You're just the devil himself, right here in front of me." So, it's really about trying to find the most attractive, yet genuine mix of all the identities, so, for some people, it's not telling them that I'm Catholic right off the bat, you know?

He continued by sharing a story of how he met someone "worldly" at field training, which he equated with being "counter-cultural." He could tell by the way she spoke that she probably was not religious. Dennis talked about how when he is in a situation like that, he does not mention his time in the seminary. Rather, he briefly mentions that he attended CathU but now attends MU. And after spending some time getting to know one another and establishing mutual appreciation for one another, he shared his Catholicism.

Dennis continued sharing examples of how he censors his identities upon meeting new people,

> I do have friends who are homosexual… and for some of them, yeah, it would be like, "Oh my gosh, you're Catholic?" and again it's just very much trying to figure out the best way to mold all of who I am without trying to seemingly oppress or actually oppress anybody.

When we met for our second interview, Dennis shared that participating in this research made him feel the importance of sharing his Catholic identity more openly. He shared an example from aviation class where he clearly spoke on behalf of his Christian identity, and was able to respectfully dialogue with his classmates from a religious point of view.

Dennis was able to tell me more about the classroom interaction, which included a professor who handled the dialogue in a respectful and unbiased manner.

In Dennis's Writing in Aviation class, they were learning about writing resumes and had the opportunity to review some resumes as a class. The instructor would display a resume on the board, and the students would give feedback and ask questions. One of the resumes they reviewed had a Bible verse written on it, in one of the more personal sections of the resume. Dennis said, "And just immediately, as soon as it came up on the screen, you could hear "ugh." Like, I literally heard that from two students behind me." qI did not realize the importance of Dennis's story until I completed all of my research interviews. This particular story was the only one shared, over the course of 18 interviews, in which the participant felt their professor handled a dialogue regarding religious beliefs positively. For that reason, it is important to share the entire story, continuing from two students saying "Ugh" when the resume with a Bible verse came up for review:

> And so, I made sure to jump in and talk about how I know that's perfectly appropriate, you know. Like, if I'm applying for a job and I want to put my religious preference, as an employer, you're going to know right off the bat that hey – this is a person who is either committed to their Christian faith or wants me to believe they're committed to their Christian faith, or is at least trying to be committed to their Christian faith. So you can see commitment. There are definitely good things about that and there are definitely bad things about that. If you're applying for a job at an atheist company – first off, why are you doing that if you're a Christian, and second, that's not going to help you. But at the same time, they were in such an uproar about how inappropriate it was, without seeing… I was dumbfounded by it. Because I was like, what the heck? This is a personal resume. If a person decides to put that on their resume, that's their decision. And they were just like, no that is so inappropriate and so wrong. I was just really dumbfounded by that… This professor did a good job because I definitely threw out my ideas and talked about it… I think giving an equal voice to everyone in the class was very helpful. Because he definitely allowed the other students in the class, and he allowed me to talk… He wasn't saying this is a bad resume, he was just introducing some resumes that could be changed in some

> ways… It was keeping that classroom, letting it be a free academic environment, but at the same time, holding people accountable for what they're saying, what they're thinking, what they're proclaiming.

Several things stood out to me during Dennis's story. First, it was refreshing to have a student share a story guided by a positive emotion and a pleasing outcome. Dennis seemed happy to be given the chance to have his perspective considered, and for his professor to keep his own opinion to himself while the students discussed the issue. Secondly, I was personally happy to hear religion brought up as a point of discussion in class. To me, religion is a real-world issue, and students should learn how to navigate conversations regarding real-world issues while they are at college. Finally, I wondered if Dennis's participation in my research had influenced his behavior in class.

When I asked Dennis directly if participating in this research influenced his willingness to defend his faith in class, he said,

> I think it's shown a greater importance to it… it gives me hope and it also reinforces like, if I don't stand up, then you're research isn't doing anything. If I'm not trying to be Catholic in the classroom, then research about why students can't be Catholic in the classroom doesn't matter and your time is wasted… so just seeing the other [participants] was kind of affirming. Like there are other students that need people to be in the classroom saying something.

Dennis continued to speak about accountability, and the need for people to be held accountable for their comments in class. Accountability was not a new concept to Dennis, who was completing his senior year as an aviation major planning to immediately continue on to graduate school until he commissions as a second lieutenant in the air force.

Religious Identity

Dennis's comfort when speaking about the Catholic faith and Church teachings and his ability to navigate religious topics in other worldly settings were clear indications

of his advanced faith development. I had to resist the urge to question him about my various unanswered religious questions, knowing he had received some of the best faith formation available during his time in the seminary. Throughout our conversations, Dennis revealed his advanced religious identity development in the ways he spoke about his family, the ways in which he related with other people, and through his ability to speak about the tenants of the Catholic Church while still engaging in dialogue with people proclaiming other worldviews.

Advanced faith development. Dennis gave me his first clue regarding faith development as he spoke about CSG. While he appreciated the work CSG does on college campuses, he was concerned the missionaries do not receive enough training to properly mentor college students in faith formation. He admitted to having high standards after receiving, "An immense amount of world-class formation" in the seminary and learning to speak "The priests' language." He also spoke several times, in various contexts, about the importance of living the faith, not just talking about it. He mentioned the need to "Walk the walk" more than once, and was able to back up the phrase with examples from his own life.

In regards to Church teaching, Dennis spoke with no inhibitions. Each of the other participants showed at least some hesitation to quote Catholic doctrine. One particularly sensitive topic to most of the participants was homosexuality within the Catholic Church, yet Dennis spoke about the issue comfortably. In speaking about social identities, he shared with confidence the difference between homosexual identities, which he did not view as a conflict with Catholicism, versus transgendered identities, which he presented as a direct conflict with Catholicism. He explained how a homosexual

individual could still live in harmony with the teachings of the Catholic Church, while transgendered individuals could not. He never wavered in his certainty of the Catholic Church. However, he never appeared closed off to other perspectives, either. He was a good listener and spoke genuinely about his desire to meet and connect with people different than himself.

Dennis's conviction for Catholicism showed clearly when he spoke about current issues facing the Church. One of the issues he identified was, "Catholics who are not Catholic," which he described as individuals identifying themselves as Catholics who did not actually practice their faith, as he had defined. When I made a correlation to a republican presidential candidate who was not truly republican, he responded, "But for me, I'm not as bothered by the republican one, because that's a worldly thing. But the Catholic one? You're misrepresenting something very near and dear to my heart." Dennis continued to demonstrate his advanced faith development as our conversation continued onto the topic of intersectionality, privilege, and oppression.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

After Dennis described himself as, "The devil himself," based on how he perceived others viewed his identity as a middle class, heterosexual, Catholic, male, the conversation took a positive turn as he shared his ability to navigate his various identities. In an effort to connect with everyone he met, Dennis would work to present common identities in order to have the best chance of connection with each person he met. Dennis stated,

> [I] try to mold all of those different things into what might be attractive with each different person. You know, if I know somebody is really anti-religious, then I'm not going to talk about God and Christ right away. Because you have so much

> more opportunity and so much greater – like, you're not just one identity. I'm not just man, I have all these other identities as well. I'm not just Catholic. I also have all of these other things as well that make up who I am and what I believe and what I do… I think you kind of have that judgment, that quick like, "Okay, how should I interact with this person?" Let me lead with sports, let me lead with cats, let me lead with military, you know?

Dennis clearly had an openness to meeting new people and trying to connect with them, which also showed up as frustration at the idea of other people judging him based on a snapshot of his identities.

During our intersectionality activity, Dennis circled military upbringing middle class, male, straight, and White as his privileged identities. He underlined Catholic, male, straight, and White as his oppressed identities. When I asked his reaction to the activity, he talked first about his core identity and how to determine if a part of you is central to your identity or not. For example, if you never think about your ethnicity, is it because it is such an integral part of your core? Or is that identity further from your core, because you never give it any consideration? He also thought it was interesting to see the variation of his social privileges and oppressions. Following Johnson's (2006) definitions of privilege and oppression, Dennis would not technically have any oppressed identities. To which Dennis responded,

> I just love to kind of see what society would say I'm privileged for. And then also just to see the correlation between what society would say I'm privileged for but then I would say I'm not privileged by… one of the big things is what society would say is things that typically rang true in the past don't necessarily ring true today… so much to the point today where it's just on the vast other end of the spectrum to where it's like, "We're saying that you have all of these privileges but then we're marginalizing you because – well, you have all these privileges already, so you don't matter as much to us.

I felt Dennis was speaking from personal experiences, and so I asked him to clarify. This was one point in our conversation when Dennis seemed less jovial and had more passion

when he spoke. Dennis continued on to share examples where he felt his siblings were denied opportunities based on their privileged identities. Most of his examples came from the military. For instance, one of his brothers was denied admittance to the naval academy and was told it was because there were already enough White men accepted; the military was obligated to accept more women and people of Color. Dennis interpreted this denial to mean the naval academy was not accepting members based on merit, but based on social categories alone. More examples came from his military experience, such as another brother's involvement in a judicial affair with a woman, where he felt falsely accused of something and also felt his side of the story was not considered merely because he was male.

He continued to talk about how he feels marginalized identities are sometimes talked about out of context. For instance, he shared the example that he would never talk about his heterosexuality in a job interview, whereas a homosexual individual might. He said,

> Leave your sexual identity and sexual preferences out of the discussion and nobody would care and nobody would know… and not necessarily in a way where you have to hide it. Like do I hide the fact that I'm a heterosexual male? No, I don't. But it's not ever something that I feel I need to be identified by.

Dennis had spoken so sensitively up to this point that I was actually a bit surprised by the nature of his comments. He seemed defensive. I had not spoken directly about social privilege or systematic oppression yet at this point, wanting to first explore his stories and experiences based on his personal understandings of the terms. However, Dennis's comments made it clear to me that during our group interview, before our second individual interview, I should share definitions of the terms to see if it would alter how he spoke about systematically privileged or oppressed individuals.

Dennis circled the conversation back to academic freedom and described how cautiously "privileged" religious individuals share their religious identities, while "marginalized" sexual identities can be freely shared. Dennis stated,

> If you're gay or lesbian or bisexual, like please tell us all about it. And everything, just heap it and live it and just – we want to see that everywhere. But if you're not, no, we don't want to see that. Like we don't care about that because you're oppressive and you're old-fashioned and you're close-minded.

At this point in the conversation, I was interested in learning whether or not Dennis had ever truly faced marginalization or oppression.

We were nearing the end of our conversation, and I felt I had a fairly solid grasp of Dennis's identities, when I asked him if being a Catholic college student was the first time he had ever felt oppressed. Without a second of hesitation, he said, "I got bullied a lot as a kid for being fat and being homeschooled, and there's a lot of marginalization about being homeschooled." He continued, "No, I would say this isn't the first time I've ever been marginalized," and talked about his experience being an American in Korea and being yelled at and threatened just based on his American heritage. Dennis reiterated that the oppression he felt in the classroom as a Catholic was not his first time experiencing oppression, in fact, his previous experiences of oppression may have made his classroom experiences easier to identify.

Dennis's Final Thoughts

Dennis and I had some of the longer interviews, and even after I asked him for his final thoughts, we spoke for another five minutes. However, he was able to articulate how he thought educators could create a safer classroom environment,

> I think it's hard at a secular university to do it without seeming like you're promoting Christianity or Catholicism… So I think there just has to be an

> openness to it, and then maybe, as a professor, bringing up everything from multiple standpoints.

He continued on to share his final thoughts as we concluded our time together in research,

> I think the biggest thing is to try and not just look at students at face value, and seeing that every student has so much more beneath the surface. And whether that's Catholic, whether that's Muslim, whether that's whatever else. And I think a lot of those things, people don't feel comfortable bringing to the classroom. I think that's probably the biggest point. Not even from a Catholic or religious standpoint but just a standpoint of, is there really academic freedom in the classroom? Because I definitely know there are people who would hesitate to bring up an issue, would hesitate to bring up a stance on a particular topic. Whether that's from a religious background or a familial background or a personal experience background where either due to the professor or due to the students in that class, they wouldn't feel comfortable or even able to share that. To feel, like even in some ways, to even think that way. Because that was even my reaction right away. Like "Oh my gosh, I can't say anything."

Dennis's final thoughts were a strong articulation of his willingness to consider others' perspectives as well as his desire for educational freedom.

Dennis stood out to me as an engaging conversationalist. He listened attentively and found ways for us to connect our stories throughout the conversation. I left the interview with mixed feelings about his understanding of privilege and oppression. Sometimes, he used the terms appropriately. Other times, his comments regarding systems of power seemed out of context. As my second interview, it was too early to detect themes, but looking back, the theme of misunderstanding privilege emerged clearly. That said, Dennis's experiences were still very real for him. He had felt the need to hide his religious identity, especially because he felt judged by his other visible, privileged identities.

Mary

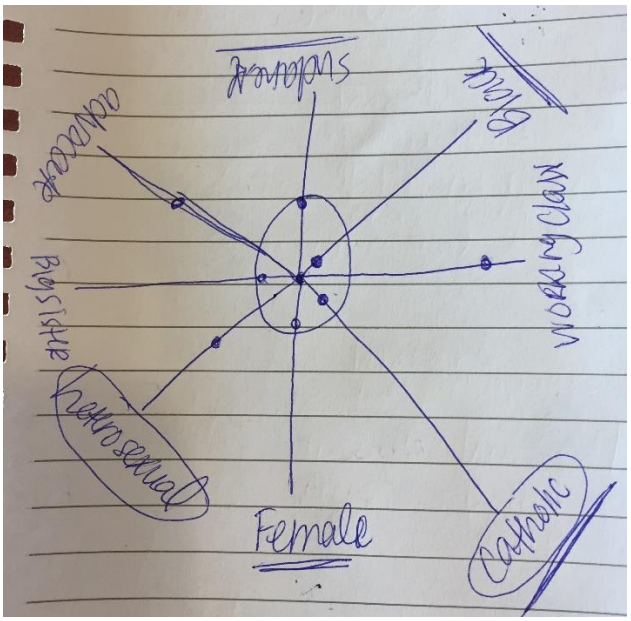

Figure 3. Mary's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Mary was the first participant I met with by referral, snowball sampling. Emily had connected Mary to me as someone deeply reflective of their faith and social identities. Mary was a social worker with Catholic Charities. She had actually graduated from MU quite recently. I did not know Mary had graduated when we sat down to meet, so I determined in the moment that she still met the participation requirements of the study, because she was so recently a student and a practicing Catholic. I was immediately struck by Mary's warm smile and calm demeanor. She had been reading a book when I approached, dressed sharply in a bright orange dress. Mary had beautiful Sudanese features, with dark skin and bright eyes. No one had mentioned Mary was Sudanese, so I was a bit surprised but also very interested to hear her stories. I met Mary at a local coffee and bagel shop. We sat outside to enjoy the beautiful early-fall weather.

Right away, I learned Mary was born into a Catholic family, but practiced the faith on her own. She shared, "Well, I've been Catholic all my life, but my family, we would go to church every so often. Until about my junior year [in high school], where I went on a retreat… and I explored my faith on my own." Mary began attending retreats and conferences, became a Catechist (Catholic educator), and even started her own Catholic club. She balanced this exploration while handling the responsibilities of being the oldest of seven children, who she helped raise after their mother passed away her first year of high school. After graduation, she began working for Catholic Charities at a women's shelter, which was my first clue of her compassionate nature.

> After she introduced herself, she shared what it meant to her to be Catholic, I think just the things that the Church teaches, minimum things, whether it's going to church on Sunday, days of obligation, going to confession, fasting, making prayer a part of your everyday life. And striving to be a better person by helping others, helping yourself, really being Christ-like. Attempting to be. Every day… helping others, forgiving, listening, being compassionate and merciful.

When she placed this definition into an academic setting, she said she experienced some "culture shock" transitioning from a Catholic elementary and high school to a secular university.

As a social work major, she often felt tension between her religion and her academics. She shared her uncomfortable experience in the classroom,

> Being in the social work program, it's very contrary to what the Church teaches. You know, as far as marriage, same-sex unions, topics that are very uncomfortable to talk about with strangers. And so I found myself not wanting to speak up for a little bit. But eventually, you gain the courage and you stand up for yourself and you stand up for your faith. Even though topics like abortion and same-sex unions can be uncomfortable to talk about, it's something that needs to be talked about within the Church and other places.

Fortunately, Mary eventually felt comfortable with her social work classmates and professors. She described it as a "privilege" to have a small department that was willing

to listen to her perspectives, "even though the majority [of our topics] were opposite of what the Church teaches." Unfortunately, she was still able to share several occasions in which she felt the Church was represented negatively in class.

She recalled one lesson in particular where a panel came to discuss LGBTQ issues. One of the speakers felt very hurt by the Church and even named a priest, who Mary knew, as part of the problem. Mary, who had previously felt comfortable sharing her faith in class, said, "That was a moment where I didn't feel I should speak up." We continued to discuss the importance of compassion, and how sometimes it is not appropriate to speak on behalf of our Catholic faith. Mary shared,

> There are numerous examples of when I've felt that I shouldn't say anything or I have said something and I felt better about it, but I think there's always just this tension where you want to be able to help people, but then you also want to maintain your own beliefs. And you want to maintain your own truth.

Mary clarified that she did not feel this tension socially, but primarily in academic settings. The tension Mary experienced and her internal struggle with how to balance her religious beliefs with her call to help others was an indication to me that she was in the transitional phase of her personal religious development, actively moving toward advanced faith formation.

Religious Identity

On the surface, the sheer amount of time and energy Mary put into her faith would make it seem she was advanced in her faith development. Indeed, she displayed many qualities of advanced faith formation, such as less dependence on the "correctness of belief" (Hoffman, 2012, p. 1028) and an openness to others' belief systems. However, Mary shared several thoughts throughout our time together indicating she still had

struggles or questions about Church teaching – an indication of transitional faith development.

Transitional faith development. Mary was the first participant in this study to question any Catholic Church teaching. Her questions were honest, a true indication of her authentic nature. In our discussion of social issues facing the Church, Mary expressed some concern about the role of women. While she expressed a logical understanding of women's role supporting the idea that, "Males are head of the Church but ultimately Christ is the head of the Church and we are His bride," she also stated, "People joke and say women are like second-class citizens in the Church… and I want to say we play an equal role, but that's not true." When we re-visited the topic later, she described being surrounded by women in her academic field and profession, and experiencing women as "trailblazers to Catholic discoveries and faith formation."

Beyond women's role in the Catholic Church, Mary expressed the need for free will, intellect, and freedom to practice our faith as we deem appropriate. She discouraged "binary thinking" as she explained,

> I mean, I think the Church gives great points and speaks from Truth, but I think God gave us intellect and allows us to see, like – does it really make sense with my own life? And is every little thing Truth?

Mary's questions of the Church will ultimately lead her to advanced levels of faith formation, once she finds answers that allow her to reach deeper levels of acceptance and conviction in her Catholic faith. Perhaps she is already there; because religious development was not directly related to my research questions, I can only assess the participants' faith formation based on the peripheral information they provided about their faith development.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

Mary was the only student of Color who participated in the study. No one seemed to notice except me, and probably Mary, but I truly valued her perspective as a person who had clearly faced oppression before attending college. Mary shared a bit from her background, speaking of the war in Sudan that led to her family's immigration to the United States. She was three years old at the time, an only child. It was her understanding that a Christian organization funded her family's immigration, which led them to California before moving to Omaha when she was seven. We briefly discussed the diversity of the city's Catholic churches, and how the Catholic Sudanese population was forced to disperse as their primary church closed. Our conversation continued into the topics of privilege and oppression.

I asked Mary which identities felt the most silenced in the classroom, and she shared this perspective,

> I think race is always a hot topic, so that's always easier to defend than Catholic identity…I think people of Color have always faced oppression and it's blatant oppression, whereas when you're Catholic – there's always that built-in stigma when it comes to religion. And having your own ideas. A lot of people say that Christians blindly follow. Kind of just proving that you do have intellect and that you do your research and that you know what you're talking about [in regards to religion], I think that's harder to defend. Especially when people who are arguing with you might come from a more emotional place… and you're thinking, well these are the facts, these are what I know, this is what I believe is true, but it doesn't change the hurt that you felt.

I summarized Mary's comments and asked, "Do you think race and ethnicity are perhaps more universally understood oppressions?" Based on her experiences, Mary agreed.

She continued to explain this dynamic, which she experienced in her race and ethnicity course at MU, "It was very clear that people had anti-Church perspectives, and

in that class, I didn't speak up much. I didn't speak up much about faith. But I did speak up about race and ethnicity." When the topic arose during our second interview, I asked Mary what ideas had remained with her from our first conversation, and she spoke about assumptions and oppression. She referred to the group interview and how everyone assumed their beliefs aligned with one another. She said, "I feel like even as Catholics, we generalize one another. So, that's kind of a form of oppression, a little bit… it's like binary thinking." After we reviewed our previous conversations, Mary completed the intersectionality exercise.

Mary categorized eight social identities. She circled Catholic and heterosexual as her privileged identities, and she underlined Catholic, Black, student, and female as her oppressed identities. As she talked me through her decisions, she clarified,

> I think being a person of Color, is something I identify with as more, but in this sense, I put Black. The stigmas that go with it, being Black… it's a bit tough to put. And then I'm proud to put Sudanese… I think it was a good exercise, just to see the places I feel oppressed.

I asked Mary directly if she thought she experienced her Catholic oppression differently because she had faced racial or ethnic oppression for so much of her life. She responded,

> Yeah, I definitely think that. It gives me a different understanding, maybe it's easy to feel oppressed because of your skin color or ethnicity. So then it's blatant for me to see oppression with my faith… I guess, I think of the way people have experienced their own oppressions, so then they feel the need to oppress others, knowingly or unknowingly.

And then, her feelings of oppression were quickly replaced with compassion. She shared, "I think before I feel anger toward people, I like to see, why does this person act this way? … Because it comes from a very personal and real place." Mary's comment made me appreciate the very personal and real ways in which she talked about her own experiences.

Every time Mary spoke, I felt like I needed to pause and just soak in her words before I could move on to another topic. She was a graceful, compassionate, and articulate example of Catholicism. I felt like I learned something from each participant, and Mary gave me many good reminders to always be compassionate and merciful toward others.

Mary's Final Thoughts

When I asked Mary, "What is something educators could do to create a safer environment in the classroom?" she responded without hesitation,

> Well, I think you could put a disclaimer at the beginning of a discussion, saying, well we're not here to change your views. We're just here to voice our opinions. I feel like we should respect one another and listen and give feedback in the most constructive way we can. I feel like that sets the tone for the discussion, and then if you have more objective questions, I think that gears toward switching the conversation from being more blameful, more "Well this is a fact" or "This is my point of view", giving everyone the floor to speak. Yeah, if you give more open-ended questions, it allows people to go wherever with the question or the answer.

As we moved to discussing her final thoughts, Mary took her time and eloquently shared,

> Well I would want people to know that the Catholic faith is, (pause), it's supposed to bring people together and closer to Christ. And so, (pause), I feel like through this research, it's allowing for more awareness of the Catholic faith and that we don't want to attack anyone, that we want to include everyone, and for everyone to be heard.

Mary's final thoughts demonstrated her ability to speak of the Catholic faith as a unifying and inclusive religion, and was also an example of how effectively she was able to take ownership of her role in the larger dialogue regarding the Catholic Church in education.

Mary spoke so eloquently and positively, it took a while for the enormity of her messages to sink in for me. On the surface, she seemed unaffected by the systems of power that had been affecting her, her entire life. She was a refugee, a Black woman, a child filling the role of a parent in her household. Yet, she felt proudest of her Sudanese

identity, comfortable talking about race oppressions, and did not seem to hold any resentment for the role she served in her family. On the other hand, she described frustration in the ways she was perceived for being Catholic, and the acceptance of anti-religious viewpoints. She seemed to understand systematic privilege and oppression, and by definition, she had experienced multiple oppressions in her lifetime. She also worked professionally within the systems of oppression, advocating for those with the inability to represent themselves. Still, she described her Catholic identity as oppressed.

Paul

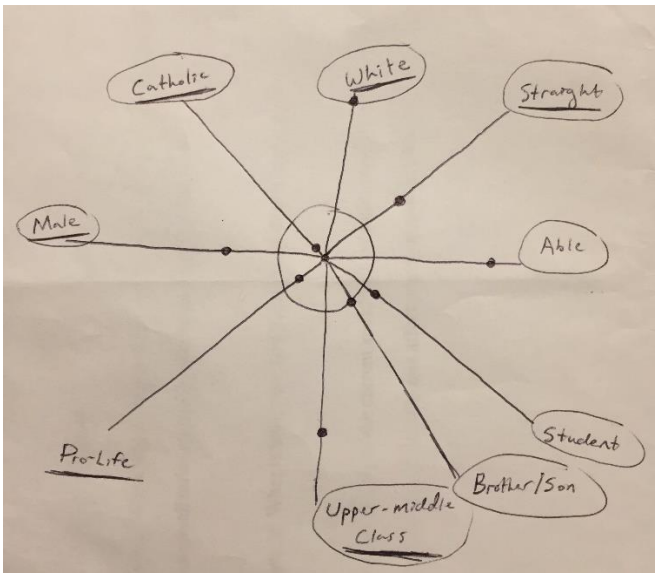

Figure 4. Paul's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Meeting Paul for the first time was like taking a breath of fresh air. He was able to express his love for humanity beautifully, and continually expressed commitment to his family and his faith. He made my eyes fill with tears several times, the first of which was when he talked about his family. Paul was raised Catholic in Indiana with one sister by his single father; his mother died when he was only three years old. He described his

family as "tight-knit" and saw his upbringing as a blessing, explaining, "My dad and sister and I have just grown so close together."

Almost immediately after we sat down and started talking, Paul was able to articulate what it meant for him to be Catholic,

> For me, to be Catholic is to be different, to be counter-cultural in a way. It's like we assume there are these truths that are objective and to believe we should live by them. And it's almost like we believe that in loving, like for me to love somebody, is to help them live according to that truth… And to be Catholic, we understand community is huge. We all have this general understanding that when we come closer together, it's good for us. For it's really easy to be a part of a community as a Catholic. And also, just fighting for good, fighting for truth for God, for all that is valued, is just part of who I am. We are expected to help with social justice, through the corporal works of mercy, do all these things that like, if I wasn't really Catholic, I wouldn't be held accountable to.

It became clear his faith was a big part of his personal identity. In addition to being Catholic, he identified himself as a "big part of the pro-life movement," as vice president of the pro-life club for MU.

Paul expressed how much he valued community many times throughout our conversation, and crediting the Newman Center and CSG for helping him continue to grow in his faith. "The community is definitely one of the biggest [reasons I joined the Catholic organizations at MU]. Just being surrounded by Catholic students who have the same values and beliefs… and the discipleship is what keeps me there." Paul glowed when he talked about the vibrant Catholic student community at MU, but our conversation took a more serious turn when we began discussing his experiences in the classroom.

As an example of his social identities being un-affirmed in the classroom, he spoke about his sociology class, a general education class required by most students at MU. He shared this experience,

> It's like my teacher would always walk into class and talk about how bad men are, but he's a man, which is a weird thing, but he would tell us about how bad men are in society and how they don't treat women right and they're racist and they're sexist… The teachers tend to be very liberal. Very. Which happens to be anti-Catholic in this day and age. So he'd come into class and he'd say that abortion was a good thing because it helped reduce crime and we should be supporting abortion… Being the privileged White, male, Catholic, is like the person you don't want to be when it comes to being in the classroom. Because if you're those three things, then yeah, it's assumed that you're racist, sexist, anti-choice, anti-sexual freedom, anti-LGBT, like anti- all of that. It's like you walk into a classroom, it's generally assumed that you support contraception, you support sex before marriage, you support all that comes with the LGBT movement, you support the "White cops are actually racist," because that's a big issue right now.

With this comment, Paul became the third of three White participants to describe feeling under attack in the classroom for his privileged identities. It was not surprising to me that he felt discomfort surrounding his privilege – I see that experience as a normal part of development when learning about systematic power. However, I was bothered that for the third time, a student seemed to have been introduced to some language regarding power and privilege without any real sense of understanding about what privilege meant. Or what to do once he realized what it meant. Part of me was glad these topics were arising in all different types of classrooms, while another part of me was frustrated that "privilege" was coming across as a type of buzz word. According to the stories I was hearing, instructors were giving no context for students to understand the meaning of the term – personally or systematically.

Paul seemed so sure of his faith and so confident in his values, one might assume that speaking up for his beliefs in class would come easily. However, Paul described it as a struggle. He explained feeling like everyone else in the class probably agreed with the teacher, and that by countering the professor's opinions, he would become, "Enemy

number one." He continued, "Sometimes it feels like it's you against the world." Paul admitted participating in this research gave him some comfort,

> I think it helps me. It's like I'm confessing something that I've always felt but have never really been able to talk about… Just to reflect on it and bring it to the table, is really nice to admit in a safe environment.

Paul's ability to articulate his beliefs continued when he incorporated Church teachings into the conversation, a strong indication of his advanced level of personal faith development.

Religious Identity

Paul's personality was so light and positive that one could almost miss the depth of his convictions. However, as I crystallized the data from Paul's interviews, it became obvious that his faith development was quite advanced. He accurately referenced Catholic Church teachings several times, appeared to have complete acceptance of the Catholic faith, yet maintained an openness to other people. He spoke respectfully of others, even when he was frustrated. He voiced a true love for humanity and a desire to help others. Interacting with Paul made me feel proud to be Catholic, for he was such a positive example of the Catholic Church's love for humanity.

Advanced faith development. Although he was born and raised in the Catholic Church, Paul shared that his true faith journey did not begin until he was a senior in high school. He moved through the transitional phase of faith development during that time, asking questions of himself and his faith. He shared, "I saw all these different options and I was like, okay, I need to figure out what's really true. Like which religion is the right one I should follow. Hopefully there is one, right?" Paul immersed himself in Catholic teachings, history, and the Catechism and said, "The pieces of the puzzle finally

fit together. Everything finally clicked." Through his exploration, Paul had found a real connection with the Catholic faith.

When Paul spoke about how we should treat people and approach life, he talked about the Catholic corporal works of mercy, which involve caring for the physical needs of others. The corporal works of mercy include feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned, and burying the dead. When we discussed homosexual unions, he referenced Catholic Theology of the Body, a teaching by Pope John Paul II on what it means to reveal God through the human body. I did not ask him to define these doctrines or explain their purposes, for that information was not relevant to my research questions. It was clear he had done his homework in reading Catholic doctrine and had an understanding of how to live out the teachings of the Church. The challenge for Paul was learning how to live in such a way as to honor his faith, yet fully engage in the classroom.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

Paul had already described how he perceived others viewing him as "Enemy number one" several times before we even began to discuss the privilege and oppression within his identities. He shared,

> It's being a student in classes like the social sciences that it challenges your identity. It makes you feel like that part of you is a bad part of you. Like being Catholic, it's a bad thing. So, it makes you not want to be Catholic.

Although Paul seemed very capable of speaking about his Catholic beliefs, he described the classroom as unsafe territory. Like several participants before him, he was acutely aware of a professors' position of power. He described how he experienced this power dynamic with one professor in particular,

> He had his side, very prochoice, very anti-man, anti-White, and kind of shoved his perspective down your throat a little bit. And then the only way to have a discussion about that, from the other side, would be to actively say – you're wrong.

Although Paul was feeling like part of the minority in class, I pointed out that Christians are a majority religion in the United States, and shared some of the privileges that came along with that majority status. Paul quickly challenged my perspective.

He laughed and said, "I reject that." I encouraged him to elaborate, and he explained how even with Christians as a majority population, Catholics would be a minority, with the majority of other Christians holding anti-Catholic beliefs. He continued, "I feel like mainstream culture does not make me feel privileged as a Catholic. It makes me feel like I am target number one." As Paul continued, his passion grew, and the hair on my arms stood up. He said,

> I'm that person who you've heard about who is intolerant, who is a "bigot." It's like when I'm sitting in class, I know if I speak my opinion, now everyone around me is like, "Whoa, those people do exist? Those intolerant bigots who actually believe that?"

So, I asked Paul if he had any bigoted beliefs. He responded sincerely,

> No, I don't. To me, part of being prolife is recognizing that there's something about all of us that makes us equal, makes us deserving of equal treatment, makes us equally valuable. And that's - that we're human. And as a Catholic it's that we have a soul, that we're made in the image of God, that we're taught that everyone who is human, and who has a soul, should be treated equally and that we're all valuable. So to me, how I could I ever be racist? How can I take something about a person, like their skin color, and say you're not as valuable as me? Because that is anti-prolife. That is anti-Catholic.

We revisited these ideas when we met for a second interview, and Paul shared how much he had been focusing on having the courage to stand up for his beliefs.

Paul continued the conversation by participating in the intersectionality exercise. He identified his privileged identities as male, Catholic, White, straight, abled, student,

brother/son, and upper-middle class. He underlined his oppressed identities as male, Catholic, White, straight, upper-middle class, and pro-life. Paul told me about his diagram, "Just even by looking at it – it's the idea of – if you are privileged, it's something to be marginalized about… it's almost like to be privileged you end up getting attacked for it." He continued to explain how frustrating it was for him to face the assumptions people had about him without really knowing anything about him. He also voiced how upsetting it felt that in order to raise up those who had been oppressed, society had to oppress anyone with privilege. He used hand gestures to demonstrate privileged individuals being up high, and oppressed individuals being down low. Instead of raising the oppressed individuals up to the same level as the privileged individuals, the privileged individuals were brought down to the same level as the oppressed.

Paul then expressed gratitude for some of his privileges, such as the privilege to belong to a strong Catholic community in the Newman Center. He appreciated being a part of the group discussion and realizing that he was not the only person feeling frustrated in class. He shared a recent example of some prolife artwork being vandalized on campus, and how it motivated him to be bolder in class. In summary, Paul and I had both come to realize a theme of courage in his interviews. He was striving to be more courageous, while I already admired the courage he was displaying as a Catholic individual at a secular university.

Paul's Final Thoughts

Paul's interviews were some of my shortest in minutes, but provoked the longest reflection from me. He was able to share his ideas succinctly. In my final interview with Paul, I forgot to ask him how educators could make classrooms feel more inclusive, but I

did ask his final thoughts for the audience reading this research. He shared after a long pause,

> Yeah, I'd say, definitely take seriously this idea that being Catholic is sort of the last accepted bias. I just hope everyone who reads this can just take in all these stories and just understand better the struggle that it is to be a Catholic in the university. And yeah, that as Catholics, we're going to stand up for what we believe in, and I think it's right of the educational system to help facilitate our voice just like everybody else's voice. And that even if the common cultural view is a certain way, we still need to have open discussion. We need to be able to have open discussion without the counter-cultural view feeling marginalized.

Although Paul's comments may seem defensive at face-value, the way he articulated his ideas was gentle, uplifting, and motivational. As he spoke, I could sense his desire to put his thoughts into action. From the first time I met Paul to the time we departed, I perceived his awareness was transitioning into action; he was speaking about his faith more courageously based on his experiences as a participant in my research.

Paul was a likeable person. He smiled as he spoke and laughed freely. When he spoke of frustrating situations, his voice held a tone of hurt, not defensiveness. Still, by the time I spoke with Paul, I was not surprised to hear he was frustrated with the way privilege was presented in the classroom. He seemed to understand privilege as a way to keep him in his place and prevent him from participating in classroom discussions. In this way, he experienced his identities as White, male, and Catholic similarly, although the only identity he seemed eager to defend was his religious identity.

Maria

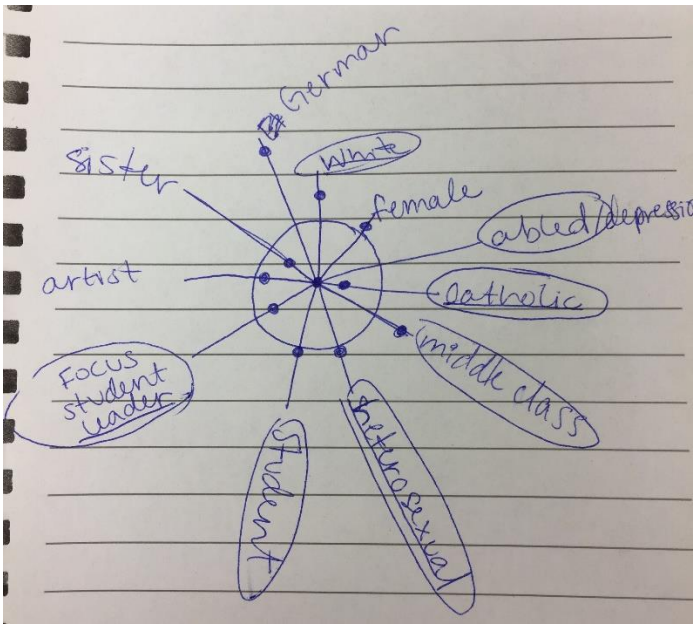

Figure 5: Maria's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Maria and I met in the Newman Center on a weeknight when the building was bustling with activity and palpable residence-hall energy. Maria's energy was definitely a part of the environment; her excitement to meet with me to talk about research was just the rejuvenation I needed. She was referred to me by Emily, and she was eager to talk about her experiences on campus. Maria told me right away her mom would be happy she found someone else to vent her concerns to, because she called her mom "at least once a week" to complain.

Maria grew up in a small town in Nebraska, not far from my own hometown. As the oldest of eight children, she said her family had a tricky time adjusting to her being at college. Finding the Newman Center community and CSG had been a stabilizer for Maria, she even credited her experiences at MU for her growth in faith, sharing, "Honestly, being here has made me a better Catholic, and it's made me less afraid of

being Catholic and letting people know it… I'm really proud of being Catholic now. Being part of this place is incredible."

To start our conversation, Maria articulated what she thought it meant to be Catholic. She mentioned the importance of following the basic fundamentals of the faith, including participation in the sacraments, reading scripture, and, "Instead of something you have to do, it's something that's important to you and something that, I mean it's the center of my life." In fact, her Catholicism was so central to her identity that she felt forced to change majors as a result of the anti-Catholic messages she received in her original major, social work. She explained,

> This summer, I switched to biology, and I think part of that was the way that I felt in my social work classes. Like I wouldn't want to go ever because I had professors that would openly bash Catholicism all the time in class. Like just this week it happened to me.

I asked Maria what had happened, and she told me her teacher shared an article in class, which she did "regularly," using "liberal" news sources that presented Catholicism negatively. She shared,

> My professor will just pull articles from like *The New York Times*… that have something to do with Catholics and how their religious beliefs don't match up with government regulations or something like that. And she teaches it as almost a fact or like the unanimous opinion of everyone that Catholics are just outrageous… and I just sit there… Abortion is one issue [my professor] has brought up, and she told us on the first day of class, "You should all just know now that I'm prochoice," and then she went on a little speech about that. And then the second week of class, she shared [an article negatively portraying Catholic Charities], and then one time in class, she just flat out said, "Who all in here is Catholic?" And I didn't raise my hand, because I was very scared. It's a small class and it's people that I will be going to school with in the same classes for the next three years.

I could relate with Maria's example. I did not share my experiences with her regarding this topic, but I remembered sitting in class as classmates made fun of conservative news

sources on several different occasions, and could recall one example of a professor using a news clip to make fun of a news source – not critique it objectively, but openly laugh at the perspectives being shared on the television. While the news sources often deserved the criticism my classmates and professor were sharing, I still often felt like screaming about how one-sided most news media felt to me, and how I would appreciate another perspective being considered occasionally.

Maria was the third social work major I interviewed. Emily had shared her advisor warning her against being a social work major, while Mary had managed to graduate and begin working as a social worker. Knowing Catholic Charities was one of the largest social work organizations in the world, I pressed Maria to explain further why she did not think she could work in the field of social work. She explained,

> I think I definitely could have, but I wouldn't have enjoyed it at all. I think I would have spent every day feeling like the entire world was pushing against me and everything I believed and I would have felt like I had to choose between my job and my morals, like on a daily basis. And I don't want to be in that situation.

She described changing majors as making her feel "More courageous and independent." Maria continued to explain the change, "I was tired of just being scared of being Catholic all the time, so I just started talking to people about it. And I've noticed people are a lot more open to it than I thought they would be." Maria's comment made me feel happy for her; she had found some comfort between the intersection of her student and Catholic identities. Still, I wondered if she could have found that comfort in her original major. If she was truly passionate about social work, I wondered if it was really necessary for her to change majors in order to feel comfortable as a Catholic student in the classroom.

As a sophomore, Maria was one of the younger participants in the study, while holding the position as oldest child in her family of ten. She also identified herself as a

student, a sister, a daughter, Montessori worker/caretaker, and artist, who loves to read. She was raised Catholic in, "Just an all-around Catholic family." Both of her parents also grew up in Catholic families, and Maria recalled her mom always talking about God and bringing home various books home for the family to read. As a family, they attended Mass at least once a week, and usually prayed the rosary daily. Starting in high school, she spent time each summer at a Catholic camp, which she credits for helping her discover her personal faith journey. Maria shared,

> There was a point where I had to decide for myself that I wanted to be Catholic. Because I don't remember a time in my life ever not being Catholic or not caring about God or my faith… It started the summer before my freshman year of high school when I went to [Catholic] camp and then again last year, I had a really rough year with transitioning. Like, everything in my life changed. I moved here, and my faith was the only thing that was still the same, so I really grew and clung to that.

Maria's gratitude for the Newman Center and CSG was evident, but then she also expressed gratitude for my research.

When I asked her how it felt to discuss these issues, she shared, "I'm really happy, it feels really good. Yeah, I think my mom is getting tired of me ranting about it all the time." She continued to express her enthusiasm, "I think it's definitely been really exciting to see how surprised people are when you're a non-judgmental Catholic. That you can be friends with gay people and people who think abortion's okay." Maria's train of thought was not only an indication of how other people react to her Catholicism, but also a sign of her own personal faith development and religious identity.

Religious Identity

Throughout our conversations, Maria gave indications she could be in either the concrete, transitional, or advanced phases of faith formation. The way she initially

avoided conflict in her social work classes and clung to Catholic teaching was a sign of concrete faith development. However, her time spent in reflection, her self-examination of whether Catholicism was her personal faith of choice, and her ability to voice her doubts were indications of a more transitional phase of faith development. Even then, Maria gave a few clues she was moving toward advanced faith development in the ways she accepted others' viewpoints while remaining deeply faithful to her Catholic convictions. Ultimately, the fluctuation between all three phases places her in a transitional stage of development.

Transitional faith development. Like many children raised in the Catholic Church, Maria spend most of her childhood in the concrete phase of faith formation, following the rules of the Church without much thought or reflection. However, Maria reached a point in her own spirituality where she wanted her faith to be a personal choice. She spent her high school years growing in faith, but it was not until college that she felt truly challenged in her Catholicism. She described instances inside and outside the classroom where she intentionally privatized her religious identity. In a discussion about how others often expect Catholics to be judgmental, Maria shared, "That's why, when I'm meeting new people on campus, I like to ease into the friendship and then be like – hey, I'm Catholic, by the way." It became clear as we continued talking that by her second year of college, she was feeling much more secure in her religious identity.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

Maria shared in her final interview that the ideas of privilege and oppression had really stuck with her after her first interview and two group interviews. She explained,

> One of the things that kind of surprised me throughout this whole thing was when we talked about privilege the other day. I had never really thought about it in that aspect before. I'd always thought about it in like, more suppressed aspects. I never really thought about Christianity in the world, and I've thought a lot about it since then, just realizing I don't always have the short end of the stick, even though it feels like it sometimes.

Maria's words affirmed the definitions I had provided regarding systematic privilege and oppression. She continued to acknowledge her Christian privilege,

> There are blessings, and I was really blessed to receive the education I did at a Catholic school. And not everybody has the opportunity. It's just good to think about those things, I guess.

I could see Maria's perspective on her Catholic privilege had shifted as a result of learning the definition of privilege and discussing the issue in a group setting. After sharing her thoughts, Maria participated in the intersectionality exercise.

Maria asked several questions as she worked to complete her intersectionality wheel, and after she completed the activity, she described it as, "A little uncomfortable." Much like some of her fellow research participants, Maria described her internal struggle determining whether to base the activity on her personal experiences or the messages she received from society. She explained,

> I guess what makes me uncomfortable is the difference between what the socially accepted oppressed and privileged identities are and how they don't always match up with my personal experience. That gap makes me uncomfortable.

I asked Maria, "What do you think that's about?" She responded,

> For example, as a Catholic, I basically think that I am privileged in a lot of ways. I talked about my education and just like, there's Catholic churches everywhere. You know [our city], there's like a million and ten Catholics. But then like at school, especially, people just have really flawed beliefs about my faith, and about how the Catholic Church works in the world and how flawed it is and all these terrible things the Church is doing and it's just really hard for me to be a Catholic in the classroom sometimes.

Maria's description aligned with previous researchers' findings of students experiencing social status ambiguity. She seemed to understand her position as a privileged Catholic but still felt isolated in classroom settings. The conversation continued with an examination of her other social identities.

Maria identified her privileged identities to be White, Catholic, abled, middle class heterosexual, student, and CSG leader. At the same time, she identified her oppressed identities to be White, catholic, heterosexual, and CSG leader. She explained her diagram and the reasons several of her identities felt both privileged and oppressed. She described her privileged identities of White, heterosexual as privileged identities surrounded by "hostility." She concluded the conversation by explaining what would make the classroom feel more welcoming to multiple perspectives.

Maria's Final Thoughts

Maria had very practical ideas for how educators could create safer learning environments for students,

> I think honestly, just to list all their expectations, especially for discussion-style classes. List all their expectations in the syllabus. I think if they just followed through with them, more objectively, it would be a lot better. I feel like it's very one-sided, just because their personal beliefs influence it. And I realize that's probably always going to be a little bit of an issue just because we're human, but I definitely think they could do a better job of keeping personal biases out of leading discussions in the classroom and the type of articles they bring to class and just how they teach altogether.

Her lighthearted nature could not disguise how sincerely she felt her final thoughts for readers,

> I want to say to people that when we're interacting with each other, it's important to know what's in your heart and then know the facts behind it before you start talking to people with all of your emotions in the way. Because I feel like I've just had so many conversations with people who have these ideas in their head that I don't even think they know why they believe what they believe, it's just

> what they've heard or what sounds right… or it's like an attack they can use. So I think that people just need to be better at like, not being angry at each other. And like, educating themselves and then we will be able to have – like people can find a lot of common ground with each other. And that's super important. It's like people need to keep their emotions in check and know what you're talking about.

Maria was the only student to express a need for more factual information to be shared in classroom discussions, which may be a result of her experiences of Catholicism feeling misrepresented in classroom discussions.

Maria was one participant who seemed to grow as a result of participating in this research and truly consider her identities differently after learning about systematic privilege and oppression. She presented her thoughts genuinely. She sounded hurt when she spoke about feeling marginalized for her faith and confused by others' negative perceptions Catholicism, a central component of her core identity. Overall, Maria seemed less concerned about defending her position as some other participants. Instead, she seemed relieved to have a safe environment to explore her feelings, and was one participant who appeared to learn and grow her perspectives as a result of our conversations.

Felicity

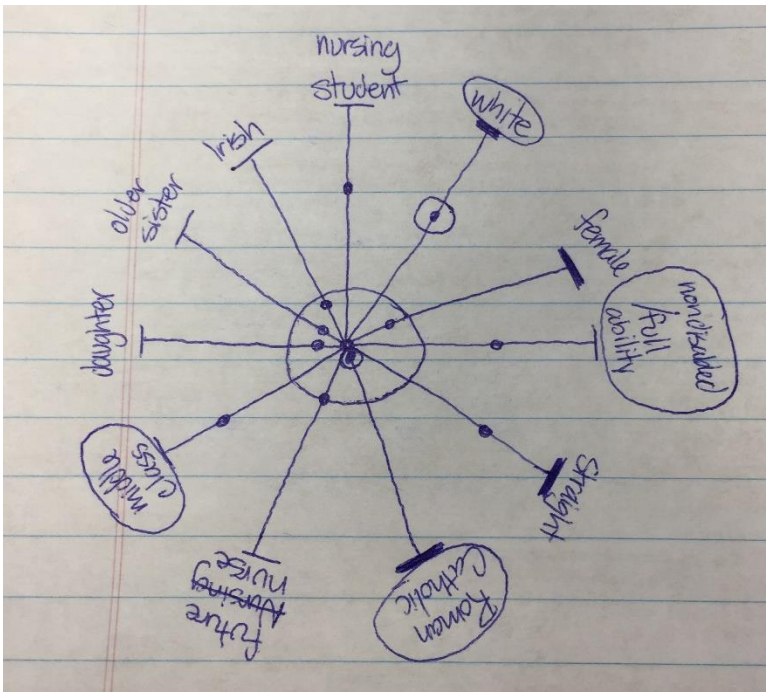

Figure 6: Felicity's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Felicity was one of the first students to approach me after I attended Mass at the Newman Center to recruit research participants, and was incredibly responsive and eager to participate in this study. I was immediately interested to learn more about her, because she physically stood out in a crowd. She had long, shiny, wavy hair, with a large section of it shaved off above her left ear. She was soft-spoken, yet gave off a bold, alternative vibe. She shared with me almost immediately that she was a nursing student, which surprised me for some reason. In all actuality, nothing about Felicity was predictable to me!

Felicity grew up in the same city as MU, raised by two Catholic parents, a twin sister, and two brothers. Her twin sister was a student at MU and also lived in the Newman Center. Actually, I accidentally tried to interview her one day; she had to

remind me she was Felicity's twin sister! She described her childhood as slightly unique, because her dad stayed at home while her mom worked as the bread-winner for the family. Her mom's career was in higher education, student affairs, so Felicity was well-versed in the lingo of higher education. She described herself as "very White, Irish, English, French, Welsh, definitely female, Cradle Catholic, professional student in nursing school, daughter, twin, and middle-class-ish." She seemed to have a strong sense of identity, based on the unabashed way she described her social identities.

MU was the first public school Felicity attended. She was a local student who went to Catholic elementary and high school. She described her transition to public education as "eye-opening," and gave several examples from her first years of college in which Catholicism was portrayed negatively in the classroom. Felicity noticed the anti-Catholic statements more prominently in large, lecture-style classes. She described the lack of discussion in this type of class and explained,

> It was frustrating, because I would have appreciated being able to have a more open dialogue about those things… but it's hard to do that. It was a lecture class, and it's a low-level class, and [I knew] people will be irritated if you argue with the professor.

Felicity thought the anti-Catholic messages were more overt in her first years of college, when she was taking more general education classes. As she started taking more science classes in preparation for nursing school, she felt a positive change.

Felicity gave an example of a biology instructor discussing religion directly. One of the professor's first lessons covered issues of faith, and he said directly, "You can be a person of faith and still study science. They don't have to go against each other." She felt encouraged to continue her path to nursing school.

Felicity interviewed a few weeks before the 2016 presidential election, and she noted the change in campus climate. Even within the Catholic student community she said,

> I think right now, in the midst of the election, politics are huge. Especially in the Church, there's a real struggle going on of how you choose who to vote for, and the Church can't endorse one candidate over the other, but amongst my friends there's a lot of division of who to vote for and how to vote and in some cases, people are asking whether or not they even do vote?

She continued to share some issues of particular concern for her, as a future healthcare provider. She mentioned "respect for life" as a growing issue because she had no idea if she would be working with babies, teenagers, or the elderly when she started practicing nursing. She reflected, "[Is] assisted suicide gonna become a part of "quality" healthcare? Because that's not just something that I get to sit around and let other people decide. I'm a part of the age group that can vote." As we considered our conversation regarding issues facing the Church, Felicity's stage of faith formation became clear to me.

Religious Identity

Felicity was born and raised in the Catholic faith, attending Catholic schools for elementary and high school, and was able to live in the Newman Center for her final year of college at a public university. She shared what she thought it meant for someone to be Catholic,

> For me, it's not even just doing the minimum requirements of the Church. So, not just going to Mass on Sundays and not just going to confession once a year. It's having daily prayer, knowing and understanding Church teaching and being willing to explore things further that I don't understand and that people have questions about. It means accepting and following Church teachings, even when they're hard or when I don't understand them or are frustrated… and seeking answers for those things. And actively pursuing growth in my relationship with Jesus and my depth of understanding of the Church.

She was also able to weave her Catholic faith throughout her other social identities. She connected being a daughter to being a "Daughter of God," and being a nurse as working as "The hands and feet of Jesus for other people." She summarized, "There hasn't been anything that conflicts with being Catholic, it all flows together. I can love science and medicine and – God appreciates that, and the Church needs people in science and medicine." Felicity's comments were consistent with Maria's; they both described how their studies in the hard sciences were more inclusive of their Catholic beliefs than their studies in social sciences.

Felicity never seemed to waver in her Catholic identity, yet still had questions. Throughout our conversation, Felicity mentioned devoutly following Church teaching, but also mentioned some Catholic beliefs that were hard for her to understand and accept, such as the Catholic stance against homosexual unions. Being in a stage of questions, seeking answers, and exploring her faith indicated Felicity was in the transitional phase of faith development.

Transitional faith development. Besides Catholic elementary and high school, Felicity had many opportunities to learn and grow in her faith. She was a teacher for Totus Tuus, a Catholic summer camp for elementary school students for two years, requiring her to learn enough to answer the children's questions. She also mentioned being able to consult with her parents when she had religious questions, and she was also willing to research her questions in books. Felicity made sure to acknowledge the amount of knowledge contained by her peers. She explained,

> A lot of people I know here are obviously practicing Catholics, and know more than I do. There are even some guys who have been to seminary who have

> answers for questions that I don't know the answers to. So just talking to them has been really good.

Still, Felicity struggled with a few Catholic teachings, especially on same-sex marriage.

She admitted accepting the Church's stance, but finding it difficult because of her love for her friends who identified as homosexual. She described the tension,

> It's hard, because I know plenty of people who are gay. I have classmates from high school even, who identify as gay and are actively pursuing a gay lifestyle. And so, it's been very hard to explain. I think it's hard to explain that no I don't hate you, and yes I can still disagree with you and love you. And no, I don't think you're going to hell. And I think that you're far more than how you choose to identify with your gender and your sexuality.

Felicity's willingness to explore her questions, seek answers, accept others with differing viewpoints than herself, and her public ownership of her faith were all indicators that she was actively moving from transitional toward advanced faith development. This growth became more evident as we discussed her intersecting identities, and how she experienced privilege and oppression.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

Felicity's comfort with her religious identity increased as she progressed through college, an indication of her personal growth. She described, "I think when I started out I felt a lot more marginalized for being Catholic." She appreciated the opportunity to discuss her experiences with her peers and noted that everyone "Sees things a little bit differently." When asked what ideas remained with her after our first individual interview and two group interviews, she spoke about intersectionality. She was surprised by the complexity of her own identity and acknowledged the privilege in her life.

These privileges also came with a fair amount of discomfort. Felicity described how privilege seems to be increasingly viewed as negative, "I feel like there's been a

shift into criticizing those who have privilege so the privilege becomes more of an occasion to like, what's the word, it's (pause)… alienating." Of all the participants interviewed, Felicity seemed to have one of the stronger understandings of her privilege. She described never being "Seen as a threat" as a White woman, and also mentioned always having Church holidays off from school. Yet, she showed some conflicting experiences in the intersectionality exercise.

Felicity identified her privileged identities being White, non-disabled, Roman Catholic, and middle class. Simultaneously, she underlined her oppressed identities as White, female, straight, and Roman Catholic. She explained three of the conflicted identities, straight, Roman Catholic, and White. As a heterosexual individual, Felicity described "Feeling like it's harder to connect with people, just because they get caught up on your sexual orientation. Sometimes I feel singled out for not breaking the norms or something." She also explained that even being "very privileged" as a Catholic, "There are people who don't appreciate that and who make fun of the Catholic Church and probably see me as pretty backwards." After explaining her White privilege, Felicity also added, "Sometimes people attack you for being White and it's like, you have so much privilege it becomes a reason for them to like, berate you." Her efforts to balance her perspectives definitely influenced her concluding thoughts for this research.

Felicity's Final Thoughts

To create a more inclusive classroom environment, Felicity suggested to educators,

> I think encouraging more of that, lifting people up, and just in terms of language and encouraging people to be aware of their own biases before beginning the conversations, especially if you're going to talk about subjects like this. Because everyone has a bias and people who say, "Oh I don't have any biases" aren't

> really being honest. And it's very easy to say, "I don't have biases", because we want to make sure that we don't, but we can't do that. So just encouraging those things, like self-awareness and objectivity. And encouraging people, encouraging students not to attach each other because we're all students together and we can learn from each other, but it's so hard to learn from each other if we don't feel safe. And especially – educators that are in a position of authority – it's a little bit different in college versus high school. But a professor has a lot of control over grades and it's wrong for students to feel like they can't share their opinion, whether they're Catholic or Muslim or Buddhist or whatever. No matter what, people should be able to share, and I think professors need to – not just students need to be aware of their biases – I think professors need to be aware of those, as well.

Felicity continued to share her final thoughts for readers to consider. After a long pause, she emphasized the need for holistic learning:

> Even though a lot of us are in very focused areas of study, and are looking to become probably experts in our given field or even just on one small topic in our field, having a holistic approach to education and pursuing those things and learning is super, super important. And I think sometimes it gets lost in the goal of knowing everything that one can about a certain topic. Because it's very easy to get [stuck on that one topic]. So it's very easy to do, but just remain aware of that because a holistic approach, when school if your life and that's what a lot of your energy is geared towards, that affects other perspectives as well. And so maintaining a holistic approach in the educational sphere also allows for that to bleed out into interactions with people outside of the classroom, and in your own faith or lack thereof and just everything else.

Felicity was the only participant to use the word "holistic" to describe her wishes for education, although most of the other students described the same phenomenon. She seemed aware of the shortcomings of her college education and desired a more well-balanced experience at MU.

Felicity's position as the only professional student was evident. She had started transitioning her classroom lessons into real-world scenarios. She was less concerned about anti-Catholic statements from professors and more concerned with how social issues facing Catholics would impact her in her nursing career. Still, she was very aware

of the lack of religious dialogue in both classroom and professional settings, and expressed a desire for religion to be considered a part of holistic learning.

Paige

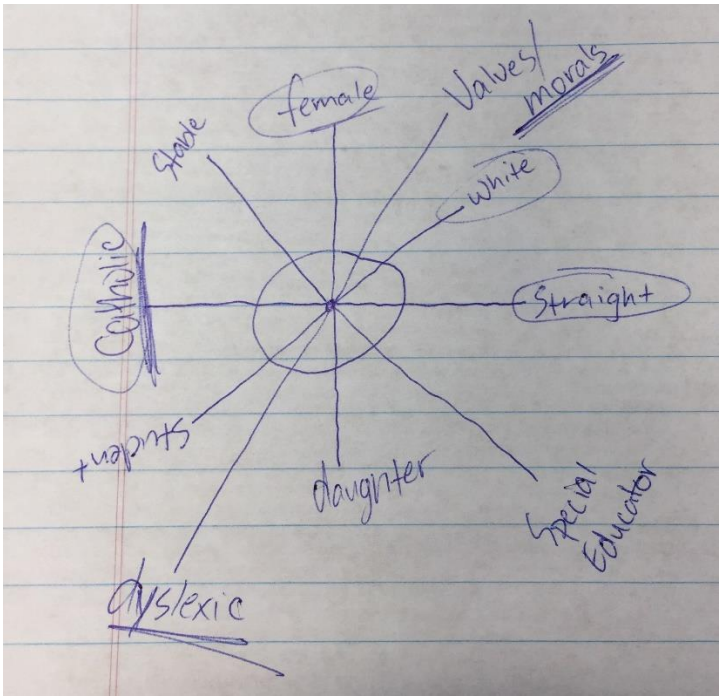

Figure 7: Paige's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Paige approached me after I attended MU's Thursday night Mass and community night. She stood out with her perfectly accessorized outfit and coordinating makeup. We met at the Newman Center about a week later, and I was refreshed and perplexed by how differently our conversation went than the conversations with the other seven participants. Paige shared many life experiences that made her seem more mature than her age, while at the same time, she seemed completely naïve to some of the religious and political issues we discussed in our interviews. She was open and honest while also seeming somewhat shy.

Right away, I could tell Paige did not have a strict sense of Catholic doctrine or teachings, which did not matter for this study. She identified herself as a practicing Catholic, but expressed much different expectations of what it meant to be Catholic than the other participants. She defined Catholicism as,

> Incorporating God into your everyday life, whether it's through prayer, journaling, reading, writing, acts of kindness, and really just making sure you're not only believing but that you're taking God in every chance that you get and living by Him, by the Bible, and then when you make a mistake that's like sinful… that you learn from it and pick yourself back up and try to re-gain confidence within yourself and within God to regain moving forward.

Right away, I asked Paige to be more specific, because she had not shared anything that would make Catholicism different from many other Christian denominations. She continued to explain that going to Mass was important, but not critical. She said, "I feel like most other religions are very strict on "Go to Mass," where for us, it's like, if we don't have the time, we find other ways to incorporate sacraments and blessings and stuff." As the conversation turned toward her involvement in CSG, it became clear Paige felt a true sense of belonging in the Catholic community at MU.

She described a time during her first year of college where she felt lost in her identity and direction in life, and "A mentor from CSG found me… I wasn't seeking it. I wasn't really seeking anything at the time. I was just looking for a new path to start and that was the new path." It was Paige's interview that made me seek out Strayhorn's (2012) sense of belonging theories. As we continued speaking, the CSG's community and Paige's sense of belonging within that community became an obvious part of her Catholic identity. She explained how her perspectives shifted once she joined CSG and became a part of the Newman Center community,

> On the MU campus, you're just another person. You do your own thing or whatever. But when you come here to the Newman Center, it's like we don't even have to know each other's name but we all know we have one thing in common, and that's God. And to know that we all focus ourselves not only in God but in MU and our academics… it makes a huge difference to me. I know I can go to them for advice with school, future, things like that, but I can also go to them for guidance and questions with God. So, it's nice to know that here, I'm not judged. But maybe on campus, I am.

Paige's comment made me consider the impact of the Catholic community at MU. In the other interviews, the theme of community was more subtly woven into the conversation, but was definitely present. Paige's experiences made the importance of community more overt. Paige continued explaining the value of her Catholic community by sharing stories of losing friendships over religion or having someone walk away mid-conversation when they realized Paige and her friends were "religious." Next, our conversation shifted to her classroom experiences.

Paige was unique in that she had attended the local community college (CC) before transferring to MU. It was actually at CC that she experienced her first discomfort in the classroom. During an ethics class, the instructor shared strong, one-sided opinions and did not leave room for much student discussion. When any discussion did occur, Paige described how the instructor would tell students their beliefs were wrong. She said sometimes the instructor would say "It's okay to believe that, but keep it to yourself." While at other times, the instructor would blatantly say, "That's not okay, that's not ethical to believe." As Paige spoke about the class, I could sense her extreme frustration. She told stories of texting her dad or boyfriend during the class, trying to keep herself from arguing with the instructor. She attributed her coping mechanisms to her upbringing.

Paige was raised in a religious home with a Catholic father and Baptist mother. She said they never practiced her mother's Baptist faith, but that her father "Really wanted to instill Mass in my sister and I, so we started going to church twice a week, going to church events, praying before bedtime and dinner, and attending religious education all through elementary and high school." Beyond her Catholic identity, Paige shared that she was female, heterosexual, a daughter, sibling, physical education major, Catholic, with asthma and slight dyslexia. We discussed her identities further in our second interview, in our conversation regarding intersectionality, privilege, and oppression. With Paige, they were complex discussions, as was my analysis of her stage of faith formation.

Religious Identity

Paige clearly identified with her Catholic faith and was proud to be a part of the Catholic community at MU. However, determining her religious development was complicated, because she truly did not fit into any of Hoffman's (2012) categories of faith formation. The very first phase, the concrete phase, is when individuals cling to the rules and teachings of their religion. In Paige's case, she indicated several times that she did not really know or understand the Church's teachings on many topics. She verbalized a strong belief in God and verbalized a strong sense of right and wrong, but her religious identity journey seemed to relate much more to growing in her faith as part of a community than being on a personal journey of faith development.

Sense of belonging. Paige's experience with religious development in college lined up nearly perfectly with Strayhorn's (2012) definition of sense of belonging. Her perceived social support was the Newman Center and CSG, she clearly described a

sensation of connectedness with the other Catholic students on campus, she shared several examples of feeling cared about by her Catholic friends, and her involvement with the Catholic student community led to her behaviors being more religiously-centered. Paige described how a CSG missionary reached out to her, introduced her to some other CSG members, and invited her to a Bible study. Paige's involvement in the community grew from that point. She explained,

> They had a Bible study and [this missionary] was like, "You need to go, you need to go." I was like, no. I don't understand the Bible, I've never read it. I've never anything. She was like, "Well, it's time you start." And so she dragged me to 2 or 3 of them and I just fell in love with the environment, the people, the learning and all of it. I just started thinking, I need to do this, like this is something that is in a sense, calling me to better myself and get my head on straight.

Throughout our conversation, Paige credited her newfound comfort with her religious identity to her involvement with CSG. However, her comfort with her identity did not prevent her from feeling oppressed on campus as a Catholic student.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

Throughout our conversations, Paige introduced some new and fresh ways for me to consider some ideas I have been thinking and talking about for years. Our conversation regarding intersectionality, privilege, and oppression was no exception. She completed the intersectionality activity, in which she identified her privileged identities to be female, White, straight, and Catholic. She selected her morals, dyslexia, and Catholicism as her areas of oppression. In typical Paige fashion, she was unique, and so I asked her right away about circling her female identity as privileged. She explained without hesitation,

> Being female, we have certain rights like pregnancy tests for free, or STD testing. I feel like females are a little more open to free options like that, because of health

> risks… I feel like sometimes females have the upper hand at being able to get care like that… or females have in the upper hand in maybe certain workplaces, depending on where. Like at my work, we only have 2 or 3 male workers.

Paige's comments were an indication that our group conversation and my definitions of privilege and oppression may not have influenced her understanding of systems of power. Her comments regarding privilege were slightly skewed from the definition I provided in the context of unearned social benefits. However, she seemed to have a better understanding of what it meant to be oppressed, marginalized, or uncomfortable based on her social identities.

In speaking about her Catholic identity, Paige revisited her classroom experience with the ethics instructor who did not allow multiple viewpoints to be shared in class. Paige explained, "I feel like my morals and values, and my religion, were definitely stabbed at repeatedly." As she continued to discuss her more oppressed identities, she clarified that her discomfort with being Catholic in the classroom was not the first time she had felt marginalization. She described being in elementary school and middle school with dyslexia, and the extreme discomfort she would feel when asked to read aloud in front of classmates. She gave an example,

> When I have to read aloud, it's a huge struggle. When I don't know a word, I skip over it, and [classmates] will be like "Oh you skipped a word," and I'm like, I don't know that word. And it's just like I'd rather not put myself in a situation where someone can look at me and be like "You're stupid." I never have wanted to be put in that situation, but sadly, many times I have.

Even having faced such hardship in the classroom previously, Paige still said her dyslexia was an easier oppression to face than Catholicism. She concluded that her morals and values have become increasingly important to her over time, making it more frustrating

when others insult her faith. She concluded our interview with summarizing thoughts for others facing similar struggles.

Paige's Final Thoughts

As an educator of students with special needs, Paige empathized with instructors trying to maintain an inclusive classroom environment. She explained how she has struggled to explain issues regarding inequality to young children and continued on to explain what college educators could do to create a safer learning space for college students,

> I feel like a way we could, a way teachers or whoever could bring it into the environment more is just like letting people express their opinions without – not judging, but without, how I was told no. That's not right. Or argued with on why [my beliefs] were not right. Don't do that! (followed by laughter). No matter how you're supposed to teach your class, don't tell a student that their beliefs aren't right. Just let it happen. Ignore it and move on with your activity. Don't nail them for ten minutes I guess.

Paige felt very motivated by her own story of transformation and wanted to encourage others with her final thoughts:

> Don't be afraid to, you know, learn and venture out and just experience, because like I said, I didn't know, when I started my journey through high school – and I call it a journey because that's exactly what it's been. I have had multiple paths and multiple avenues of different options that I could have taken. And at so many points, little red flags popped up, whether it was God or my parents or whatever, that were like, "Hey, that's morally wrong. Don't do that." You know? This is where you need to be. This is how you need to do things. So I definitely would say, don't be afraid to experience but also make sure you take the opportunity to learn and better yourself... And if I wouldn't have learned and taken on the people and the things that God has given me in life, the different choices, I probably honestly wouldn't be where I am right now. And the reason why I say that is just because it came to a point where I realized I needed to change my lifestyle.

Paige's final thoughts summarized comments she made continuously throughout her interviews, suggesting her personal journey of faith development was not always

continuous, obvious, or righteous, but it ultimately led her to a place of comfort within her own identities.

Alabaster

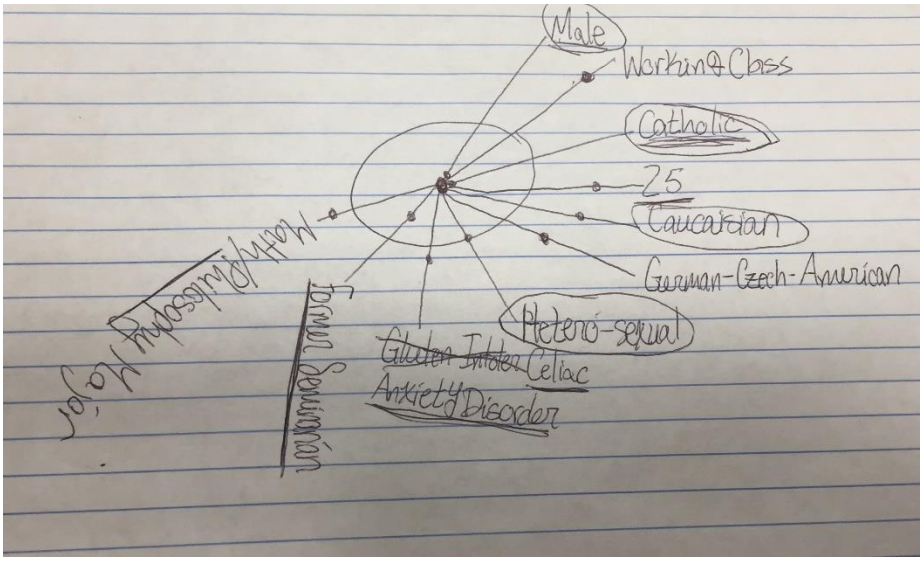

Figure 8: Alabaster's Intersectionality Wheel

Overview

Alabaster was the last participant to meet with me. We had connected when I recruited students after Thursday night Mass. He was the oldest student in the study at age 25, but was still working to complete his undergraduate degree after spending several years in the Catholic seminary, discerning the priesthood. Alabaster clearly practiced his philosophy major, spending as much time analyzing the interview questions as he did answering them. He spent approximately half of our first interview answering the question, "How do you experience your Catholic identity at college?"

Alabaster grew up on a farm outside of a small town in-state. He grew up with two Catholic parents and two sisters. He described his mom as "Pretty darn religious… a very religious convert to the faith," while describing his dad as "Not terribly religious."

Right away, he indicated he had never grown up seeing the faith as something "masculine." Although his faith formation story was quite extensive, he was able to recall when it all seemed to begin – in about second grade. He remembered arguing with another child about religion and getting emotional when he was told they should not be discussing religion in school. Later that year, his teacher told his parents, "I think your son would be a good priest." Yet again, Alabaster mentioned his lack of male role models and a shortage of young priests in his area.

Alabaster's journey led him to rebel, experimenting a bit with drugs and alcohol, before he connected with his parish's youth group and discovered the power of religious retreats. He remembered sharing, "It seems like God's calling me to be a priest but I just don't want to be a priest." Alabaster recalled feeling a vocation to be married, and decided to pursue college instead of seminary. After spending two years at a state university, he finally discerned the priesthood and spent the next three years in the seminary. He never felt complete clarity about his future as a priest, so in his final year of seminary, he decided, "Alright, full guns a-blazin' for the seminary" and ultimately determined his loyalty to the seminary was coming from a "German sense of duty" more than a true calling to the priesthood. He explained his desire for marriage, "never wavered." In fact, he circled back to the idea of marriage many times throughout our conversation.

When I met Alabaster, he was in his first year back at a traditional university. Although he spent a lot of time speaking about his identities as a former seminarian and as a philosophy major, he also identified himself as heterosexual, Catholic, "maybe" middle class, Czech and German, and non-disabled, although in a later meeting he did

identify some physical and mental health issues. After he spoke about his identities, he said, "So, let's add those together. I am like an evil person." Alabaster's perception was nearly identical to Dennis and Paul – the other two White, Catholic, male participants. At first, their descriptions of how others perceived them, "Enemy number one," "The devil himself," and "An evil person," upset me and made me feel their defensiveness was justified. However, after analyzing their interviews further and engaging them in conversation regarding systematic privilege and oppression, it seemed to me that all three men had been told they were privileged without being given a definition of what privilege meant, nor a chance to contextualize the meaning of privilege in their own lives. My research was not the place to have this incredibly complex conversation, either, which I discuss further in chapter five, areas for future research.

Alabaster continued to explain that his other social identities definitely affected his Catholic identity. Because of his perceived social privilege, he felt it was necessary to keep his identity as a Catholic, especially as a former seminarian, very private. He described,

> It's not something I ever want to bring up. Well in fact, even with some of the students… with one of my statistics peers, we started talking about philosophy, and it started out as philosophy and he was like, "Who is your favorite philosopher?" And I was like, Thomas Aquinas would actually be my favorite philosopher. But instead of saying Thomas Aquinas, since Aristotle is still secular, like, I can say someone like Aristotle or Plato.

Alabaster further clarified that his innate personality, being a former seminarian, and being a philosophy major made him not want to offend anyone. Again, his perception of how others viewed him made it seem like he understood his mere presence to be offensive and made him so self-conscious of his words, it was difficult to get him to answer questions directly. In Alabaster's case, I perceived the very word "privilege" to

bother him, particularly because he had recently gone through a breakup with a young woman who often reminded him of his social privilege. Perhaps, as a result, he viewed the word privilege as a type of insult.

Even with his macro-level thinking and natural tendency to analyze questions, Alabaster was able to define what he thought it meant to be Catholic. His expectations of all practicing Catholics would be,

> …To go to Mass at least weekly, to be in a personal relationship with Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit, so the Trinity. To believe or at least be searching. To believe all of the tenants of the Church. I think there are like 23 dogmatic principles that have been declared. But then also, even if you're having trouble with it, to further research.

As I tried to move on with the interview, Alabaster was still reflecting on the question and continued to explain the need for practicing Catholics to be in personal relationship with Jesus. Alabaster's deep level of reflection, willingness to ask questions, and complete acceptance of Catholic Church teachings were all indications of his advanced phase of faith development.

Religious Identity

Within the first few minutes of speaking during his first interview, Alabaster identified the college years as "the years where you have the most formation." In his case, college, interrupted by several years of seminary, followed by a return to college, had given him an immense amount of time to spend on his own personal faith journey. He clearly indicated his advanced faith formation by verbalizing knowledge and acceptance of Catholic Church teaching, an ability to dialogue about his faith and accept other perspectives, and showed an understanding of a strong social awareness regarding appropriate times and places to discuss religious topics.

Advanced faith development. Alabaster shared multiple avenues he had used to explore his faith, including youth group, retreats, mentorships, and the seminary. He was continuing his faith development at MU through his involvement with the Newman Center and CSG. In fact, when I attended Mass at the Newman Center, Alabaster was an altar server and was visibly involved with setting up and helping with Mass. He gave an example of his commitment to the Catholic faith, sharing how a religious disagreement led to the eventual demise of a romantic relationship. He shared how her commitment to neuroscience ended up being a conflict with his devout Catholicism. Ultimately, Alabaster's years spent discerning into the seminary and then his years spent learning about the Catholic faith and his eventual discernment out of the seminary gave him the knowledge, commitment, and savvy to achieve advanced personal faith formation.

Intersectionality, Privilege, and Oppression

Alabaster's philosophical background was evident as we discussed his social identities, intersectionality, privilege and oppression. He considered each question from every angle, and often came up with multiple answers to my inquiries. He opened the conversation by sharing a lingering thought left after one of our group discussions. He asked rhetorically, "Can majority groups also be discriminated against? It seems like something that we can't really talk about." Of course, then we talked about it.

Alabaster worked through the intersectionality activity, reflecting aloud as he worked, "I could technically circle and underline all of these, it's crazy." He ultimately decided, "The philosopher in me always says you have to go with reason over even the way you feel," which is how he determined whether to classify particular identities as privileged or oppressed. Eventually, he determined his privileged identities to be male,

Catholic, Caucasian, and heterosexual. He categorized being Male, Catholic, 25, celiac, anxiety disorder, former seminarian, and math/philosophy major as his oppressed identities. He reflected on his privileges first,

> There were a lot of things I didn't want to circle… but then honestly, I kinda felt like I should have to circle all of them, because in some way shape or form, like objectively, I can say that even being a celiac, that's actually an advantage because I have to eat way healthier.

Then, the conversation turned to his struggle with determining privilege from oppression. He had learned about Christian privilege in our group conversation and reacted

> From what you told me, we have some sort of social privileges but the very fact that there are a lot of laws that get passed that are completely against our consciences. Maybe not a lot, but 2 or 3 or 4 that have gotten passed that put us at a disadvantage. I don't remember what I can declare as a disadvantage, but…

Alabaster did not give examples of such laws, but based on my knowledge and comments from other participants, he was likely referring to legal decisions regarding abortion, contraception in health care, and homosexual unions. Before I could ask for clarification, Alabaster's train of thought was back to privileges. Again, he was examining every interpretation and angle of the question.

Alabaster also shared his experience of being overlooked for his privilege. He recalled feeling like people responded to him with, "You don't know how it is," because of his privileged identities. He said, "I guess they praised being the opposite of White male, and again, I guess that was to make up for this male privilege. This White male whatever class privilege, so I can kind of see that." Like many of the students, Alabaster struggled to understand privilege, oppression, and the balance of his own personal experiences.

Alabaster's Final Thoughts

Due to time restraints, I was not able to ask Alabaster for his final thoughts when we met for our second interview. Ironically, I am not sure Alabaster would have been comfortable summarizing his thoughts. When he spoke, he felt most comfortable when the conversation stayed broad and encouraged more questions than answers. In fact, summarizing his thoughts from our individual and group interviews, I believe Alabaster would encourage educational environments with more open questioning and time to explore the reasoning behind every lesson or opinion. He was the embodiment of a philosopher, reflecting deeply, questioning widely, and often answering an inquiry by circling back to the original question.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Thematic Discussion

Throughout the 18 interviews conducted for this research project, the consistency among the participants' stories was evident. In accordance with narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I will explore both the shared and unique experiences of the participants. In chapter four, I shared the participants' individual narratives to highlight the uniqueness in their experiences. Next, I will share the commonalities among their stories, which emerged as four primary themes: the participants' Catholic beliefs, their appreciation for the Catholic community at MU, the complexity of privilege, oppression, and intersectionality, and the desire for multiple perspectives to be respected in their classrooms.

Catholic Beliefs

My participants defined what they thought it meant to be Catholic. I had asked all participants to be self-identified "practicing Catholics," but then left it up to them to define the term. In my mind, practicing Catholics were individuals who attended Mass every week. However, to the participants, practicing the Catholic faith meant much more than attending weekly services. Every participant mentioned living intentionally in the Catholic faith and seeking a personal relationship with Jesus. Many students also

mentioned the importance of living the faith by loving others. Mary said, "I think helping others, forgiving, listening, and being compassionate and merciful" are components of being Catholic.

Another component of Catholicism nearly all of the participants mentioned was a desire to grow in faith. Maria said to be Catholic, one would "Know the basic fundamentals of what their faith is, and have a desire to learn more about it." Felicity also described a component of the faith as learning: "Being willing to explore things further that I don't understand and that people have questions about." Whether it be through exploration, prayer, Bible studies, or other methods, actively pursuing and exploring Catholicism seemed important to every participant.

Faithful Families

All eight of the participants were introduced to Catholicism at home, raised by at least one Catholic parent. Beyond that commonality, the way each family practiced Catholicism ranged. I did not find any connection between the way each participant was raised in their faith and how their personal faith ultimately developed. Some described their families as "very Catholic," while others felt their families fall away from the faith. Four participants, Alabaster, Emily, Paul, Maria, and Felicity illustrated their families to be fully Catholic, practicing the faith to its full extent. The other four participants had some family members practicing the Catholic faith but also described how others in their family had stopped practicing as devoutly. For example, Dennis described his family as Catholic, but with some caveats,

> And so some of my siblings, all of my siblings are still Catholic, although… like all 3 of my brothers lived together with their girlfriends or fiancés before they got married, and so, so it's like a little bit like on the line as far as – are we really Catholic as a family or not?

For Dennis and six of the other participants, it was clear they considered their personal Catholic identity separate from their families' Catholicism. Paige was the exception. In answering interview questions, Paige often referenced calling her dad to discuss his thoughts before speaking with me. She also spoke about her Catholic identity collectively with her family members' Catholicism.

Family support was critical for several participants who identified their parents as the only people they could talk to about their Catholic concerns at college. Such concerns included feeling as though only non-Catholic opinions were represented or shared in classroom settings, or that instructors had biases against Catholic students. Paige actually described instances of texting her dad during class when she was frustrated with the instructor's anti-Catholic rhetoric. Likewise, Maria had parental support through her frustrations. When asked how she felt about participating in the research, she responded, "I'm like really happy, it feels really good. Yeah, I think my mom is getting tired of me ranting about it all of the time." Maria's comment was not isolated among the participants, and indicated to me that it was a positive experience to be allowed time to reflect on their Catholic identities and speak about their experiences.

The common experience of growing up in faithful families definitely influenced my participants' experiences of faith. They were introduced to religion before they were even old enough to form memories, which most of the participants described as being raised a "cradle Catholic." As I reviewed their experiences and religious identity development, I could clearly connect their religious upbringing to their faith formation development. Most of the students had worked through the more concrete phases of formation in childhood, allowing them to move through transitional and advanced levels

of development throughout adolescence and early adulthood. Being in more advanced levels of faith development would certainly affect the way they experienced their religious identity in the classroom, and their awareness of how religion connected to larger social and political issues. Moreover, because their faith was chosen for them before they had a personal choice, in order to deep their faith, each participant defined a time in their life when they chose to personally pursue their faith, apart from their families.

Ownership of Faith

At some point in their adolescence or early adulthood, each participant defined a time in which they took ownership of their faith, deciding for themselves they wanted to be Catholic. Paul shared,

> Basically, my senior year of high school, I just kept asking questions of myself. Like why am I Catholic? Why am I not Lutheran? Why am I not Muslim? Why am I not anything else? …And I'm like okay, I need to figure out what's really true. Like which religion is the right one that I should follow.

Emily described a similar phase of exploration before devoting herself to Catholicism,

> Honestly, after childhood and stuff I was like, I don't know if I want to be Catholic…that's the struggle I had with coming from high school to college. I was like, I believe that there might be a God that exists, and you know, I wasn't for sure on that or not, and I felt like I had been going through the motions… [So] I prayed… I was like, I'm gonna give it a chance and if it doesn't go through, then I'm gonna leave the Catholic Church… And holy cow, God moved.

The students' experiences were all personal and led each student to continue growing in their Catholic faith. None of the participants described a time in which they stopped practicing their Catholicism; instead, they used this time of formation to become more intentional in the way they asked questions, prayed, and lived out their faiths.

Mary, Maria, and Alabaster all explained their personal journeys started in high school, when religious retreats became readily available. Dennis also described his faith ownership starting in high school, eventually leading him to study at the seminary. Alabaster shared faith development experiences with both Dennis and Felicity, having also studied at the same Catholic seminary as Dennis and also teaching Totus Tuus, a Catholic youth camp, like Felicity.

Felicity described the most constant and continual faith development, moving from a solid foundation of Catholic elementary and high school to joining the Catholic community at MU. On the other end of the spectrum, Paige's journey was the latest to develop, as her personal faith journey did not truly develop until college, when she started participating in CSG.

Growing up in faithful families introduced every participant to their Catholic roots, but it was during their high school and college years in which they truly decided to continue their faith formation as Catholic young adults. Each student had clearly taken ownership of their personal faith journeys, and such ownership likely contributed to their discomfort in classroom settings when their professors discussed controversial issues. As young adults, this was also the first time many of them were able to vote, and it was election season while I collected data. This timing, along with their personal investments in their religious identity development, added relevancy to our discussions of social and political issues.

Social Issues Concerning Catholics

When asked to identify current social issues of concern for Catholics, the students responded with a range of answers. However, two issues came up with 7 out of 8

participants: prolife issues and homosexual marriage. Other issues, mentioned by only 1 or 2 participants, included transgender identities, contraception, pornography, women's position in the Church, health care, religious freedom, and politics.

Prolife. Each participant described prolife in different ways, yet they all mentioned being prolife as a pressing Catholic social issue. Some spoke directly about abortion and euthanasia, while others spoke about basic human rights and dignity. Paul, vice president of the prolife club at MU, eloquently described how his prolife stance included a love for all humanity, "To me, part of being prolife is like, we're recognizing that there's something about all of us… that makes us equal, makes us deserving of equal treatment, makes us equally valuable. And that's… that we're human." While Paul defined being prolife using broad, positive language, Alabaster defined prolife social issues by focusing on anti-life issues,

> What are the most intrinsic social evils? …So like, murder would probably be one of the biggest social issues ever and the murder of the innocent and the murder of those who are the most vulnerable would be the greatest social issue that anyone could face. Which is what makes me say that abortion would probably, is, always going to be until it's no longer a thing, the biggest social issue for the church.

Of all the social issues students identified, the topic of being prolife was the broadest and led to the most variation in definitions, yet every student specifically used the word prolife when describing current social issues concerning their Catholic faiths.

Paige was the only outlier on the prolife issue, speaking specifically about her prochoice views regarding abortion,

> I know abortion right now is a huge thing, like prolife and all of that. My beliefs on it are it's up to the woman to decide. I'm against it to a point, it is a child's life, and most of us for the most part love children… but I'd say it's definitely up to the woman.

As the researcher, I wondered if Paige knew and understood the Church's stance on abortion. Paige's initial response to the question of issues facing the Church was, "I hate politics, ugh. I have not paid a single lick of attention because I hate it." The way she spoke, I felt she did not know the Church had a firm anti-abortion stance. I wondered if this knowledge would affect her opinion in any way.

I had determined prior to starting the interviews that I would not educate the students on any Catholic teachings; rather, I wanted to purely allow them time to explore their own thoughts and beliefs. So, I did not interrupt Paige or ask her if she knew the Church's stance on abortion. I wanted her to continue her interview without anything influencing how she filtered information to me. For example, if I questioned her knowledge of Catholic teaching on abortion, she may have become more hesitant to share her unfiltered ideas regarding other Church teachings. Therefore, I continued the interview without drawing any attention to the fact that her opinion was in direct contradiction to Catholic teaching on the topic of abortion. This issue only arose in my conversation with Paige; the other seven participants seemed to have fairly comprehensive understandings of Catholicism as prolife.

Marriage. In speaking about marriage, 7 out of 8 participants specifically mentioned gay marriage as an issue, but were not unanimously for or against homosexual unions. In one group conversation, it became clear they all struggled to determine how to support their LGBTQ peers while still upholding the beliefs of the Church, which holds a public stance against same-sex unions. Only one student, Paige, clearly voiced her support of same-sex marriage, but she only shared her support during individual interviews. During the group interview, she remained quiet. Coincidentally, Paige had

also identified herself as the least political and out-of-touch individual in the group. She admitted not fully knowing or understanding the Church's teachings on many social issues.

Dennis shared his perspective, which had clearly been influenced by his training in the seminary. He was able to speak confidently about his views regarding Catholics who identified as homosexual,

> I think that's another issue, just because of the very public sphere that it's in… from within the Church, it's not really an issue... You know, if you have homosexual tendency and are Catholic, those are not conflicting identities. You know, like you can do that. It's the acting out, it's the living the homosexual lifestyle that is contrary to being Catholic. And so I think, from the insider's perspective of one who knows and loves and appreciates the Church, it's like yeah, well okay, there is isn't any homosexuality issue.

For Felicity, the issue was more complicated, as she had personal relationships she was trying to balance with her deep faith. She explained,

> I think it was really hard for me to be able to explain and fully understand the teaching on why gay marriage isn't okay and stuff like that. That's something I definitely accept and understand, but it's hard, cuz like I know plenty of people who are gay. I have classmates from high school even, who identify as gay and are like actively pursuing a gay lifestyle… Sometimes it's hard to explain that no I don't hate you, and yes, I can still disagree with you and love you. And like, no I don't think you're going to hell. Like, and I think that you're far more than how you choose to identify with your gender and your sexual orientation.

Felicity's statement was very much like comments all seven of the other participants made during their interviews. The students definitely agreed on homosexual marriage as a social issue facing Catholics, but clearly had a wide range of questions, interpretations, and opinions on the topic. If I were to continue working with this group of research participants, I would be interested for us all to be educated on the actual Church stances on the topic in order to have a more meaningful and knowledgeable discussion.

Because the participants, along with myself, had different levels of knowledge and understanding of Church teachings regarding homosexuality, it kept our discussion on the topic at a surface level. No one questioned or challenged anyone else's beliefs. In a way, our group conversations were not entirely different from the classroom settings the participants described in which only one side of an issue was ever presented. In our case, the participants only discussed the Catholic perspective regarding gay marriage. No one challenged or questioned this belief in the group setting, although several of them had mentioned grappling with the topic individually. To me, this dynamic was indicative of the students' desire to discuss multiple perspectives without having the skills or abilities to truly explore multiple perspectives in a group setting.

Other issues. Throughout the discussions regarding social issues and the Catholic Church, the participants noted a handful of other concerns, beyond their prolife stances and views on marriage. Such issues included transgendered identities, contraception, pornography, lack of female leadership in the Church, health care, religious freedom, and politics. Beyond mentioning the issues, few students went into detail. However, Mary was able to articulate her desire for more female leadership in the Church. She shared,

> As a woman, it's kind of hard sometimes to be okay with the males' position in the Church, because I feel like women should also be at the forefront. And a lot of times, women are the trailblazers to Catholic discoveries and faith formation.

Paige echoed Mary's concern, but voiced it as a question she had yet to explore, "Why aren't there more female [leaders] in the Church?"

Maria was the only participant to mention religious freedoms as a concern, which was surprising considering it was at the forefront of political discussions regarding

upcoming Supreme Court nominations. She said, "It seems so unfair to me. I think religious freedom, especially for Catholics, is being taken away more and more." Her concern continued to Catholics working in healthcare,

> Even Catholics in the workplace, in healthcare… people in their jobs being forced to pay for this or provide this to people when it goes against their beliefs. That is so scary to me, like that breaks my heart. I could not do that.

Felicity shared her concern regarding healthcare, especially in relation to assisted suicide. She linked her concern for healthcare to being prolife,

> The prolife issue isn't just about babies. It's about the whole life spectrum, and so I think that's been a big issue, especially in light of all the changes in health care that are occurring. I know personally for me, as someone who is going to be providing care, that's a huge issue, because I refuse to end the life of people just because.

Both of these students were able to identify conflicts between their Catholic identity and current healthcare issues, but did not relate their experiences to non-Catholics who may regularly be faced with conforming to Judeo-Christian values in other workplaces. To me, this was one clue the students were oblivious to their Christian privilege. They were each so focused on their micro-level experiences, they were not able to consider the macro-levels of systematic oppression that happen regularly in the workplace. I explore this issue further later in this chapter, for most of the students participating in this study seemed to have a misunderstanding of their social privileges.

Felicity noted how interconnected politics were to all of these issues, and described how her peers were struggling to figure out who to vote for, since the Catholic Church does not endorse any candidates. Rather, Church leaders encouraged voters to vote with their conscience. Coincidentally, on one of the nights we met for a group

interview at the Newman Center, a group of MU students were gathered with their laptops, researching the presidential candidates together.

Given the timing of our conversations – the Pope had visited within the year and it was election season – I wondered if any of the students would specifically mention the Pope's teachings on social issues. Only Dennis mentioned Pope Frances during his interview, and it was in regards to how some people interpreted the Pope's comments on homosexuality as the Church needing to change its stance against gay marriage. Dennis laughed at the misinterpretation, saying, "He affirmed [the Church's stance], actually. Just in a more loving manner than you may have heard it in the past." Inadvertently, Dennis had just raised an issue the no one else identified as a social concern. How knowledgeable were people, both Catholics and non-Catholics, on the *actual* teachings and stances of the Catholic Church? While the student participants demonstrated a wide range of knowledge, they all expressed a desire to learn and a willingness to question Catholic teaching as a way to deepen their personal faith.

Ultimately, as we spoke about social issues facing Catholics, the students answered my question of the roles social issues and political debates have on shaping their experiences. All of the social issues they mentioned had been discussed in classroom settings, which felt like unsafe environments for them to share their religious identities. Therefore, current social issues and political topics had a large role in shaping their experiences as Catholic students, for these topics were the central theme of conversations leading to the participants' feelings of discomfort, isolation, and marginalization in the classroom. Fortunately for my participants, the Newman Center

provided an environment outside their classrooms to discuss these issues in a more supportive manner.

Community

The sense of community among the Catholic students at MU was palpable. All eight participants mentioned various ways they were involved with or relied on the Catholic student organizations. Even without talking about the community, I could feel it, especially when I spent time at the Newman Center. Everyone seemed to have a sense of familiarity with each other. They greeted everyone we met in the halls, various people would poke their heads in the windows of our interview rooms to wave or smile, and I was introduced to someone new every time I came to campus. While 7 out of 8 participants had already started their personal faith journeys before joining the Catholic community at MU, 1 student, Paige, clearly credited the community for helping her find a sense of purpose at college.

Paige shared her experience of feeling the sense of community among the MU Catholic students,

> When you come here to the Newman Center especially, it's like we don't even have to know each other's name but we all know we have one thing in common, and that's God and to know that we all focus ourselves not only in God but in MU and our academics and stuff it makes a huge difference to me. Because I know not only can I go to them for advice with school, future, things like that, but I can also go to them for guidance and questions with God... And just get a better understanding. So, it's nice to know that like, here I'm not judged.

Emily also spoke of how the Catholic student community at MU helped her grow in her faith, which started with a mere invitation to attend a Bible study. Now, as a leader for the CSG community, she helps give back to the community by leading two Bible studies of her own.

Dennis described himself as "heavily involved" in the Newman Center community, serving as a resident assistant (RA). In his definition of Catholicism, Dennis even mentioned the importance of being involved in the greater Catholic community. Paul also defined Catholicism in terms of community. He shared, "To be Catholic, we understand community is huge, we all we have this general understanding that when we come closer together, it's good for us. For it's really easy to be a part of a community as a Catholic." The ease of the Catholic community was evident at the Newman Center, where the students specifically mentioned feeling welcomed and I instantly felt a part of the MU Catholic community.

Complexity of Privilege and Oppression

While privilege and oppression were not mentioned directly in the research questions, speaking with students about intersectionality required some discussion regarding privilege and oppression. I was prepared to give an overview on these topics, but was not prepared for how unaccepting and challenging the participants would be on the subject. They did not merely accept my definitions, they blatantly rejected them. Every participant, in their own way, expressed frustration at the way their identities were defined and understood by Johnson's (2006) systems of oppression. Some theorists might suggest the students had lived comfortably with their privilege for such a long time, equality felt oppressive. The students may have been experiencing White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011). My impression was that the students had been introduced to the language surrounding social privilege, even the singular word "privilege," in ways that felt accusatory, with no means to contextualize, define, or even begin to reflect on what privilege meant in their lives. Developmentally, they may not have been ready to accept

the definition, either. Even after I reviewed the concept of social privilege and shared examples of Catholic privilege, most of the students disagreed that Catholic privilege existed. This confusion carried on for most of them through their intersectionality exercise. My participants' reactions were similar to the previous study involving pre-service White principals (Hines, 2016). While some of the students acknowledged the existence of privilege, they did not acknowledge privilege as an explanation for their experiences or reactions.

During the intersectionality exercise, when asked to circle his privileged identities and underline his oppressed identities, Alabaster explained, "I could technically circle and underline all of these." Maria described the complexity as uncomfortable, "I guess what makes me uncomfortable is the difference between what the socially accepted oppressed and privileged identities are and how they don't always match up with my personal experience. That gap makes me uncomfortable." Felicity also explained her frustration with the definitions of privilege and oppression, explaining a shift she sensed in society, "I feel there's been a shift into criticizing those who have privilege so the privilege becomes more of an occasion to like, what's the word… it's alienating." Felicity was explaining her experience of Catholics feeling like a minority population, and in her opinion, an oppressed population.

I empathized with the students' frustration, because social status ambiguity, the experience of holding social privilege while feeling personally oppressed or marginalized (Moran et al., 2007, p. 23), was a very real part of my doctoral educational experience. However, I was privy to classroom lessons and discussions regarding privilege and oppression that provided me with outsiders' perspectives of my privilege as a Catholic.

Starting with an undergraduate and master's level education at an award-winning Jesuit university with a social justice mission and finishing my doctoral work in a program equally committed to social justice, equality, privilege, and oppression were a part of my consciousness before I even realized what social identities were. Unfortunately, the student participants in this study did not have the same, full understanding of privilege and oppression to contextualize their experiences. All most of them had for reference was the definition of privilege I gave them in our group discussion and their personal experiences. In order to help deepen their understanding, I had them each participate in an intersectionality exercise during our second interviews, which helped reveal to me if any of them had truly experienced systematic oppression in the past.

The intersection of gender and religion. One of the more commonly researched identities within intersectionality scholarship is gender, and while conducting my research, I understood why. My research questions had nothing directly to do with gender, yet most of the participants addressed the topic in some fashion. Most prominently, the three male participants spoke openly about their frustration of how others perceived them as White, Catholic, males. Two of the six women mentioned a desire for more female leadership in the Catholic Church, and several of the participants identified transgenderism as a current social issue troubling Catholics.

I think Paul, Alabaster, and Dennis knew each other prior to participating in this study, but they certainly had not discussed the issue of gender. Still, all three of them described feeling negatively perceived for their privileged identities as White, Catholic males. Interestingly, they were the only participants to mention race as an uncomfortable identity. None of the White females mentioned race, and the one Black participant spoke

about her race and ethnicity comfortably, only identifying her religious identity as troubling. Individually, each of the three men described feeling like others perceived them as "Enemy number one," "The devil himself," and "Evil." Each time they used these terms, it was in relation to how someone else had presented male privilege. For instance, Alabaster's recent ex-girlfriend spoke of his privilege as a reason why he could not understand her perspectives. Paul's sociology professor said something that made Paul feel he was not welcome to speak in class, because of his privilege. Dennis described being viewed as the "oppressor" as a reason why it could be difficult to connect with others in classroom settings.

My participants' reactions relate closely to the findings of the 2005 study on White identity development (Miville et al., 2005). The researchers from this study found women to feel more positively while staying naïve regarding White privilege. On the other hand, White males had difficulty developing positive ego identity if they felt any conflict in their racial identity (Miville et al., 2005). My male participants are a clear example of this conflict, for they had difficulty exploring any of their other social identities without expressing the conflict and stress they felt in their racial identity. Meanwhile, my White female participants barely acknowledged their racial identity and seemed somewhat happily unaware of their racial privilege. The women were able to explore their other social identities without acknowledging any stress in their racial identities.

In each of these conversations, gender came up as a precursor to religion. The men felt the need to hide their religious identities because they already had so much visible privilege, and felt they were perceived negatively by others as a result. For this

reason, they did not want to add any more reason for others to make assumptions about them or dislike them, so they closely monitored how, when, and why they shared their religious identities with others. Some might view this choice as a form of privilege, or as an expression of their White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011). For Paul, Dennis, and Alabaster, it felt like oppression.

The two women who mentioned the intersection of their gender and religion were Mary and Paige. Mary described women in the Catholic Church as the "trailblazers," and expressed some frustration that women could not hold more formal leadership positions in the Church. Paige admitted she had first considered this issue when she became an altar server, which seemed like one of the only opportunities she would have to be a leader in the Church. Neither woman spoke much about the topic and explained other ways they had made peace with the intersection. Mary worked with all women, so she explained how women held positions of power and made the majority of the decisions in her work at Catholic Charities. Paige spoke about the issue like she did many other social issues, giving the disclaimer that she did not really follow social issues, politics, or the news.

Beyond speaking about their own identities, many of the participants identified transgenderism as a concerning social issue for Catholics. They explained how the Catholic Church has a firm stance against altering a person's gender; transgendered individuals pursuing life in any form other than the way in which they were biologically assigned at birth would be wrong. None of the students shared a strong opinion on the topic, they only mentioned it as a current issue for Catholics. Emily spoke the most extensively on the topic; she had a transgendered classmate who spoke openly about his

experiences. In chapter 4, I shared how Emily was able to relate to him. She did not share a strong opinion on the topic; rather, she used the conversation as an example of how some oppressed individuals were able to talk openly about their frustrations in the classroom, while her comments regarding her religious identity were not welcomed.

The intersection of race. Of the 8 participants in this study, 7 of them were White. I specifically talked about race with each of them in either the individual or group interviews, but their responses varied greatly. Looking back on previous research helped contextualize their responses, which revealed a pattern connecting their narratives regarding race to their genders (Miville et al., 2005). Overall, I could clearly identify a lack of awareness of White privilege among the White participants. However, their responses to this ignorance varied by gender. Consistent with the 2005 study on the relationship between racial, gender, and ego identities, the female students seemed to be able to glaze over their White privilege and continue to personally develop in their other social identities without distress. However, the men in the study expressed frustration, defensiveness, and confusion regarding their White identities, which may have been causing them distress in the development of their other social identities (Miville et al., 2005).

Previously oppressed, marginalized, or uncomfortable. One reason for exploring the students' intersectionality was to gain a fuller understanding of their social identities, especially as they related to systems of power (Johnson, 2006). While the students did not demonstrate a full understanding of privilege and oppression, I was able to identify areas in their lives they had previously experienced discomfort, marginalization, and even systematic oppression. Interestingly, most of the students'

oppressed identities were not brought up in open conversation. Rather, these identities surfaced when the students were specifically asked to identify eight specific identities: sex, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, race, ethnicity, and age. Mary and Paige were the only participants to openly acknowledge any oppressed identities prior to the intersectionality exercise; Mary reflected upon her race and ethnicity as a Black Sudanese person, while Paige described her struggles as an individual with a disability.

However, during the intersectionality exercise, several other students revealed influential aspects of their personal identity that were systematically oppressed and/or personally marginalizing. Alabaster shared his anxiety and celiac diagnoses, which both qualified him as an individual with disabilities; Dennis spoke about being bullied for his weight and homeschooling, which was isolating and perhaps marginalizing, but not an example of systematic oppression. Emily disclosed previous abuse, which upon further exploration may have actually had long-term mental health effects, and Maria identified her struggles with depression. Because individuals with mental health diagnoses are considered disabled in some capacities, these students may have certainly experienced systematic oppression.

Mary connected the idea of oppression being perpetuated by people who were previously oppressed, "I think I come from an understanding of why people would feel [oppressed]. And I guess I think of the way people have experienced their own oppressions, so then they feel the need to oppress others, knowingly or unknowingly." Mary's statement assumes oppressors have experienced their own oppression, which Dennis articulated as he spoke about his childhood. Although he grew up with the

systematic privileges of being White, male, and Catholic, Dennis surprised me with how authentically he described the ways in which he felt marginalized growing up. The hairs on my arms stood up when he bluntly stated, "I got bullied a lot as a kid for being fat and for being homeschooled. There's a lot of marginalization about being homeschooled…so no, I wouldn't say [being Catholic in the classroom] is the first time I've been marginalized." Whether the experiences the students spoke about were truly examples of oppression, marginalization, or perhaps discomfort, one thing was clear: they knew what it meant to feel affected by society's views of their social identities.

Misunderstood privilege. Conversations regarding intersectionality were complicated by the fact that only a few participants seemed to grasp the definition of social privilege. Mary, Dennis, and Paul were able to speak about their social privileges, or lack thereof, in the same terms I intended, based on Johnson's (2006) definitions. Paul even expressed gratitude for being reminded of the social privilege we hold as Catholics. When asked what he liked about the group interviews, he shared,

> I liked talking about the idea of marginalization and also… how because we're Catholic we have, what's the word? Privilege, yeah! So, the privilege. I liked talking about that and it made me think, too, about all the ways that other people may not have privilege that I have, so I can – it definitely opened my eyes to like, yeah, I have been privileged, especially to have a Newman Center like this that we're in. And to have churches that we can go to whenever I want to. And it was nice to hear everybody else's perspective too, while we were there.

Whether Paul had this understanding of privilege before I defined it for the group was not clear, but irrelevant, since he was quickly able to grasp the concept and apply it to the remainder of our discussion.

The other five participants did not demonstrate the same understandings. The way they spoke about privilege referred to a more dictionary-type definition, relating

privilege to being an honor, freedom, or opportunity, rather than an unearned social benefit. One example of this misunderstanding was Paige speaking about her female privilege. Even after I questioned her decision to classify being female as privileged, she defended her choice. She explained,

> I don't know, being female, we have certain rights of just like, I don't know if it's open to everybody, but like, pregnancy tests for free, at certain places, or like STD testing. I feel like females are a little more open to free options like that. Just because of you know, health risks or Obamacare, all of that. Like, not being able to afford it. So, I feel like sometimes females have the upper hand at being able to go get care like that, where, you know, for males, they may have to pay for the testings and care and stuff like that where females don't. Or females have the upper hand in maybe certain workplaces, I feel, depending on where, like at my work we only have two or three male workers.

Paige was the only participant who explained being female as a privilege, although not all female participants identified their sex as an oppression, either.

This difference in understanding privilege expanded the interviews, as students truthfully explored their experiences without social influences or definitions. Felicity seemed to have a general understanding of social privilege, but still did not identify her heterosexual identity as having unearned advantages. She described being "criticized" for being straight, and also feeling, "I feel uncomfortable about [being heterosexual], feeling singled out for not breaking the norms or whatever." The participants' confusion regarding social privilege may have been caused by social status ambiguity (Moran et al., 2007), for they could not fathom the advantages of their privileged identities while also experiencing explicit marginalization for the same identities. Our discussions surrounding their Catholic identities made this confusion most abundantly clear, as *few* of the students understood their privileged position as Catholics, *most* of them rejected the

idea of Christian privilege, and *all* of them articulated feeling marginalized for their religious identities.

Social ambiguity and negative classroom experiences. The participants in this study unequivocally and unanimously described experiencing social status ambiguity in academic settings. Every student was able to identify at least one example of feeling oppressed or marginalized in the classroom because of their religious beliefs, while simultaneously being aware of their social privilege. The participants shared stories from their classrooms involving educators who took strong political stances in the classroom, left no room for any other perspectives to be shared or considered, or blatantly told students their Catholic beliefs were wrong or unwelcome. Only two students were able to share positive experiences with morally-motivated dialogues allowed by instructors, and even then, the instructors did not initiate the dialogues.

Paul was one of the students who seemed to understand his privileged position as a White male, but shared his experience of social status ambiguity,

> It's like – if you are privileged, it's something to be marginalized about… when you're sitting in sociology class and your professor looks at you and is like, "You don't deserve to make as much money as you do," or "You're probably racist like all the other White people." It seems like culture has, they're trying to sort of bring everyone, I don't know… it's almost like to be privileged you end up getting attacked for it.

Paul was one of three White, Catholic males in the study, who each individually described themselves as "the devil himself," "enemy number one," and "target number one." Even as caring and compassionate young men wanting to engage in dialogue, they described feeling like, or directly being told, they were not welcome to speak in the classroom.

The females in the study were able to share just as many stories as the males. Emily even asked rhetorically what her legal rights were as a student, because she had been given such strong anti-Catholic messages from some of her professors. She shared her frustration, "It's like you really have to be careful [in the classroom] and walk on eggshells in talking about anything. You know? And that's what everybody does. With the exception of religion." Mary shared her experience of gaining the courage to stand up for her Catholic beliefs,

> There are numerous examples of when I've felt that I shouldn't say anything or I have said something and I felt better about it, but I think there's always jus this tension where you want to be able to help people, but then you also want to maintain your own beliefs. And you want to maintain your own truth.

Felicity realized her own truth while participating in the group interview and intersectionality exercise. She came to a better understanding of her identity as a privileged Catholic who experienced oppression in some situations,

> Aspects of being Catholic, like having holidays I know I will have time off for… and I can ask where the Catholic Church is, and in [this city] there are a ton of Catholic churches… so really objectively, I know that I'm very privileged in those regards, of having the freedom to express my religion. But yeah, there are people who don't appreciate that and like, people who make fun of the Catholic Church and probably see me as pretty backwards. Like even in my own family, I think they have a little bit of judgment in their hearts… for the way my immediate family chooses to live out the faith and be fully in line with the Church.

Dennis also tried to explain the ambiguity, "[They're] saying that we have all of these privileges but then they're marginalizing us because… well, we have all these privileges already, so we don't matter as much to them." As the students expressed their frustration and confusion, I empathized. Even in my position as the researcher, with a somewhat comprehensive understanding of privilege, oppression, and social status ambiguity, I

often felt confused about how the students could possibly be privileged while feeling so attacked.

On one hand, the participants could only experience social status ambiguity because of their socially privileged identities. On the other hand, their sense of marginalization for those same identities was also true and authentic. The students truly felt mistreated and also believed they were minorities on their college campus. However, as Christians, they were definitely part of a dominant group in society, making systematic oppression impossible (Moran et al., 2007). The students struggled to understand their ambiguous social position in the classroom, and I empathized, knowing exactly how they felt. Ultimately, social status ambiguity was a major part of how the students experienced their religious identity in the classroom. As a result, the students' desires became evident: they wanted more perspectives to be respected in the classroom.

Desire for Multiple Perspectives in the Classroom

Despite their frustration with the anti-Catholic messages they often received in the classroom, no student participant expressed a need or desire for educators to share pro-Catholic messages. Instead, they plainly articulated a longing for multiple perspectives to be considered, shared, or even merely acknowledged in academic settings. Emily spoke directly about wanting religion considered as a social identity worth considering, "I just really want people to think about religion as being something that is attacked, too, just like things that they hold close as their identities." She continued to explain what this meant for classroom dynamics,

> I don't expect them to understand, if they don't hold those views. I don't expect them to like, bend over backwards to make us comfortable.. But I'd just appreciate them taking a moment to think about like, hey, if I was Catholic in this

> class, which may actually happen… it's assumed a lot of times that there's no Catholics that are practicing. Christians, you know, there's been a lot of Christians in my class that are upset too. There's always going to be somebody in there.

Paul echoed Emily's sentiments, holding the entire educational system responsible for equal treatment in the classroom. He said, "I think it's right of the educational system to help facilitate our [Catholic] voices just like everybody else's voice." He continued to explain, "Even if the common cultural view is a certain way, we still need to have open discussion. We need to be able to have open discussion without the counter-cultural view feeling marginalized."

Felicity shared her expectation that educators take the lead on making room for more perspectives. She explained how much power the professor in the classroom holds,

> Educators are in that power of authority… a professor has a lot of control over grades and it's wrong for students to feel like they can't share their opinion, whether they're Catholic or Muslim or Buddhist or whatever. No matter what, people should be able to share, and I think professors, not just students, need to be aware of their biases.

Maria shared Felicity's opinion that everyone should be able to voice their perspective, but she was clear in her expectation that people speak from facts, not just emotion. She shared,

> In general, I think that people just need to be better at like, not being angry at each other. And educating themselves and so we can find common ground with each other. That's super important. It's like people need to keep their emotions in check and know what they're talking about."

Both of these young women spoke from a desire to share more openly, but also from a yearning to learn from others. While I do not necessarily agree with Maria's wish that students keep their emotions in check during discussions, I think she was trying to express a desire for less judgmental and accusatory statements in the classroom. She had

changed her major as a result of a few anti-Catholic classroom discussions, and had witnessed some disrespectful dialogues in class. Likewise, Felicity had been negatively affected by professors she viewed as "biased," and her comments reflected her need for fewer biased judgments to be shared in the classroom. Nonetheless, both women articulated a longing for more openness in the classroom.

Throughout my analysis and even as I wrote and clarified my findings, I debated the practicality of what the students were requesting. After all, some of the most effective, memorable, and passionate discussions I have witnessed in classroom settings came from emotional students who may not have known all the "facts" behind their "biases." However, I have also witnessed students losing all sense of trust or respect for their professors based on how quickly such dialogues became unsafe for students emotionally, and sometimes it took weeks or months for the class to regain the skills to effectively communicate. To me, the fact that the students' comments led to more questions than answers for me indicates it is a topic requiring more research. Regardless, the students clearly expressed a need for more perspectives to be welcomed in the classroom, which could have major implications for educators.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this research study are complex and require thinking of implications at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, implications include a shift in paradigmatic thinking for college educators striving for more inclusive classroom environments. At the micro level, implications include relating with individual students and examining personal biases. Both levels of thinking promote the

transferability of these eight students' stories and experiences to a much larger population of college students experiencing discomfort in the classroom due to their social identities. In this chapter, I will make suggestions for educators based on the four major themes that emerged from my research data: Catholic beliefs, community, complexity of privilege, oppression, and intersectionality, and the desire for multiple perspectives in the classroom. I will incorporate the students' personal suggestions as well as other theorists' ideas for how to create more inclusive, holistic, and meaningful learning environments. This evaluation is also a continuation of the backward, inward, and outward thinking required of narrative researchers.

Catholic Beliefs

Current social movements, such as the right of same-sex couples to be legally married, for women to have free access to contraception, and the continuation of legal abortions, are contrary to Catholic beliefs. In fact, the Catholic Church has taken very public stances against these issues. Catholic students aligning with this belief system are trying to navigate these religious beliefs while also continuing their education at college. While Catholic students at secular universities may not be a majority population, they nonetheless exist and are not exclusive in their belief systems. As several students pointed out during their interviews, they sought comfort with Christian students of other denominations who were also having moral struggles with their classroom learning environments.

The importance of the participants' Catholic beliefs is three-fold. First, their beliefs are real and a part of their core identity. When my participants felt marginalized by their beliefs or identities, their learning was compromised. Secondly, their beliefs are

not strictly Catholic; these issues affect more than just Catholic students. Non-Catholic students share Catholic students' beliefs based on their own religious denominations or other values structures. For example, Paul and Emily both connected with non-Catholic students who were prolife and frustrated with their professors who shared very pro-abortion stances in class. Emily shared the story of a non-Catholic, male classmate, who was still suffering as a result of his girlfriend's abortion. In this same class, the professor reportedly denied the students the opportunity to give a presentation sharing prolife perspectives, yet commonly spoke about her own pro-abortion beliefs. Emily was able to connect with the other student based upon their shared prolife stance, although the other student was not Catholic and despite the fact that the professor denied them the opportunity to share their prolife perspectives in class. Finally, Catholic students holding strong personal beliefs are an indication of many different students holding many different personal beliefs that could potentially come up in classroom discussions, making the findings from this Catholic research transferable to other student populations. For example, Emily was able to connect her isolating educational experiences to the isolating educational experiences of a transgendered classmate. Both students shared their experiences in class, were able to learn from one another, and even engaged in further dialogue outside the classroom regarding faith and gender issues.

The students' beliefs may or may not align with the personal beliefs of their instructors, yet my participants clearly expressed a desire for their educators to allow more perspectives to be safely shared in classroom settings. The goal of this more inclusive classroom environment would be more effective student learning. As previously mentioned, studies indicate that students do not learn effectively if they feel

self-conscious, marginalized, or judged based upon their social identities or belief systems (Evans et al., 2010; Torres et al., 2009; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Harper, 2008). Therefore, a more inclusive learning environment would lead to more effective learning.

Indeed, the experiences, stories, and opinions shared by the Catholic students in this study indicate a need for more culturally-responsive classroom environments. Educators who encourage cross-cultural learning give students control over much of the learning environment as they share their own perspectives and personal stories (Rice, 2008). When students are able to engage in respectful dialogue about difference, they often start to build trust in their own experiences and thoughts. This type of independent thinking builds confidence, increasing students' willingness to concentrate, participate, and put effort into their learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). This type of learning environment may also build community, which was another important theme of this study. Educators wanting to implement culturally-responsive methods in their classroom would require training, for they are a product of the same non-culturally-responsive educational system perpetuated in my participants' classrooms. An exploration of how educators could acquire culturally-responsive teaching skills would be a future research topic that would further enhance my findings.

Community

I learned a lot from the participants' positive experiences with the Catholic student community at MU. Without prompting, each student individually mentioned how beneficial it was for them to have a place where they felt they belonged. This anecdotal evidence supports Strayhorn's (2012) definition of sense of belonging, which asserts that

students experience an affective response when they feel they belong. From the stories shared in this research study, we learned how Paige gained confidence, Emily experienced personal faith development, Paul developed leadership skills, Mary benefited from listening to others' experiences, Dennis discerned his vocation, Alabaster improved his dialogue skills, and Felicity successfully transitioned to professional-level learning, all as a result of belonging to a strong, supportive community at MU's Newman Center.

Educators can emulate this sense of belonging in their own classrooms by making students feel accepted and even more importantly, respected in academic settings. The student participants expressed a sense of relief in being able to express their opinions to me during their interviews. If they were given the same opportunity to share their opinions and experiences in their college classes, based upon the definitions of culturally responsive learning and sense of belonging, the students' learning would likely increase. However, as Maria pointed out in her final thoughts, there is a need for balance between students' feelings, opinions, experiences, and facts. The importance of her message was evident in this study as students tried to articulate their feelings on privilege, oppression, and marginalization based on their feelings and experiences alone – without clear understandings of how the terms were defined.

Complexity of Privilege, Oppression, and Intersectionality

During each of the participants' second interviews, they specifically reflected upon their own privileged and oppressed identities. I had introduced the definition of social privilege during our group interviews, and several of the students had been told of their privilege in various classroom and social settings, yet I did not feel the participants fully grasped the implications or roles privilege and oppression truly played in their lives.

As a result, one implication for educators would be to make sure students have an understanding of the definitions of privilege and oppression before using such language in a classroom. The students who had been told they had privilege without any explanation expressed feelings of defensiveness and frustration. Particularly, the three White males in the study had each been told in accusing ways they had privilege, but were never given real definitions to understand or ideas for how to navigate that part of their identities. The result, when they each spoke with me, was feeling like they did not have the rights to participate in classroom discussions.

As a researcher, I gave the students an opportunity to reflect on their feelings, but as the conversations progressed, I felt slightly irresponsible for introducing a topic I was not fully equipped to explore, define, or explain to the participants. As a result, at the conclusion of the study, I provided the participants with some resources to help them explore the ideas of privilege and oppression more fully if they desired (Appendix G). The confusion by these participants, in addition to my inability to fully explore such a complex issue with them, can serve as a lesson for other educators. It is crucial to provide students with the opportunity to fully explore and understand the language surrounding power and privilege if those topics or related words are going to be used in classroom settings. As evidenced by Paul, Alabaster, and Dennis, telling a student they have privilege without allowing them to fully understand what it means, can lead to defensiveness, hurt, confusion, and misconceptions. As a result, students are unable to be authentic in the classroom, which theorists attribute to less effective learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009).

Desire for Multiple Perspectives in the Classroom

Each theme from the study continually connected to one primary concern: the participants in the study were all hopeful for more perspectives to be considered, respected, and shared in classroom settings. They were clear that the educators did not need to share or teach multiple perspectives themselves; rather, the students indicated an appreciation for any educator who was willing to at least acknowledge other perspectives existed or allowed students to represent their own diverse perspectives in classroom discussions. In their concluding comments, every participant mentioned the need for more perspectives to be respected in classroom settings. All 8 participants gave examples of poorly-handled classroom discussions or extremely one-sided professors, while only 2 students shared examples of multi-perspective, respectful classroom dialogues. This final theme, once again, has implications for educators.

Implications for Educators

This study further supports previous research indicating today's college students are more diverse than ever, and educators may be partially responsible for creating environments in which students can learn and grow holistically without feeling limited by their social identities (Abes et al., 2007; Evans et al., 2010; Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009; Johnson, 2006; Museus, 2008; Rice, 2008; Torres et al., 2009). As each of the previous sections indicates, if educators engaged in culturally responsive teaching, students would be able to learn more effectively. According to this study, culturally responsive teaching could also lead to students experiencing a sense of belonging in classroom environments.

As discussed in chapter two, educators who foster culturally-responsive classrooms give students control over much of the learning environment as they share their own perspectives and personal stories (Rice, 2008). When students are able to engage in respectful dialogue about difference, they often start to build trust in their own experiences and thoughts. This type of independent thinking builds confidence, increasing students' willingness to concentrate, participate, and put effort into their learning (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009). As the research participants for this study defined what was needed to create safer, more inclusive classroom environments, the definition of culturally-responsive education emerged. However, culturally-responsive teaching is not a practice that develops overnight. Researchers suggest culturally responsive classroom management is a "frame of mind as much as a set of strategies or practices" (Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clark, 2003, p. 275).

Educators who are culturally responsive know their own personal biases and values, and spend time reflecting on these biases and values before interacting with students. Such educators also make time to get to know the students in their classrooms, and then they work to become more educated about the types of cultures the students come from or may want to discuss in class. To be culturally responsive, teachers must also understand power dynamics, including privilege and oppression. When appropriate, educators also need to be able to educate their students on these topics, and not merely use language or point out a student's privileged or oppressed identities in the classroom. Finally, culturally responsive educators understand the ultimate goal of education is not for all students to agree, but for all students to have the maximum opportunity to learn in the classroom (Weinstein et al., 2003).

While educators have some responsibility for creating culturally-responsive classrooms, students may share the responsibility, for they embody the diverse social identities from which their classmates can learn. My participants described their desire for more open classroom environments – not only so they could feel safe sharing their own beliefs, but so they could learn from others' perspectives, as well. Dennis's example of debating a religious quote on a resume as part of a class discussion was an example of how a culturally-responsive classroom can benefit students. By sharing his perspective with his classmates, Dennis helped create a more diverse learning environment for his classmates. Dennis also learned from his classmates' various opinions. In this real-life classroom example, students from various backgrounds were able to respectfully share their conflicting beliefs and experiences in a way that included multiple perspectives without giving any one idea preference or approval over the others. Still, some may question the necessity of culturally-responsive teaching, arguing the value of learning in moments of discomfort in the classroom. There is little to no discussion of the value of this discomfort in current research and may be a valuable topic for future research.

Implications for Catholic Student Organizations

The implications for this research go beyond educators of higher education and include those responsible for teaching Catholic students about their faith and their religious identities. In this study, every participant was introduced to Catholicism at home, but they each experienced the most faith development in late high school and early college. During this time, the students also spoke of the importance of community. This study indicates a need for groups such as CSG, MUCatholics, and the Newman Center. These organizations provide Catholic students a welcoming place to learn and dialogue

about their religious identities. However, this research also indicates that the educators for these student groups would benefit their students by learning about systemic power, and teaching Catholic students what it could mean for their religious identities.

Areas for Future Research

The stories, experiences, and suggestions shared in this research study will contribute to a growing body of literature regarding diverse student learning and culturally responsive teaching. The Catholic student participants for the study were a small group of individuals with experiences transferable to a much larger population of college students. Future research incorporating multiple perspectives, examination of identity, opportunities to share stories, and education on privilege, oppression, and intersectionality - all essential components of culturally responsive teaching - will lend further understanding to how classroom learning could be more inclusive and effective. With that in mind, there are numerous ways in which the present study could be expanded and improved.

The original motivation for this study came from my desire to speak with students of many different religious backgrounds. However, time limitations and the introductory nature of this research was better suited for participants from a singular religious denomination. Now that I have completed one exploratory study on this topic, future research including more religious identities would be beneficial. Studies including more religious denominations, both Christian and non-Christian, would strengthen the findings from this study by producing a wider range of stories and experiences. Several participants in this study mentioned friends or classmates from other religious backgrounds who were also struggling to understand the place for their religious

identities in academic settings. Including these students in future research may be as beneficial for the students as it could be for the body of research on the topic.

This research was exploratory in nature and categorized under the constructivist paradigm. I chose this paradigm because of the limitations of transformative research and the suggestion that transformative research included participants from oppressed populations. Because Catholic students are categorized as a privileged population, constructivist research seemed most appropriate. However, after listening to the students' stories and also having them share their sense of relief in being able to talk about a controversial topic, I would suggest future research regarding religious student experiences be transformative in nature. Many of the students in this study expressed how their views or actions had changed as a result of participating in my research. Some described feeling more courage in sharing their personal beliefs in class, while others mentioned being more aware of the diverse social identities of their classmates. Ultimately, it seemed the students would have benefited from leaving the research with the type of action plan a more transformative study could provide. Additionally, future studies based in intersectionality theory should include a more thorough educational component on the topics of privilege and oppression, which also lends itself to the transformative paradigm.

The participants, researchers, and audience of future research would benefit from a deeper, more consistent dialogue on the topics of privilege and oppression than I was able to provide in this constructivist study. To honor the exploratory nature of the constructivist paradigm, I kept definitions open to the students and let them define the terms based upon their own knowledge and experiences. However, I could sense the

confusion it caused some students to explain their experiences using terms they did not completely understand. While they each articulated an appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on the topics, future participants could benefit from more concrete definitions of the terms and more time to reflect on what privilege and oppression meant for each participant in the study.

As mentioned earlier in chapter five, this research would benefit from a more informed perspective on what constitutes an effective classroom dialogue. The students were articulating desires which may be unrealistic and ineffective if actually implemented. I was left wondering if unbiased, fact-based conversations in the classroom would be authentic, or if such dialogues would be meaningful for college student development. Furthermore, I questioned how educators could foster an open sharing environment in the classroom while also asking students to limit their comments to informed perspectives, and if such sharing would generate authentic sharing and learning. Regardless, this research and future research involving the topic of classroom learning environments would benefit from an informed perspective on what constitutes an effective, open, respectful classroom discussion.

Additionally, my research indicated a need for more culturally-responsive educational settings, but it was unclear how educators go about learning this style of teaching or implementing it in their classrooms. Students and educators alike could benefit from future research on this topic, to determine where the cycle of education begins, if culturally-responsive teaching is truly more effective than current methods, and how to change the current culture of teaching in higher education to be more culturally-responsive. Also, what professional areas could benefit from this training beyond

teaching? Perhaps other fields, such as student affairs or counseling, could also benefit from this type of inquiry.

Furthermore, as one major implication of this research was for educators to engage in more culturally responsive teaching, an area for future research should include faculty members. The experiences shared in this study only represented one side of the classroom experience – the learners' side. For a more complete understanding of how social identities, religious identities in particular, are affected in the learning environment, faculty members should have a voice in the findings. Future research could include an exploration of faculty members' experiences, as well as how to best prepare them to be culturally responsive educators. A body of literature including these topics, as well as a diverse exploration of students' experiences, could create truly meaningful change for the future of college education.

It was clear throughout my research interviews that the students had various levels of knowledge and understanding of specific Catholic stances and teachings, especially in regards to current social issues and political movements. Future research focused on practicing Catholics and their actual knowledge of Catholic teachings would not only inform my research, but would add depth to any discussion of religious identity development. Regarding faith formation, does an individual need to fully understand the concrete teachings of their religion in order to progress in their individual religious development? In my study, I did not specifically question students' knowledge, nor did I compare their beliefs to actual Catholic teachings. Such exploration may have been too complex for this study, but would definitely enhance future research on the topic. Such research could also explore the Catholic Church's responsibility to educate its members

on how to navigate seemingly anti-Catholic environments. Specifically, future researchers could ask how the Catholic Church can prepare young adults for the diverse experience of learning in higher education.

Finally, once researchers have considered more perspectives and included tools for faculty to be more culturally responsive, there is a need to consider how this all affects students beyond their college years. As I spoke with friends and family about my research topic, it became evident that many people struggle with how to talk about difference, how to dialogue about controversial topics, how to consider others' perspectives, and ultimately, how to learn from one another.

Conclusion

In this constructivist, narrative case study, I explored Catholic student experiences in academic settings. With consideration for current social issues and political debates, students reflected on their experiences and ultimately revealed that Catholic students are feeling marginalized in the classroom, not only for their specific beliefs, but because of the lack of diverse perspectives shared in their learning environments. As a result, they are dropping classes, changing majors, and internalizing their feelings of confusion, frustration, and isolation. Fortunately, belonging to a strong Catholic community on campus helped the participants in this study cope with these complex emotions while continuing on their personal faith journeys. However, students have a need to feel this same sense of belonging in their classrooms. Feeling safe, included, and respected helps students engage in deeper levels of learning and understanding. Educators can foster this type of learning environment by making space for multiple perspectives to be shared and respected in academic settings. Such learning environments are culturally responsive,

and would result in more meaningful learning in the classroom, which, in turn, would help develop more culturally responsive college graduates.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

DATE:	August 19, 2016
TO:	Sara Miller
FROM:	University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB
PROJECT TITLE:	[930611-3] Catholic Students Intersecting with the Academy: An Exploration of Religious Identities
SUBMISSION TYPE:	Amendment/Modification
ACTION:	APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE:	August 16, 2016
EXPIRATION DATE:	August 16, 2020

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Hello Sara,

Thank you for your modifications. I did notice (sorry I did not see this earlier) that you have an outdated phone contact for Sponsored Programs on your Consent. Please change that phone number to 970-351-1910.

I am approving your IRB application and wish you the best with your research.

Sincerely,

Nancy White, PhD, IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B

INFORMATIONAL FLYER

What Does it Mean To be a CATHOLIC COLLEGE STUDENT?????

UNO FOCUS students
Are invited to participate in a 6-week study exploring their Catholic identity

Participation will include:

- 2 individual interviews
- 3-4 group discussions
- Throughout September/October 2016

About the research: The researcher, Sara Elizabeth Miller, is a doctorate student studying Catholic college students' academic experiences in order to contribute to a larger discussion of the importance of understanding students' religion in college. If interested, please contact her at mill3055@bears.unco.edu THANKS! ☺

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear FOCUS students,

Thank you for including me in your recent community night! As I told you that night, I am a PhD student embarking on a study of Catholic student experiences. I am seeking 8 diverse participants who are willing to share their experiences in individual interviews and group discussions.

I'm attaching the informational flyer and consent form to this email. Please contact me with any questions. All interviews will take place in March and April and should take a total of 5-10 hours. Participating in this study will give you the opportunity to reflect on your identity as a Catholic student, especially given the current social and political issues facing the Catholic Church.

I look forward to hearing from you and appreciate your willingness to help!

Regards,

Sara Elizabeth Miller
402-981-2202
Mill3055@bears.unco.edu

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

University of Northern Colorado

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Catholic Students Intersecting with the Academy: An Exploration of Religious Identities

Researcher: Sara Elizabeth Miller, mill3055@bears.unco.edu
402-981-2202
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership
College of Behavioral and Educational Sciences

Research Advisor: Dr. Matthew Birnbaum, 970-351-2598
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership
College of Behavioral and Educational Sciences

The purpose of this study is to explore the academic experiences of Catholic college students. At this stage in the research, Catholic students will be defined as self-identified practicing Catholics. It is my hope that my findings will inform future students and educators how to incorporate religious diversity into academic settings.

As the primary participant in this study, you will be interviewed twice individually and 3-4 times in a group setting. You will be asked to complete a written reflection before the interviews to allow you time to personally reflect on the topics of discussion before the interviews. The first interview will provide the opportunity to explore the ideas of social identities, Christian privilege, marginalization, and current social issues facing the Catholic Church. Your written reflection will be the basis of conversation. The second interview will be a follow-up to the entire research experience and will give you the opportunity to share final thoughts or questions. The group interviews will cover the topics of Christian privilege, marginalization, anti-Catholicism, intersectionality theory, and the current social and political issues facing the Catholic Church.

All of the interviews will take place in a mutually decided upon location on or near campus, such as a library study room or other quiet, private space. The interviews are expected to take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. They will be audio-recorded and transcribed, and your name will be replaced with a pseudonym of your choosing to protect your identity. Additionally, any information that could be used to identify you will be removed from the final report. Access to the research data will be limited to the researcher and research advisor named above to ensure further confidentiality.

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than the risks associated with sharing personal information in a classroom or other educational setting. There will be no cost involved with participating in this study other than the time commitment involved for completing the interviews and reflection.

Benefits of participating in this study may include the opportunity for participants to gain a deeper understanding of their personal identities. Participants may also experience an increased sense of community by interacting with other participants in the study. Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

By signing this consent, you agree that you are at least 18 years of age.

Should you have any questions or concerns prior to, during, or following this study, please feel free to contact us.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher's Signature Date

APPENDIX E

WRITTEN REFLECTION

The purpose of this written reflection is to get you thinking about your Catholic identity and to start putting some of your ideas into words before we meet for our first individual interview. This reflection has no page/word limit, I just ask that you spend time really considering the question: How do you experience your religious identity at college?

APPENDIX F

INTERSECTIONALITY ACTIVITY

In this activity, we will be exploring our own social identities and demonstrating how inseparable they can be.

1. Please draw a dot in the center of your paper, then draw a small circle around the dot.
2. From the center of the dot, draw lines out and label each of them with your social identities, like spokes on a wheel. Be sure to include these eight identities: ability, sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, and student. Feel free to add other parts of your identity to the wheel that are important to you. For instance, I add on the identity of being a counselor.
3. Next, circle any identity in which you experience social privilege.
4. Finally, underline any identity in which you experience oppression.

APPENDIX G

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS

Johnson, A.G. (2006). *Privilege, Power, and Difference.* New York: McGraw-Hill
"Privilege Walk": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD5f8GuNuGQ