"How to Make It Here": A Qualitative Study on Generational Narratives of Survival and Success Among Latinx and White Evangelical Communities Along the US/Mexico Border

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“How to Make It Here:” A Qualitative Study on Generational Narratives of Survival and Success Among Latinx and White Evangelical Communities Along the US/ Mexico Border

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver

and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Cari Myers

June 2018

Advisor: Miguel De La Torre
Abstract

This dissertation maintains that a primary method of accumulating and transmitting cultural capital\(^1\) across generations is survival narratives. In this study, a “survival narrative” is best understood as counsel passed down from older to younger generations designed to help the younger generation understand, survive and succeed in contemporary U.S. culture. The study is a qualitative project in liberative social ethics rooted in constructivist qualitative inquiry and is specifically a phenomenological project.\(^2\) Results of the study revealed four different types of survival narratives in six different categories specific to this study. The research questions explore issues of ethnicity in evangelical borderland communities and contrast Latinx survival narratives with white survival narratives in religious and educative contexts. Findings also revealed gendered narratives, class-based narratives, and the glaring absence of helpful narratives around sexuality, filtered through the lenses of religion and education. The study concludes that true survival narratives were not the messages delivered to the participants but were instead the narratives participants constructed in response to the evangelical church.


Chapter one introduces the thesis, my position toward the research, the statement of the problem as it stands, and why the study focuses on religious communities and education. Chapter two includes a literature review determined by deconstructing the elements of the survival narrative and places this dissertation within the fields of generational wisdom literature and the study of parental advice, as well as the fields of family systems and youth ministry within the evangelical church. Chapter three focuses on the qualitative methodology and will describe how a hermeneutical circle of ethics guided the study. Chapter three will also contain an explanation of specific qualitative methods and specifics of how the research was gathered, coded, analyzed and synthesized. Chapters four through six reveal what the research shows about survival narratives surrounding specific themes related to religion, education, and the identities of nationality, class, gender, and sexuality. Chapter seven uses the themes emerging from the findings to connect with and contribute to current scholarship, and to discuss implications for reification and transmission of sexist, racist, homophobic, and classist religious and educative survival narratives. Finally, chapter eight concludes with potential action steps available to these institutions indicated by the findings and goals for future research.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation owes its existence to the courage and vulnerability of my 16 study participants. Thank you for trusting your stories with me. They changed me. Many thanks also to my committee who have been so deeply invested in my excellence: Katherine Turpin, Deb Ortega, and particularly my advisor, Miguel de la Torre. I’m grateful to IRISE: The Interdisciplinary Research Incubator for the Study of (In)equality for a very generous grant making my dissertation research possible. Many people went out of their way to assist me on this journey, in particular Dr. Dan Rodriguez for assisting me with translating Spanish phrases and helping me understand the spirit behind them, and for introducing me to the Latino Student Association at Pepperdine University, a kind and gracious group who shared their experiences and their food. Three of my church families supported me in various ways during this journey – The Hills Church in Ft. Worth, Texas for helping me find study participants, and to the Littleton, CO and Camarillo, CA Churches of Christ for providing prayer, encouragement, free meals and humor. Without the offer of the Seaver Faculty Fellowship at Pepperdine University, I wouldn’t have had the time, the support, or the access to an excellent academic library (and librarian Jeremy Witt) required to complete a dissertation. The kindness of Pepperdine faculty and staff, particularly in the Seaver Dean’s Office and the Religion and Philosophy Division, has sustained me through the grieving and rebirth that a dissertation seems to demand. Deep gratitude to S for her patience, presence and constant comfort, and especially to Mike, Carol, Holly, Amanda, Kristian, Amanda and Ryann, who embarrass me with their love and their pride in me.
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Section 1: Introduction and Foundational Material

Section one contains material designed to lay the foundation to support the findings from data gathered through the sixteen interviews providing the backbone of this study. Section one will contain introductory materials such as the research question, background and context locating the survival narrative and the dissertation as a whole within the fields of ethics and qualitative research, a description of my positionality, a description of the participants in the study, and an explanation of the methodology.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Transmission of cultural capital is one of the primary functions of family systems and formative U/S. institutions. Families working alongside churches and schools in particular serve to pass along cultural capital to younger generations. Of particular concern in this study is the transmission of cultural capital by means of the survival narrative. In this study, a “survival narrative” may be best understood as wisdom, advice, oral histories, directives, or counsel passed down from an older generation to a younger generation designed to help the younger generation understand and succeed in contemporary U.S. culture.

Findings from this study revealed four different types of survival narratives in six different categories specific to this study. The first two arenas are the two major institutions the study examined: religion (evangelical churches and the Church of Christ specifically) and education (both public and private). The conclusions drawn from the findings around religious survival narratives revealed that the participants in this study offer great insight into the perspective of young adults toward conservative Protestant

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Christianity. The data suggests that, while they are suspicious of the motives and methods behind institutional belonging and homogenous messaging designed to protect the church, young adults still see value in participating in religious community. Conclusions from these interviews support and complement studies from sociologists James Wellman⁴ and Christian Smith⁵ and social work professor Vern Bengston⁶ illustrating that the young adults in this study are still spiritually curious and seeking, and that the exodus of millennial young adults from evangelical churches may have more to do with the social praxis of these religious communities than with disagreements in doctrine or style of worship. Alongside evangelical churches in the U.S., the institutional education system is on the front-lines of patrolling the borders of young adult identity.⁷ Supplementing the claims postcolonial scholars have been telling the public for decades, the participants in this study describe their educational histories as the intentional transmission of homogenous and standardized markers of success, where conformity and obedience are rewarded over innovation or passion. Western education continues to make promises it cannot keep,⁸ and the findings here advocate for a prioritization on vocation and passion⁹ rather than the route acquisition of a four-year diploma.

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The final four categories the data revealed as important for the participant experience of survival narratives fall within the distinction of identities: gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and financial literacy or class. Analysis of the identity data revealed that although U.S. religious and educative institutions are arguably becoming more diverse, they are not necessarily becoming more inclusive. In the case of the U.S. evangelical church, in the understanding of the participants of this study, the normative identity is white, heterosexual, and male Christian. Anything that deviates from this norm stands to be corrected or feared. The participants who did not identify as white, heterosexual or male experienced oppression within the evangelical church. In describing the different survival narratives necessary in order to “pass” in U.S. culture, the Latinx participants of this study reflect a position of liminality that constructs a space unique to the descendants of Latin American immigrants. Latinx participants describe a constant requirement to be pliant and agile, existing in a space of constant tension and transition. The location of these evangelical churches along the US/Mexico border compounded the borderland experience of these participants, at the same time providing something of a familial haven.


and a double-layer of hybridity. The study participants found class performance and financial literacy connected to a specific Christian morality, and understood the debt they acquired (often to in order to attend college) to be at best a necessary evil and at worst a shameful sin. The women in this study were all very clear on the oppressive performative expectations of the evangelical churches for them. Within evangelical churches, gender identity is solidly binary, is closely tied to sexuality, and is vigilantly monitored by the panoptic male gaze. Discussions from the participants around sexuality and sexual development are striking because of their absence. The two members of the study who mentioned survival narratives and sexuality only mentioned their absence, and how that silence affected their relational and sexual development. Participants understood this silence as a wholesale indictment against sex of any kind and advocated for open evangelical conversations around all sexuality as necessary for healthy embracing human flourishing.

In addition to communicating strategies for success and survival, these narratives can further serve to reinscribe conforming messages designed to uphold and reinforce the

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institutions providing social context for these families, specifically in this case, the institution of the U.S. evangelical church, which provided the most formative context for the research participants. Findings from this study indicate that in the evangelical context, success looks like conformity and homogenization, as Sam (White, male, 24) explains, “Same is better. That’s basically what we learned.”

**Background and Context**

The thesis of my dissertation maintains that a primary method of accumulating and transmitting cultural capital across generations is survival narratives. Of particular importance is Bourdieu’s theory of social and cultural capital and the ways family, as well as education and religious institutions, manage and control the accumulation of capital. This dissertation primarily rests on the construction of the survival narrative and the communication of cultural capital through formal or informal means. In this study, these specific survival narratives are communications of cultural capital transmitted through a form of generational wisdom and advice within the evangelical church, specifically the Churches of Christ, for people possessing specific educative, religious, gendered, class-based, ethnic and sexual identities. This study revealed two major approaches to survival narratives: the personal and the institutional. Personal survival narratives borrow elements from generational wisdom and wisdom theory, particularly as distilled by social scientists at the Mac Plank Institute. Wisdom is concerned with that which is good for self and other, and the possibility for achievement

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of personal full potential. Survival narratives also carry elements of parental advice and advice theory as a form of interpersonal communication that aims to supports young adults as they negotiate emerging adulthood. Institutional survival narratives serve to promote and insure the survival of the institution providing context for the narratives, in this case, the evangelical church and specifically the Churches of Christ. Wuthnow, Babbington, Fitzgerald and Noll provide historical grounding for the evangelical church as a cohesive group with a specific history and conflict that creates the background of this study, while Foster and Olbricht narrow the focus onto the Churches of Christ as the specific faith communities all participants of this study share.

**Statement of Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate two propositions: how survival narratives function as an effective means of transmitting cultural capital, and how

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survival narratives differ between Latinx and white communities. The context shaping these particular survival narratives are the geographic and religious locations of the communities in question, and the scope is limited to the institutions populated by the participants. The research questions were designed to explore issues of ethnicity in evangelical educative communities, and also revealed issues of gender, class and sexuality among both white and Latinx participants. My overarching research question was as follows:

“How do survival narratives contribute to the accumulation and transmission of capital across generations, and what do the differences between Latino/a and white survival narratives expose about inequality in social conditions and norms?”

**Methodology (Research Approach)**

This dissertation is a liberation ethicist qualitative project. It is rooted in constructivist qualitative inquiry and is specifically a phenomenological project. Creswell defines phenomenology as follows:

Researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning.  

The qualitative elements of this dissertation describe a process, and do so rigorously by analyzing patterns that emerge in the data that are gathered through interviews and observations through the lens of social ethics. It would be ethically irresponsible for me to speak on behalf of others, especially those who represent a demographic I do not

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represent. Therefore, I employed a hermeneutical circle of ethics\textsuperscript{30} inspired by liberation theologians to analyze the data. According to De La Torre, the hermeneutical circle is a paradigm to “do ethics,” which is “motivated by a passion to establish justice-based relationships from which love can flow,” and “begins with the lived experience of oppressive social situations and proceeds by working out a theory and then a course of action that will dismantle the mechanisms that cause oppression.”\textsuperscript{31} The steps are not static and rigid, but serve as a method not only of analyzing the data but as a method for understanding correct practice instead of simply correct theory.

The sample was comprised of four participants from the Denver, Colorado area, six from the Dallas/Ft. Worth Texas area, and six from Los Angeles, California. Eight of the participants are Latinx and eight are white. These sites are specifically represented in this study as they are representative of evangelical communities along the US/Mexico border, and because these are the specific cities in which I have contacts, credibility and access within those communities. In addition to their easy accessibility to me via education and religious institutions, I also selected subjects who were young adults specifically because I did not want to put anyone at risk. I chose to interview young adults instead of adolescents for two reasons: adults will have a longer experience with survival narratives and the maturity and cognitive skills to critically reflect on them. The average age of the sample is 22, while 7 subjects identified as female and 9 identified as male. At the time of the interviews, 2 participants were freshmen in college, 4 were sophomores, 2 were juniors, and 4 were seniors, while 5 had already graduated from


\textsuperscript{31} De La Torre, \textit{Doing Christian Ethics from the Margin}, 58.
college. All participants attended college, but five participants admitted they had taken a break during their college education and worked for a year or two, while 2 members of the study are active in the military. All but two of the participants are affiliated with the Churches of Christ in some way, either through upbringing or by attendance at a Church of Christ university. Seven participants are the first in their family to attend college (Appendix A). Each participant was interviewed by me personally in a public location of their choosing and was thereafter identified only by a pseudonym of his or her choosing. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and were then loaded into Atlas TI software for coding.

This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of self-identified Latinx and white young adults who live in California, North Texas and Colorado and are between the ages of 18-25. I collected 16 semi-structured interviews on survival narratives handed down from both Latinx and white evangelical families through personal interviews collected by means of snow-ball sampling among churches and universities in these three locations. As a phenomenological study, I was searching for meaning units during the coding process. I coded the data during the first cycle using initial coding, after which I themed the data. During the second cycle of coding I used focused coding to better develop the themes from the interviews. Section Two of the dissertation details specific discoveries resulting from analysis of the data.

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**Position toward the research**

I approach this research primarily as an educator and a minister. I am a white, middle-class, Christian. I am educated, I come from Irish and Western European ancestry, and I grew up deeply entrenched in a Southern Evangelical religious tradition, the Church of Christ. Several generations of my family were born and raised in Texas. After ten years in full-time youth ministry in the largest Church of Christ in our fellowship, I left the church to enter public education, a transition which triggered a foundational shift in my personal ideology. When I became a teacher, my students represented a different racial and socio-economic demographic than me, yet I began to see them in every aspect of my life—the mall, movies, restaurants, as I was driving, everywhere. Every place except for one; I never saw any of my students at my church. Even though my church was well-known and in close proximity to their community, none of my students were regular members. A few had visited and thought our game room and concession stand were “awesome,” but the interaction was superficial, and they never returned. This is experience was the genesis of this project, and their faces and stories are always before me in this work.

**Outline of Chapters**

*Section 1:* Section one contains introductory and foundational materials such as the introduction to the dissertation, the literature review, and an explanation of the methodology.

*Chapter 1: Introduction* - This chapter introduces the background and context of the study, describes the purpose for the study, identifies the research question,

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summarizes the methodology used, and explains the researcher’s position toward the research.

Chapter 2: Survival Narratives and Evangelical Cultural Capital - This chapter constructs the elements of the survival narrative, and locates the survival narrative within the context of wisdom and advice theory and evangelicalism. This chapter will detail the contributions of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, how survival narratives fit within the fields of generational wisdom literature and the study of parental advice, as well as the fields of family systems and youth ministry within the evangelical church.

Chapter 3: Methodology – In two sections, chapter three describes how a liberative hermeneutical circle of ethics guided the study, and also contains an explanation of constructive qualitative phenomenological methods and specifics of how the research was gathered, coded, analyzed and synthesized.

Section 2: Findings - Section two is dedicated to revealing the findings of the study, the participants’ narratives of their experiences with survival narratives over the course of their lives to this point, categorized by the four different types of survival narratives revealed in the study and illustrated by direct quotes.

Chapter 4: Religion - Chapter four discusses what the research shows about survival narratives surrounding specific themes related to religion.
Chapter 5: Identity - Chapter five details what the research shows about survival narratives surrounding ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality, and how possession of these identities influenced the nature of survival narrative they received and interpreted.

Chapter 6: Education - Chapter six describes what the research shows about survival narratives surrounding education and specific themes related to the importance of education to the family and community.

Section 3: Analysis and Conclusion - Section three contains a discussion of the findings alongside current scholarship, and conclusions from the study and implications for U.S. religious and educational institutions, as well as potential for further research.

Chapter 7: Analysis - Chapter seven connects the themes emerging from the study to current scholarship to examine the implications for religious and educational systems, as well as implications for reification and transmission of sexist, racist, homophobic, classist survival narratives.

Chapter 8: Conclusion – The final chapter concludes with a distillation of the essential message behind the survival narratives from each institution and for each identity and concludes with recommendations derived from interview participants’ experiences with survival narratives.
Chapter Two: Survival Narratives and Evangelical Cultural Capital

Survival narratives are the communication of cultural capital transmitted through formal or informal means within specific contexts for people in possession of certain identities. I appreciate this broad definition for its ability to transfer to different contexts, institutions, social groups and identities. For the purposes of this study, these specific survival narratives are communications of cultural capital transmitted through a form of generational wisdom and advice within the evangelical church, specifically the Churches of Christ, for people possessing specific educative, religious, gendered, class-based, ethnic and sexual identities. This definition will be broken into four parts in order to construct a field of supporting literature: the survival narrative itself, cultural capital, generational wisdom and parental advice, and the evangelical church and the Church of Christ within it. Details on the specific identities discussed in the study will be relayed in the Findings Section, Chapters 4-6, and analysis of the findings will be covered in Chapter 7.

Cultural Capital

The intended function of the survival narrative is the transmission of cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu and Karl Marx both believed that the degree of social power one
possesses is a direct result of how much capital one possesses.  

Bourdieu expanded Marx’s idea of capital beyond mere economics into the realm of symbolic acquisition. According to Bourdieu, there are three forms of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Cultural capital is determined by a person’s accumulated capital that align with a particular social class: taste, language, possessions, hobbies, sport, dress, degrees, and appearance are just a few examples. Cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. Embodied capital is the specific type of capital under exchange in survival narratives as the older generation seeks to transfer knowledge, language, and the ability to recognize coding and perform specific behaviors that are rewarded in the field of evangelical religion. In Bourdieu’s view, cultural capital is transmitted through family or educational systems, and in this study the church serves as such an educative space.

Drawing on the theories of Bourdieu’s capital, James Coleman discussed three aspects of family-based capital that are particular to a child’s well-being: the extent to which the family is supportive, the extent to which families exert control over their children, and stability and structure of the child-parent ties. The evangelical church partners in this familial capital transmission and bestows capital onto its youth through the family by creating meaning and inspiring action in individuals and families by means

39 Bourdieu, *Distinctions,* 80-85.
of hope, assurance, promise, and reward. Christian Smith discovered that the transmission of cultural capital was one of nine reinforcing factors of positive religious influence in the lives of teenagers, and provides youth with specific tastes, skills, knowledges and practices that empower youth to attain greater social success. This dissertation shows survival narratives are one such vehicle for cultural capital.

The language of “cultural capital” is not common in evangelical churches. In 2007, sociologist Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University delivered a paper at the Christian Conservative Movement and American Democracy conference in which he reprimanded the field of sociology for largely dismissing the study of religion in larger society, and conservative Protestantism in particular. Drawing from the fields of history, religious studies, and ethnography, Wuthnow sought to “connect with a few of those in my discipline who care nothing about religion” by “considering conservative Protestant religion through the lens of cultural capital.” Recognizing that Bourdieu’s definition of cultural capital points to the elite realm of aesthetic taste, Wuthnow invited sociologists to take seriously the study of cultural capital in evangelical churches by remembering that cultural capital is context specific and advocated for scholarly expansion beyond money into morality as a marker of taste. Wuthnow then moves on to define six distinct areas of evangelical Protestant cultural capital: 1) the divinity of Jesus and his death and resurrection to save humanity from sin, 2) the meaning and value of biblical literalism, 3) the born-again experience, 4) patterns of worship (communion, music, sermons,


repetition, community participation), 5) integration of faith and life (personal spiritual growth, politics), 6) and putting faith into practice (evangelism, organized leaders like Graham, Falwell, or Dobson). In this list, Wuthnow has defined evangelical cultural capital externally, in relation to larger society. “Its cultural capital lies in its teachings and practices, its worship, and its spiritual experiences – in short, in religion.” In this study, I am attempting to define cultural capital internally, within the evangelical church, and particularly within Churches of Christ, itself. As we will see, the cultural capital detailed by this study provides a clear (and successful) path for survival and success within the evangelical church, although not necessarily outside of it.

Survival Narrative

From 2006 to 2013, Showtime aired a series titled Dexter. The main character, Dexter Morgan, was a blood-spatter analyst by profession for the Miami police, and a serial killer who targets only other murderers who escaped the justice system in his spare time. Dexter was raised by an adoptive father, Harry, who recognized Dexter’s sociopathy at a young age and helped him to harness his urges (what Dexter calls his “Dark Passenger”) through personal discipline and strict adherence to “Harry’s Code.” Because of this moral code provided to Dexter by his father, Dexter has learned how to function in everyday society, somewhat manage relationships, hold down a consistent

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44 Ibid.

45 I am aware that “survival narrative” may not be the most appropriate title for these narratives, as it automatically assigns the institution or system as adversarial and invites a defensive posture on the institutions behalf. However, it is a truthful marker of the experience of the marginalized youth in this study, as that specific institution is what they needed to survive, so for the purposes of this study the name will stand, although I am open to other suggestions.
job, and still meet his needs to the betterment of society. The series reveals the training Harry provided for Dexter in flashbacks, so the audience may understand who Dexter is. Harry provides Dexter a series of survival narratives in order to survive and succeed in common society, while channeling his murderous urges in as positive a direction as possible: “When you take a man's life you're not just killing him, you're snuffing out all the things he'll ever become. Killing must serve a purpose or else it's just plain murder.”

While survival narratives around ability are noticeably missing in this study, *Dexter* offers a helpful bridge between theory and praxis, and has provided me an easy example to explain my study to laypersons.

The weight of this dissertation hangs entirely on the survival narrative. In order for any of the findings or analysis to make sense it is critical to establish the parameters and definitions undergirding the survival narrative. In this study, a “survival narrative” may be best understood as wisdom, advice, oral histories, directives, or counsel passed down from an older generation to a younger generation designed to help the younger generation in possession of specific identities understand and succeed in contemporary U.S. culture. The survival narrative is a term borrowed from the world of literature. In its most common usage, a survival story is a memoir that tells the true story of the author’s journey through a harrowing experience, courtesy perhaps of forces of nature or darker humanity. One popular example of the survivor narrative is the crash of Ugandan Air Force flight 571 in the Andes Mountains in 1972. Of the original 45 passengers, including the Old Christians Club Rugby team, only 27 people survived the crash and only 16 people survived an avalanche that engulfed the wreckage. Survivors lived on

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snacks from the plane and eventually on the bodies of deceased fellow passengers.\(^{47}\) This survival story has been retold many times; perhaps most popularly in the 1993 film *Alive* starring Ethan Hawke. Other popular examples of true survival stories include war memoir, humanitarian crisis, natural disasters, acts of God, addictions, migrations, prison, or abuse survival. One feature all survival narratives in the literary field share is the survival of a trauma of some kind.\(^{48}\) On rare occasions a true survival story might be fictional and fall under the adventure story genre. An excellent example is *Maus*\(^ {49}\) by Art Spiegelman. These survival narratives tell the story of survival, a celebration following an event or experience.

The survival narratives in my study are a work in progress. They are covert and subcutaneous, and often unconscious, messages aimed toward the future, in an effort to provide the listener with capital to succeed and survive in a specific context. While none of these features are universal or flawless, the features of the survival narrative in this study are as follows:

1. Survival narratives are ongoing and repeated – they are rarely mentioned only once and often mentioned by more than one person. Participants in this study shared similar survival narratives as heard from parents, grandparents, religious leaders, teachers, coaches or parents of friends.

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\(^{48}\) I am hesitant to name the evangelical church as a traumatic event my participants survived, although some of them would certainly embrace that label. I hesitate because I know that trauma studies are a vast and nuanced field, and I do not possess the expertise or the space to do it justice here, although a brief JSTOR and Google search tell me many other scholars are undertaking the challenge.

2. Survival narratives can be either consciously or unconsciously relayed – they can be overtly taught or covertly modeled. While usually informal, survival narratives often grow from some formal teaching or ideology of a larger institution or system.

3. Survival narratives are intended to alleviate passage and unnecessary suffering of the listener. The goal of the survival narrative is survival at least, and success and flourishing at best. A survival narrative stands as a corrective to whatever forces in larger society, or the immediate institution, serve as obstacles or roadblocks.

4. The vast majority of the time, the survival narrative passes from older to younger, although sometimes it is reinforced by peers.

5. Survival narratives are shared by those closest and most trusted and are familial and intimately communal in nature. They are furthermore reinforced and supported by the larger community in the specific context.

6. Survival narratives usually have an unconscious or conscious recognition of some sort of hierarchy at work. Sometimes this hierarchy has created an experience of inequality, but a survival narrative is almost always a response to a power dynamic and is often an attempt to minimize or mediate an imbalance or an inequality.

7. The nature of the survival narrative within a family or community points to that family’s or community’s understanding of the world around them. The survival narratives of a group reveal that group’s specific experiences, assumptions, and perspectives.
8. To a large degree, whether or not a survival narrative is liberative or binding depends on the critical thinking, awareness and dependence of the listener.

9. When survival narratives are specific to an institution or system, such as the evangelical church, survival narratives can serve two preservative functions: the survival of the listener as well as the survival of the institution. While this point is not relevant to all survival narrative contexts, in the case of this study it is critical.

While I feel this is an exhaustive and inclusive list, it is not perfect. For every feature I listed, I can quickly think of an exception. For example, Dexter’s survival narratives from his father were not communal in nature at all and remained solely between Dexter and his father until the end of the series. Regardless, it is a helpful place to start, and will help draw distinctions between this concept and the survival narrative’s closest relative, generational wisdom.

Additionally, survival narratives are approached in two distinct ways in this dissertation, although the boundaries between these two approaches are blurry and porous. First, and primarily, from the perspective of the participants, there are personal survival narratives which stem from generational wisdom and parental advice. These narratives assume the majority of the space at work here, and the research questions focused specifically on these. Personal survival narratives are primarily revealed through the data around identities and the narratives the participants choose to pay forward and the narratives they revise. However, through analysis of the data, another field of survival narrative emerged. The other approach is from the perspective of the institution under question, the evangelical church. Many of the primary survival narratives serve the
agenda assisting the evangelical church in its survival, and these institutional narratives particularly surface in data around religion and education, although the well-meaning narratives in the identity data reside in this arena as well. (See Appendix B for a graphic detailing this description). The answers to the question of the success of the survival narrative reside in the space created between the institutional and personal survival narratives, as the narratives that provide for personal flourishing do not always help the institution survive, and vice versa. These two approaches will help define the next portion of the literature review.

Personal Survival Narratives

Generational Wisdom

The exploration of survival narratives has been an inductive process. I did not really know what I was dealing with until I emerged from coding my interviews. Therefore, it has been difficult to trace a trail of scholarship from the survival narrative into a specific field. Therefore, I have found myself performing a sort of apophatic literature review, in which I could best define what a survival narrative is by clarifying first what it is not.

I mentioned above that I am using the term “survival narrative” in a different manner than it has been traditionally used in psychological and sociological fields, simply because the survival narratives in this study are preventative. After extensive searching, I believe that a very close relative to my definition of a survival narrative is

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50 Keywords I used in the search for similar sources include parental advice, parent talks, generational counsel, parental wisdom, community wisdom, transmission of wisdom, transmission of advice, and wisdom traditions.
the field of generational wisdom, which largely rests in the hands of the social sciences, but belongs to the larger field of wisdom theory, which has been the purview of philosophers and social scientists.

Wisdom theory can trace its roots from Plato through Aristotle through the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{51} Two specific theories emerging from the study of wisdom are explicit and implicit. Explicit theories of wisdom are largely due to a large body of work emerging from the Berlin wisdom paradigm, which focuses on personal development through lived experience which provides knowledge and the ability to achieve one’s full potential. Wisdom of this nature is acquired through personal experience not necessarily accompanied by guidance, and prioritizes factual and pragmatic knowledge about life which includes, “knowledge and judgment about the meaning and conduct of life and the orchestration of human development towards excellence while attending conjointly to personal and collective well-being.”\textsuperscript{52} Theories of implicit wisdom have been synthesized by social scientist Paul Baltes at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development under seven properties: Wisdom 1) represents superior level of knowledge and judgement; 2) addresses difficulties about the meaning of life; 3) includes knowledge of limits of knowledge and uncertainties of life; 4) constitutes knowledge of extraordinary scope, depth, measure and balance; 5) involves a perfect synergy of mind


and virtue, or knowledge and character; 6) represents knowledge used for the good of self and others; and 7) is difficult to achieve and manifest but is easy to recognize.

All theories of wisdom agree on one feature – wisdom is intended for the good of oneself and the good of others. How do we measure “the good” of others? Is it wisdom that is being transmitted when the results are stifling and identity-blocking? In the case of survival narratives in this study, if the receiver of the narrative chose to stay within the boundaries of the evangelical church and validate the church messaging, then perhaps that receiver will experience life and goodness. But the same exact message does not have the same effect on every listener. I suspect that when there is a sub-motive of conforming to the church ethos so the church may survive and thrive, the intention of the individual survival narrative becomes tainted. In the case of the respondents in this study, the survival narrative was often about how the study participant survived the evangelical church with their dignity and full identity intact. There are many features that survival narratives share with the field of generational wisdom, but the two diverge at some very critical junctures.

Survival narratives are not necessarily wise. Definitions of wisdom offered by the Berlin paradigm suggest that wisdom is partially defined by superior knowledge of depth and scope. Survival narratives communicate knowledge, but often in a limited context and scope. Furthermore, while wisdom may be a form of a cultural capital, wisdom and cultural capital are not necessarily the same thing. In the case of the survival narratives in this study, the transmission of cultural capital is intimately connected to the survival of an institution. Bourdieu drew this parallel first between families and schools, but we see it

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here functioning in the same way within churches: “The reproduction of the structure of the
distribution of cultural capital is achieved in the relation between familial strategies
and the specific logic of the school institution.” 54 For the participants in this study, we
could replace the word “school” with “church” because of the comprehensive formative
environment that the church provided in their life, often including educational institutions
at the primary, secondary, and collegiate level. Wisdom deals with greater and deeper
truths of life, with judgement and virtue and meaning. Cultural capital deals with cultural
competencies and their designated value within specific contexts.55 Perhaps sometimes
survival narratives have to do with wisdom, but I would argue that wisdom survival
narratives are largely relegated to the resistance narratives, in which the younger
generation reinterpreted the survival narratives into a new narrative that provided a path
for rebirth and reidentification.

Parental Advice56

The transmission of the personal survival narrative is a close neighbor to the field
of advice theory. According to scholars in communications and sociology, parental
advice is a form of interpersonal communication that aims to supports young adults as

56 I intentionally chose not to label survival narratives specifically as advice, although some participants
may have understood it as such, for two reasons. 1. Advice seems more intentional and contained within a
specific conversation or series of conversations. One participant asks a question, another offers a response.
Survival narratives revealed themselves to be more ongoing, often unconscious, and repetitive, sustained
over longer periods of time and repeated by different members of a community in similar fashion. 2. My
primary reason is that parental advice does not quite carry the immediacy and urgency of some of the
survival narratives delivered down through the generations of participants of color. Some of the narratives
the Latinx participants shared involved literal psychological, physical or emotional survival, and to term
those survival narratives as “advice” diminishes their experiences.
they navigate eventual or emerging adulthood. Advice may either be perceived as helpful and positive, promoting resilience and coping mechanisms or it may be perceived as unsupportive and negative, promoting emotional upheaval and insecurity, thus impeding communication. Advice perceived as helpful is most often employed by the listener and often shares three characteristics: the perceived expertise of the speaker, perceived similarities with the speaker, and perceived empathy from the speaker. So, a young adult receiving advice from a parent or an older speaker is most likely to employ advice they receive from someone they believe is an expert, from someone with whom they believe they share much in common, and from someone who the listeners believe is trying to emotionally engage and understand the perspective of the listener.

In advice theory, the warmth and personality of the speaker carries great weight with the listener. In fact, studies show that the closer the relationship between the advice speaker and listener, the greater the receptiveness of the listener, and the greater

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60 D.J. O’Keefe, “Message properties, mediating states, and manipulation checks: Claims, evidence and data analysis in experimental persuasive message effects research,” Communication Theory 13, no. 3 (2003), 251-274.


63 Ibid.
the chance for advice implementation. Relational closeness did not override the fact that if the listener did not perceive the speaker as an expert or if the speaker was not empathetic, the listener would be receptive to the advice but was not likely to implement it. In this study, the participantss expressed feelings of varied closeness with their parents and with their elders, they expressed varying degrees of perceived expertise in areas such as class and education, and they expressed understanding that their elders were dispensing advice intended to help and empower. So why have so many of the survival narratives in this study gone unheeded? So many of the survival narratives were delivered within a very specific context – success within the evangelical system. If the narrative listener was not particularly interested in remaining in the evangelical system, or if they grew to feel oppressed and marginalized by the evangelical system, the advice they received from those entrenched in the institution was not helpful. The perception of the bulk of the messages being handed down through the evangelical church was not that they were designed to create independent, autonomous free-thinkers, but that they were designed to create a network of support for the survival of the evangelical church disguised as individually sustaining counsel. Based on hypotheses from Aquilino, Carlson established that advice implementation rests greatly on the listener’s perception of autonomy support in the speaker. The more autonomy was supported and encouraged,

64 B. Feng and E.L. MacGeorge, “Predicting receptiveness to advice: Characteristics of the problem, the advice-giver, and the recipient,” Southern Communication Journal, 71 (1) 2006, 67-85.

65 Cassandra Carlson, “Predicting emerging adults’ implementation of parental advice: source, situation, relationship, and message characteristics,” Western Journal of Communication, 80, no. 3 (2016), 304-326.

the more likely the emerging adult would implement the advice. Very few of the subjects in this study communicated that they felt encouraged to make independent decisions. The implication is that autonomy might threaten the sustained inheritance that is the evangelical church, and the messages passed down were designed to inspire devotion and loyalty to the institution, not to support autonomy and independent decision making. This conclusion sheds light on the troubled nature of the transmission of evangelical messages to young adults, particularly those in possession of specific identities that are seen as problematic within the evangelical system.

**Institutional Narratives**

This section will discuss at length the specific and unique identity of the evangelical church as that identity informs the nature and motivation behind the survival narratives. Although the participants in this study were specifically aligned with the Church of Christ, most of the religious scholarly work arising from the Churches of Christ is centered around the Biblical text, so it has been necessary to expand the parameters of the search for foundational literature to encompass the evangelical church. Furthermore, this section will explain and defend why this dissertation uses the identifiers “evangelical” and “Church of Christ” interchangeably.

**The Evangelical Church**

When I constructed the general research questions and the guiding interview questions for this study, I expected the context that would show the greatest impact on the data would be the U.S./Mexico border. To my surprise, the context that emerged as having the greatest impact on the data was the evangelical church, and specifically the

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67 Carlson, 319.
Churches of Christ. This realization caused a shift in the focus of this study therefore I find it necessary to situate the findings within the field of evangelicalism and further within the subfield of the Churches of Christ.

The word “evangelical” comes from the Greek “evangel,” which means “good news” or “Gospel.” While this term could apply to any Christian, the evangelical movement officially began in the late eighteenth century with the first of the two Great Awakenings, a series of religious revivals that swept through the North Atlantic regions.68 Led by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield in the United States, the first Great Awakening crossed colonial boundaries and spread evangelicalism from the north to the south, creating ripples that lasted up until the American Revolution. The Second Great Awakening began after the War of Independence and lasted until roughly the 1850’s. These revivals were in essence a rebellion against “the formalism of the established churches and an effort to recover an authentic spiritual experience: a religion of the heart, as opposed to the head.”69 One of the outcomes of this perspective was a discounting of intellectualism that still plagues many evangelical communities today.

Evangelicalism has played a pivotal role in the history of Christianity and the United States. Every mainline Protestant denomination in the United States was involved in or directly impacted by the beginning of the “Evangelical Empire” in the Great Awakenings as the mainline denominations pushed back against the Congregational and Puritan order. Immigration of other Christians and non-believers eroded the power of the


Puritans and made room for dissenting voices from other denominational streams, especially the Calvinists, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians. Many of evangelicalism’s favorite sons enjoyed political power, especially in the South, and led groups that influenced elections and decided public policy. After World War II, North Americans returned to church in record numbers. Billy Graham attracted huge crowds to his revivals in the 1950’s, and although he became a confidant of varying degrees to Eisenhower, Johnson and Nixon, the relationship between evangelicals and the Republican party wasn’t firmly established until the 1980’s when Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority got behind Ronald Reagan. The second wave of the Christian right followed when Pat Robertson and the Christian Coalition supported George H. W. Bush, and then a third wave when James Dobson and the Family Research Council backed George W. Bush.

Scholars from the fields of history, sociology, and religion have identified similar characteristics of evangelicals. Wuthnow’s areas of evangelical cultural capital align with historian David Bebbington’s designation of specific evangelical convictions and attitudes. Bebbington’s history of evangelicalism specifies evangelical markers as ABCC: Activism (the enthusiastic, individual approach to social participation and spiritual duty), Biblicism (the reliance both corporately and individually as the ultimate religious authority), Conversionism (a high priority placed on the experience of being “born again”), and Crucicentrism (an emphasis placed on the redeeming work of Christ as the

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71 Fitzgerald, *The Evangelicals*. 
core of essential Christianity). Religious historian Mark Noll emphasized the evangelical priorities of repentance, redemption, and reconciliation: “Evangelicals called people to acknowledge their sin before God, to look upon Jesus Christ (crucified—dead—resurrected) as God’s means of redemption, and to exercise faith in this Redeemer as the way of reconciliation with God and orientation for life in the world.” Sociologist Michael P. Young credits early evangelicals with translating their personal religious convictions into social action into efforts such as anti-slavery campaigns and temperance movements. In modern U.S. Christianity, according to Wuthnow, there are four factors that cemented evangelicalism into a national identity: the presidential candidacy of Jimmy Carter, Gallup polls that allowed the public to self-identify as evangelical, the weakening of denominational identity due to ecumenical collaboration, intermarriage and geographic mobility, and the creation of community for disillusioned denominationalists through television ministries, special purpose ministry and advocacy organizations. While the world of evangelicals is decentralized and difficult to control, and no religious group is totally static or uniform, I find it important to note that historically, the evangelicals who created this national identity are almost all white, and it was not until well after the civil rights movement that some evangelicals of color begin to enter the

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history. White evangelicalism is a cohesive group with a specific history and conflict that creates the background of this study.

Currently, evangelicalism seems to be at a crossroads. In March of 2016, the Pew Research Center surveyed U.S. Americans on the upcoming 2016 presidential election. There was only one question on the survey regarding religion, “Would you describe yourself as a born-again or evangelical Christian?” More than one-third of respondents self-identified as evangelical. Later in the year, following the election of Donald Trump, the PRC again polled the faithful to see how they voted. 81% of these self-identified evangelicals voted for Donald Trump. Following the election, 14% of evangelicals reported to the Washington Post that they had stopped attending the church they had previously reported attended in September 2016. The Public Religion Research Institute has been tracking the numbers of steady decline in evangelical churches over the last decade, and white evangelical Christians are down from 23% of U.S. Americans in 2006 to 17% in 2017, and the youth are leading the way. Only 11% of white evangelicals are under 30 years of age. Are numbers dwindling because of

76 Fitzgerald, The Evangelicals, 3.


Donald Trump, because we are entering a post-Christian era, or is the face of U.S. Christianity changing? In this study, the narratives of the interview participants suggest that young people are leaving evangelical churches because they are discovering the messages of evangelical churches to be destructive to specific minoritized identities. While none of the participants attend the church of their youth, several of them do still attend a church that, if not directly affirming, does not vilify their specific identities.

The Church of Christ

Churches of Christ have existed as a distinct group for roughly 200 years. The beginnings of the Churches of Christ occurred as a reform movement in the late 1700’s. The perception of fierce competition among “rival” Christian groups led to a passion for unity, and the Puritan ideal that God had specially prepared the United States to “restore” pure Christianity served as the catalyst for change and established the two basic principles undergirding the early Church of Christ – unity and restoration.81 During the Second Great Awakening, Presbyterian ministers, Barton Stone and father and son Thomas and Alexander Campbell, were publicly calling on Christians to lay aside their creedal and practical differences and seek unity in their difference. Based on the reformation motto of “sola scriptura,” Stone and the Campbells had attempted to create congregations of Christians who simply sought to “go back to the Bible” and imitate the New Testament church to the best of their ability in fulfillment of Jesus’s prayer for his


followers in John 17:21: “That they may all be one.”

Following his involvement in the Cane Ridge Revival in 1801, Stone believed he had witnessed firsthand the ability of the Holy Spirit to unite Christians regardless of denominational membership. Stone founded the Springfield Presbytery but then disbanded it a year later in the name of Christian unity. The leaders of this Presbytery explained their reasoning in *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* in 1804, which serves as one of two significant founding documents in the Churches of Christ. In this document, Stone and his colleagues stated their desire to “sink into union with the Body of Christ at large,” making every effort to lay aside differences in the name of becoming one body. The Stone movement therefore decided to call themselves “churches of Christ” or simply “Christian Churches.”

Meanwhile, the Christian Association asked Thomas Campbell to create a statement outlining their purpose and plan for unity with other Christians. Thomas Campbell wrote *A Declaration and Address*, which called the church back to its New Testament roots. This is the second foundational document in the history of the Churches of Christ, and it declared that the things which kept Christians apart were “things in which God does not consist.” The Campbells had begun congregations they simply called “disciples of Christ.” Both Stone and the Campbells were not asking Christians to

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84 Foster and Holloway, *Renewing God’s People*, 35.

85 Ibid., 43.
agree on everything as they sought unity, and they believed the power of the Bible was enough to unite diverse Christians groups.

Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone met for the first time in Kentucky at Stone’s home in 1824, and the two men developed a mutually respectful friendship. They had many differences: Campbell was a wealthy landowner from the North, while Stone’s movement lived on the edge of poverty in the South. They did not agree on doctrine of the Trinity, beliefs on the purpose and function of baptism, naming of congregations, and roles of ministers and elders. Despite these differences, the two movements decided to unite in 1831. The name of this united group is contested by religious historians, and they are largely called the “Stone-Campbell movement” to avoid creating confusion with the present day Disciples of Christ, Christian Church, or Churches of Christ. Their foundational principles were unity grounded in New Testament principles, evangelism, the believer’s baptism as immersion for the forgiveness of sins, millennialism, opposition to credalism and theological constructs, congregational independence, leadership by elders and deacons instead of ministers, unadorned buildings, simple worship, straightforward, text-based preaching, and the weekly observation of the Lord’s Supper and over the next three decades their deep commitment to unity overrode most of their differences. By the beginnings of the Civil War this movement boasted over 200,000

86 Foster and Holloway, *Renewing God’s People*, 54.


88 Foster and Holloway, *Renewing God’s People*, 61.

members in twenty-nine states and two territories. \(^{90}\) But fractures began to occur as early as the 1950s around the use of instrumental worship, missionary societies, the pastor system, and ideas on how a church best pleased God. Many histories of the Stone-Campbell Movement deny that The Civil War served as a major catalyst for division, although recent scholarship has begun to admit the schism. In 1860, two-thirds of the congregations were in the North and one-third were in the South. Both Stone and Alexander were opposed to slavery but were also opposed to abolition. \(^{91}\) Following the Civil War, these issues continued to exaggerate widening divisions. Churches in the South had lost members to the war or to the West and were on the verge of destitution. For these churches, the use of simple a cappella worship was a financial necessity. Meanwhile, churches in the North prospered and enjoyed increased membership and new construction and instruments. Compounded by disagreements on views of the Bible, understandings of the silence of scripture, and the basis for Christian unity, the Stone-Campbell Movement was divided into Churches of Christ with a membership of 160,000 and Disciples of Christ with a membership of 983,000 in the 1906 U.S. Bureau of the Census. \(^{92}\)

In the first half of the twentieth century, the Churches of Christ enjoyed a swelling membership. By 1936, they had grown to 434,000 members. \(^{93}\) The character of

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\(^{91}\) Foster and Holloway, *Renewing God’s People*, 83-95.


the group shifted during this era, and the Church of Christ began to isolate themselves both from other religious groups and larger society on the whole. Members continued to be poor working class who shared many fundamentalist values: opposition to alcohol, dancing, card playing, the theater, cosmetics, extravagant clothing and frivolous activity especially on Sundays. Leadership defended literal interpretation of the Bible in its full inspiration, and resisted evolution, higher criticism, the social gospel, parachurch organizations, instrumental worship, and the public involvement of women in church leadership and worship.94 Individual congregations continued to enjoy the freedom to select their own ministers without any formal ordination process. This is the era when the Churches of Christ became known more for what they did not do and who they were not, although they continued to have a very high view of scripture rather than creeds or confessions and placed great value on personal spiritual growth through interaction with the text and private prayer and study. The Church of Christ remained very evangelistic, and deeply cared for the poor, the hungry, and their children, but in many ways, the Churches of Christ remained deeply enmeshed with their Southern Civil War roots and gained a reputation for “believing they are the only ones going to Heaven.”95 This doctrine led to a severe disconnect between doctrine and unified life in community in Churches of Christ, and laid the groundwork for an identity crisis in the second half on the twentieth century.

Following World War II, the Churches of Christ began to build schools and seminaries, and in the 1960’s, largely shifted from the Democratic to the Republican


95 Foster and Holloway, *Renewing God’s People*, 83-95.108-111.
party. While the group enjoyed another swelling of membership between the 1960’s and 1980’s, it then plateaued and began to sink. Some scholars attribute this shift to the ability for younger generations to attend schools sanctioned by their parents that in turn challenged the magisterium of the fellowship. Some attribute this shift to the church’s alignment with the Republican party as creating internal division that flies in the face of the founding principles of the group. Doug Foster, a Restoration historian within the Churches of Christ schools, defines this shift as “identity crisis:”

This psychological term refers to a state in which a person or institutions have lost a clear concept of their defining attributes. Perhaps, having lived isolated for so long in their own subculture or having mindlessly moved along with the larger culture, they find themselves caught off guard by change…. Not having a clear picture of whom they really are and having based their identity on culturally-defined externals that have begun to radically change, a crisis occurs.  

Many Churches of Christ are reaching back to their origins and attempting to reclaim their original identity from Stone and the Campbells. The preacher of the largest Church of Christ in the country approached Christian Church leaders in 2004 to propose the idea of a “family reunion” in 2006, 100 years following the split. Other Churches of Christ are rethinking their doctrines and traditions that seem to be costing them membership. These specific issues are the same issues with which the group has always struggled – race relations, gender roles, sexuality, worship styles, baptism, and interpretation of the Bible. Many of these issues are represented by the findings in this study. One strategy that everyone is beginning to agree has obviously failed the Churches of Christ is the push to force everyone to take sides. Churches of Christ are attempting to be more open, to face

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97 Ibid., 120.
more difficult conversations, and to embrace larger culture in an inclusive and loving manner. One just hopes it is not too late.

**Transmission of Church Messaging as Survival Narratives**

Churches have two primary methods of growth and sustainability – conversion and retention. A 2001 study claimed that the most important factor driving evangelical growth was fertility.\(^9^8\) This study examines the language evangelical churches use to insure its own survival through the cultural capital it imparts to its youth. This study reveals that these messages are often conforming and are successful only if the listener chooses to remain within the church system. The evangelical church transmits survival narratives to its youth by means of two methods: through family systems and through youth ministry.

**Family Systems**

The evangelical church has been accused of “familism,” or the deep sense that the traditional family is at the heart of what God wants for all humans.\(^9^9\) Faith in Jesus compels evangelicals to nurture and protect their own family systems, as well as taking measures to ensure that others share this priority and have opportunities and knowledge of how to create their own nuclear family.\(^1^0^0\) Because of this focus on the family, the evangelical church places a high premium on the spiritual health and success of its youth. Indeed, the success of the nuclear family is central to the survival of the evangelical


church. Entire institutions centered around successful parenting, healthy families, and family values have sprung up within the evangelical church,\textsuperscript{101} often producing evangelical celebrities.\textsuperscript{102} Evangelicals have interpreted the Bible to understand the family as a central plank in their moral worldview,\textsuperscript{103} and this protection of the nuclear family informs the evangelical position on divorce, gay marriage, and extramarital sex. The evangelical church will survive into the next generation through the reproduction of its youth, therefore, the high view of the nuclear family must be modeled, protected and reified. Part of how this reification of family values works is the creation of a “counter-culture” mentality, a tension with larger culture. In fact, this tension between culture and evangelicalism has been found by social scientists to be a causal element in evangelical vitality,\textsuperscript{104} and reifies the evangelical image of the nuclear family as a powerful force that defends and is protected by the Christian faith.

In 2013, three sociologists from the University of Southern California released a landmark study that was the result of over thirty-five years of research. The Longitudinal Study of Generations was a study in eight waves among over 350 families comprised of more than 3,500 individuals. The ages of the subjects ranged over almost 100 years. The research question was simple: What is it that sustains religious continuity across generations in some families, and what leads to a break in that continuity in other

\textsuperscript{101} Focus on the Family is probably the most widely recognized institution, in addition to The Christian Family and Christian Family Life. Evangelical educative institutions often offer family ministry majors, Christian marriage and family therapy degrees, and family life science classes as well. Since the 1980s this focus has been mobilized into a voting bloc.

\textsuperscript{102} Such as James Dobson, Gary Smalley and Beverley LaHaye

\textsuperscript{103} Wellman, Evangelical vs. Liberal, 69.

families? The study measured for dimensions: religious intensity, religious participation, biblical literalism, and civic religiosity. Evangelicals were found to be particularly successful at passing their faith down through the generations, and this success is largely due to the emphasis of family values in evangelical churches. In fact, Bengston discovered that the transmission of faith to younger evangelicals is considered an aspect of Christian stewardship, worthy of great cost and labor within the church system. For evangelicals, youth are one of the great resources, and the connection between church and family is constantly reinforced and encouraged through activities built around family engagement and high family involvement in religious education. Intergenerational activities are strongly encouraged and rewarded. This close alignment between family and church points to a blurred line in this study. When participants discussed survival narratives, they switched fluidly between narratives received from parents, older family members, parents of friends, church teachers and pastors. If the study questions specifically asked for messages received from parents, those narratives were the first narratives mentioned, but other narratives received from other community members soon followed. Strong reinforcement between family and church was the first of three factors that led to high generational continuity. Second was strong religious role modeling of previous generations, and third was a high degree of

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106 Bengston, 55.

107 Ibid., 177.

family closeness characterized by frequent interaction and support. Likewise, there were four factors that undermined religious continuity which are supported by the findings of this study: marriage outside the faith, authoritative parental religiosity and the perception that religion is being forced, the perception of parental hypocrisy, and other role models who discourage religious transmission. As the current study reveals, parenting style and familial affinity has a huge impact on the success of religious transmission. Parents who were warm and affirming found greater success, while authoritarian parents had less success. Also supported by this study is the conclusion that parental hypocrisy was one of the leading detriments to faith transmission. While several studies have examined the effectiveness of family relationship and the transmission of faith, these studies are examining relationships and not the effects of ecclesial messages delivered through the amplifier of family systems. This study seeks not to examine the relationship, although the health of the relationship is obviously an important variable in the successful transmission of religious messages but seeks instead to examine how evangelical messages germane to a child’s identity benefit or wound a child’s identity. Several of the participants in this study claim that they were members of warm, nurturing, supportive families who did their best to be consistent and honest Christians, who still delivered hurtful and oppressive church messages to their youth. Some of the evangelical messages delivered to the youth through family systems were toxic enough to override close familial and community relationships and the avoidance of

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109 Bengston, 181.

110 Ibid., 182.

111 Ibid., 186.
the appearance of hypocrisy. Along with more and more of America’s youth, several of the participants in this study now identify as “spiritual but not religious,” and have attempted to maintain close relationships with their families and communities without participating in evangelical church, with mixed results. Scholars agree that families who are capable of nurturing relationships such as these without forcing the religious issue stand the greatest chance of youth returning to the evangelical church one day.

**Youth Ministry**

Studies that examined the messages the evangelical church propagated in order to secure its future led inevitably to the field of evangelical youth ministry. In order to thoroughly examine how the evangelical church is passing down cultural capital to its youth in order for it to survive, we must look at the programs the evangelical church has designed and institutionalized around its youth. This search yielded an abundance of source material, as the evangelical church is highly invested in its youth.

The field of evangelical youth ministry is vast and in-depth. As Wellman discovered in his study of Pacific Northwest evangelical and liberal churches, evangelical

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113 Bengston, 197; Smith, 270; Wellman, 283.

114 Keywords I examined for this thread included religious parental advice/counsel, religious community advice/counsel, evangelical parental/community advice/counsel, church messaging, evangelical cultural capital, and communal cultural capital.

115 This section on youth ministry is not specific to any denomination and is certainly not a comprehensive representation of youth ministries in the Churches of Christ. Much of the literature written by the Church of Christ for its youth ministries has come out of the Church of Christ colleges and universities, and has been written by ministry veterans, educators, and scholars of ministry. In the 1990’s, three professors (Carly Dodd, Communications; David Lewis, Psychology; Darryl Tippens, English) from Abilene Christian University compiled a quantitative study examining the culture of adolescent faith, another over adolescent substance abuse, and a third over adolescent sexuality. These are the only academic research projects on adolescence in the Churches of Christ to my knowledge.
churches will invest serious resources in the training and community of their young.

Wellman points out that for many evangelical families, church programming for the children and adolescents is often the deciding factor in choosing a church.116 Likewise, if evangelical youth are not enjoying church, it is seen as the church’s fault and the family either begins to search for a new church or become deeply invested in improving those ministries. Often, evangelical youth ministries welcome family engagement in multi-generational ministries. In the liberal churches Wellman examined, the fastest growing liberal churches were those that focused on young people. Part of this focus is because the evangelical church views itself involved in a “culture war,” where their ideologies and priorities are under attack from secular forces, and intact families and the younger generation are the first line of defense. This priority of establishing a “counter-culture” is taken very seriously and is considered an ongoing battle. I was struck by how many of the youth and children’s programming and music I found online used militaristic language to describe the themes and values of the community. The evangelical community seeks to defend itself by creating a strong support system within the church, to insure its future, but also to train youth in evangelism so they will grow the larger family through outreach and conversion.117 Evangelical churches pour enormous resources into their youth ministries, investing huge sums of money, space and adult


116 Wellman, *Evangelical vs. Liberal*, 166.
117 Ibid., 278.
labor into creating attractive and meaningful events and programs for their young.

Several churches examined by both Smith and Bengston joked that their best ministers were over their youth and children’s ministries. Invested youth are rewarded with a varied network of support in the larger “body of Christ” and receive economic, social, and spiritual guidance in addition to access to wisdom from older members and a peer group to create a space of belonging and acceptance.

The evangelical church prioritizes its youth ministries because it desires to create an experience of value, a sense of community and a hopeful future for its young, to insure the continuation and flourishing of the institution, and third, to confirm the eternal salvation of its children. I chose to build this study on the foundations of Bengston, Wellman and Smith primarily because they are respected scholars in their field who have all done groundbreaking and landmark academic studies on evangelical youth, but also because they are kind and thorough in their communication of the urgency of evangelical eschatology. The evangelical church are biblical literalists, and they believe there is a literal heaven and a literal hell, and after death every person’s soul will go to one place or the other. The salvation of their young is understandably a huge priority in this case, and a church who will help children choose good friends and make wise choices so as to not risk their eternal salvation is worth great financial and emotional investment.

Because of these evangelical priorities for youth ministry, it is difficult to underestimate the resources available to evangelical youth ministries. The U.S. Evangelical

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118 Wellman, 278; Bengston, *Families and Faith*, 192.

Church has created institutions dedicated to the study of healthy youth ministry, which employ scholars in sociology, psychology, theology, and ministry to provide books, events, trips, seminars, conferences and resources for evangelical youth ministers and families. Preeminent among these institutions are YouthSpecialities and the Fuller Youth Institute. In the 1960’s, Mike Yaconelli and Wayne Rice began to write curriculum and books for the infant age of youth ministry, traveling the country and speaking to church leadership about the future of youth ministry and the survival of their churches. The first YouthSpecialties National Youth Workers’ Convention was held in 1970 and has since become an annual institution attended by thousands of youth workers.

YouthSpecialities provides resources for youth workers written by youth workers.

The Fuller Youth Institute is leading the way in evangelical academic youth study. The Fuller Youth Institute through Fuller Theological Seminary provides lay resources created from academic research examining teenagers and their religiosity. In 2004, FYI initiated the College Transition Project, a four-wave longitudinal study on 500 high school seniors who were active in their youth ministries from the time they graduated high school through their third year of college. Interviews were both quantitative and qualitative, and examined five faith measures. From the data of these studies came “Sticky Faith:” “a ministry framework and parenting philosophy backed by practical and proven ideas to help develop long-term faith in teenagers.” The Sticky Faith FYI series provides resources for youth ministries to employ to help students

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maintain faith commitments into their young adult years. Additionally, between 2012-2015, FYI also launched the Churches Engaging Young People project, a study over churches practicing effective youth ministry, churches who are “Growing Young.” Through over 1300 qualitative and quantitative interviews with different churches, scholars and pastors, FYI created the “Growing Young” series of resources for churches to examine how they are engaging young people. Based on the data from this study, FYI determined there are six core commitments of churches who are “growing young,” and released a 60 questions assessment survey that churches can use to determine their strengths and weaknesses. Results from the survey include programming ideas, instructional videos, an hour of free coaching from the FYI team, and execution timeline and a discussion guide.\textsuperscript{122} An informal survey of evangelical youth ministers revealed that YouthSpecialties resources and the Fuller Youth Institute are the most trendy right now, in addition to curriculum published through Orange and the Youth Cartel, and ministry resources available through other evangelical youth ministries such as Willow Creek in Chicago and Saddleback in Southern California.

While these studies are comprehensive and collaborative, the language and measures are still very evangelical. Survey questions observed “sin markers” in the subjects as evidence that their faith was waning, such as extramarital sex or alcohol or drug use. The language used in these resources is still very binary, while straining against those boundaries in the name of love. The contention of this dissertation is that these binaries are part of what is not only leading to the shrinking size of the evangelical

\textsuperscript{122} These six commitments are leadership, warmth, empathy, priority, neighbor, and gospel. Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, \textit{Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016).
church, but more importantly, contributing to violence done to evangelical youth.

Christian Smith challenged the field of evangelical youth study to “move beyond simply identifying statistical correlation” and to begin “actually theorizing the real causal social mechanisms at work ‘beneath’” in order to create a fuller understanding of “why and how the correlation exists.”\textsuperscript{123} Such is the goal of this dissertation, with the necessary caveat that this study is not concerned with the survival of the evangelical church, nor necessarily deeply concerned with the survival of individual evangelical faith, which seems to be driving the resources mentioned here. The concerns of this dissertation rest with the well-being of the individual, particularly the young individual who has experienced marginalization at the hands of evangelical church, and the exposure of those narratives communicating oppression transmitted both formally and informally through the church and the family.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This dissertation is a qualitative project in liberative social ethics. It is rooted in constructivist qualitative inquiry and is specifically a phenomenological project.\textsuperscript{124} The point and the risk of qualitative research is that you do not know what you are going to find, and you should not presume you know. In this dissertation, I strive to describe a process, and to do so rigorously by analyzing patterns that emerged in the data gathered through interviews and observations through the lens of social ethics. For the sake of clarity, I will describe the different methodologies I have employed by dividing the chapter into two separate sections, the social ethics methodology in section one and the qualitative methodology in the second section.

A qualitative methodology allows me to privilege the voices of those who could be otherwise marginalized by requiring the investigator to identify and own his or her own prejudices and assumptions before each stage of the interview process: during the creation and revision of the interview questions, while thinking of recruitment methods and materials, while choosing demographics and locations for interviews, and particularly when reviewing, coding and analyzing the data. Qualitative research expects the

\textsuperscript{124} Creswell defines phenomenology as follows: “Researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning.” J.W. Creswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Traditions. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 52
investigator to become well-practiced in owning his or her personal location and lens, and then laying it aside to the best of his or her ability and adopting a posture of committed listening. Because of these expectations and commitments, a rigorous and valid qualitative methodology is particularly suited to the liberative practice of social ethics.

**Part I: Social Ethics Methodology**

Although this dissertation relies on qualitative interviews to allow the voices of evangelical young adults to emerge, both white and Latinx, these are not groups of which I am currently a member. I also was a white young adult affiliated with the Church of Christ at one time, I have since been through processes of graduate education and life experiences outside that world that mean that I am not an insider to the communities that even my white participants represent. Because of the potential colonizing aspects of qualitative research, the concerns that I could try to speak on behalf of others, especially those who represent a nondominant demographic of which I am not a part, I had to take special care to approach this project in a liberative rather than a colonizing manner, while recognizing that the potential for power imbalance remains. In order to place an intentional check on my power as the researcher, I made every effort to employ a hermeneutical circle as defined by liberation theologians as a personal plumb line.

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125 The phrase “hermeneutical circle” was originally created by Friedrich Schleiermacher [Friedrich Schleiermacher D. E. "The Hermeneutics: Outline of the 1819 Lectures," *New Literary History*, Vol.10, No. 1, Literary Hermeneutics (Autumn, 1978)] to describe the relationship between a reader, the text, and the environment of the text. In the wake of the Medellin Document of 1968 (Latin American Bishops, *Poverty of the Church*, Spring Hill College Theology Library, September 6, 1968, accessed February 22, 2018 http://theolibrary.shc.edu/poverty.htm) and the Second Vatican Council, liberation theologians (specifically Gustavo Gutierrez, Juan Segundo, Jose Bonino, and Leonardo and Clodovis Boff) proposed a hermeneutical circle that began not with the text but with context, with the lived experiences of daily realities of those on the margins of society. According to Juan Segundo, changes in biblical interpretation should be dictated by individual and social shifts in reality and should require ongoing traveling between day-to-day experiences and the text. Therefore, interpretation adjusts as the context shifts. (Juan Luis Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1976, 7-8.)
Owing to the gathering, analysis, synthesis and delivery of the data. According to De La Torre, the hermeneutical circle is a paradigm to “do ethics,” which is “motivated by a passion to establish justice-based relationships from which love can flow,” and “begins with the lived experience of oppressive social situations and proceeds by working out a theory and then a course of action that will dismantle the mechanisms that cause oppression.”

As an educated, heterosexual, white middle-class Christian woman, I represent the dominant culture in the United States. Therefore, this hermeneutical circle requires different engagement from me and a critical level of self-checking and hermeneutical

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126 Liberation theologians employ a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (a term borrowed and repurposed from Paul Ricouer) to indicate the impossibility of a truly neutral reading of the bible. Any interaction with sacred text must be understood as “bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way.” (Segundo, Liberation of Theology, 8.) To regard theology with suspicion means to make room in interpretation for current social agendas or priorities before initiating praxis, looking at social causes that might have influenced how and why the interpretation exists.

127 One critique of this methodology may stem from the use of the term “circle,” which implies a “static, perfect and finished figure.” Perhaps the term “hermeneutical circulation” from George Casalis and applied by Gustavo Gutierrez would be more appropriate, in order to imply an ongoing process that is never complete (Robert McAfee Brown, 1978). Another critique of this method has to do with the discomfort in the US social ethics community when a Eurocentric model of “doing ethics” is placed on its head. Traditionally, an ethical model begins with an examination of theory or truth, which leads to action or praxis. According to De La Torre, orthopraxis flows from orthodoxy. This issue is that those holding the deductive tools and microphones have historically been deeply invested in reifying the Eurocentric preference, and so the experiences of the oppressed are silenced. De La Torre’s hermeneutic circle seeks to remedy this omission by beginning with the experiences of the oppressed and ends with praxis “informed by considerations of social analysis, philosophy, and biblical hermeneutics” (De La Torre, “Liberation Theology,” Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views, 2014). Laura Sivers questions whether it is ever truly possible to remove an ethical model from a Eurocentric definition of justice, and other Western biblical scholars declare any ethical model must begin with a study of scripture to be considered in agreement with Christian praxis, but if we are seeking stories from the margins, and seeking justice for those on the margins, perhaps it is best to allow those doing ethics from the margins to guide our way instead of insisting on our own path. I choose to employ this method because I am attempting to find a means for dominant ethicists to join in the liberative work already underway along the margins instead of creating a Western European model and asking the marginalized to conform to my standard.

128 Miguel De La Torre, Doing Christian Ethics from the Margin, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 58-69. De La Torre’s hermeneutical circle consists of five steps or stages and begins with the daily lived experience of the oppressed. The stages are observation, reflection, prayer, action, and reassessment, which lead back to observation. The steps are constantly evolving and self-monitoring and correcting, and serve as a method not only of analyzing the data but as a method for understanding correct practice instead of simply correct theory.
suspicion as compared to someone whose identity is more multiply marked by membership in marginalized or nondominant communities. As I describe each of the steps within the hermeneutical circle, I will describe how I engaged these steps throughout each step of research and how the process influenced the final shape of the overall project.

**Step 1: Observing/ Listening**

My method of social analysis is qualitative study and will be laid out in great detail in section two, but for now I will say I chose to do a qualitative study in an effort to hold the microphone to voices often silenced by a group in which I have enjoyed great privilege. A qualitative researcher must initially be able to observe and listen well during the interviews, and then later to the data, to her peer reviewers and to her members checkers. The liberation hermeneutical circle is how I went about reflecting on those observations. As this hermeneutic begins with the lived experiences of the oppressed,129 the first step of any ethicist is observing the structures in place that benefit some and oppress others. The risk of observation is always in the interpretation of s/he who “sees,” and is at the cost of h/she who is “seen,” or who becomes the subject. Having the space and ability to interpret what is seen creates a power dynamic between observer and observed.130 This power structure continues to create additional difficulties for marginalized communities, especially in cases like this when the story is being filtered.

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129 Gustavo Gutierrez describes the initial lived stage of theological hermeneutics in its approach to liberation as “knowledge shot through with the ‘savored’ experience first of God but then also of the people and culture to which we belong.” (Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1971), xxxv.) Rather than rushing to declare orthodoxy, we reflect on praxis. Before creating doctrines, the history and experiences of the people affected by it must be considered. This stage is one of dialogue, humility and vulnerability for the liberation theologian as context is critical for understanding the specific interpretations of text.

130 De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margin*, 58.
through the lens of a member of a dominant group. Michel Foucault discusses “le regard” (roughly translated as “the gaze”) as a tool of discipline and normalization when he explains,

the examination” as a tool for correct training: “It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them…. At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected.\(^\text{131}\)

In this instance, “the gaze” is the locus for power, for he or she who “gazes” holds the ability to identify and label, to assign a hierarchical level, to enforce meaning or to dismiss. The weight of providing information, for teaching, for sharing data is placed upon the subject, and the observer merely absorbs, watches, and decides what is valuable.

The observer is able to decide what information is acceptable for transmission, and to decide how to best communicate that information, and for what motive. Should the observer have an agenda, and therefore look for specific data to further that agenda, even if it is at the cost of the subject, that power potential lies within he or she who gazes. It is impossible for one outside a specific dynamic to not interpret, or to not try and translate what is being observed into a comfortable context understandable to the observer. It is therefore critical for a conscientious, well-intentioned observer to employ specific strategies as a corrective to these potential power plays. While every pitfall of “the gaze” may not be fully eliminated, it can certainly be mitigated. I will detail a few of those mitigating strategies I employed during my research and data organization and analysis in the second section of this chapter, but it is important to recognize and admit that a certain level of this dynamic will always exist.

Especially in something like a qualitative dissertation, stories and experiences are shared through the filter of the author and rely on his or her ability to communicate accurately. Because my dissertation initially and primarily prioritized the voices of Latinx young adults, I chose to do interviews in order to allow these young people to speak for themselves. Their words guide my discoveries and findings, and to the best of my ability I have attempted to allow them to stand on their own. For a representative of dominant culture, the stage of “observation” becomes that of “listening.”

As I conducted the interviews with my subjects and observed them revealing their personal narratives, I began to frame the kind of listening required of me as a non-colonizing qualitative researcher theologically. The listening required of me was a different kind of listening. Listening differently within larger religious communities provides an empowering means to hear the world around us uninterrupted, engaging our communities in speaking for themselves, and understanding people as they tell their own stories and communicate their own needs and desires and wishes and dreams without our interpretation.

**Step 2: Reflecting (Qualitative Study/ Data coding and organization)**

The goals of step two are an effort to “ground ethics in analysis in order to best discern reality,” and is the clearest connection to qualitative analysis. Gutierrez defines

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132 As a reminder, I am identifying my study participants who self-identified as Latin American descendants as Latinx to honor the intersectionality of their many identities, and to move beyond simple gender binaries.

133 De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margin*, 62. Segundo’s second of four decisive factors needed for a hermeneutic circle suggest the need for an interruption of the cycle, a break for analysis and application to test the adequacy and impact of the initial suspicion in order to not reify systems of oppression. (Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 13-19).
good theology as “critical reflection on humankind, on basic human principles.”

In the work of the Christian ethicist, good theological reflection must necessarily be “a criticism of society and the church.”

In this stage, the ethicist must pause and examine what she has found thus far, and honestly face what the data says about society and the church. To this end, I employed qualitative coding and organization as described in the second part of this chapter. Because it is impossible for me to understand or relate to the experiences of the Latinx members of my study, I chose qualitative study and data analysis in an effort to provide a scaffold for the narratives of the participants to stand on their own as much as possible, independent from my filters and lenses. An unexpected benefit to this study is how difficult this posture makes it for audiences to dismiss the conclusions of the study. Many stories contributing to the dissertation speak of death-dealing structures within the evangelical religious system that cannot be discounted. These are not my opinions – these are the lived experiences of members of a specific faith community speaking truth to power, and they reveal gendered, racial, classist and homophobic religious practices.

**Step 3: Praying (Grieving)**

Praying as I collected and interpreted the interview data proved to be a critical crossroads in the completion of this project. Segundo encourages a prayerful step in order for the ethicist to take a measured pause between reflection and action, because to do otherwise could very well lead to reactionary rather than informed responses.

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135 Ibid.

136 De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics*, 63.
Jesus went away in his anger to make a whip before driving the money changers out of his Father’s house, so should the ethicist take a step back from the conclusions of her social analysis for theological and Biblical analysis. Given the sometimes painful and traumatic stories shared by the young people I interviewed, and the stark differences between the white and Latinx participants, step three brought an unexpected stage to pass through, the stage of grief.

For a critically thinking member of the dominant culture to hear life-draining stories of those on the margins of a faith community they represented, many emotions avail themselves. Step three is best taken within community, because ethics is a communal activity, particularly social ethics. In my faith community, when members would ask me what I was finding in my dissertation analysis and I would tell them, they responded with two primary emotions: guilt or anger. Responding to stories such as the ones in this dissertation with either guilt or anger is a privilege of dominant culture. Guilt and anger feel good, but both have problematic impacts for the young participants in my study.

Anger dismisses the offered narratives of the young adults by performing some level of intellectual gymnastics in which the member of the dominant culture can become

137 John 2:14-16
138 De La Torre, Doing Christian Ethics, 64.
139 Katherine Turpin examined the emergence of these very emotions among relatively privileged seminary students when faced with course content that challenged their understandings of their religious and cultural contexts by revealing dominant narratives that ignored social oppression. Turpin stated that these students could not “afford to learn of their privilege because of the enormous costs to their self-understanding and the understanding of their communities at large.” (Katherine Turpin, “Disrupting the Luxury of Despair: Justice and Peace Education in Contexts of Relative Privilege,” in Teaching Theology and Religion, 58, no.4 (2008): 142.) Turpin five characteristic temptations of students learning about justice, two of which are echoed here: anger and the desire to “fix it.”
the victim. Upon reception of a story from the margin, the member of dominant culture feels attacked and responds with anger. Anger feels good because it discounts what is being said as incorrect or petulant, and therefore does not need to be acknowledged. Shielding oneself with anger provides room not to listen any longer, to construct one’s next point of attack while the Other is speaking, and to resort to name calling or stereotypes in order to diminish the perceived opposing side. After repeated practice, those who feel angry learn to recognize potential marginalized language coming and can respond with a few practiced catchphrases (Snowflake! SJW! Libtard!), thus shutting down conversation before it even begins.\(^\text{140}\) This method, obviously, requires even greater linguistic flexibility and dexterity of the marginalized community to try and deduce those perceived triggers that “marginalized language is coming” and twist and turn their words around the barricades guarding the angry dominant culture. Part of the grieving I experienced came from the responses from members of the Churches of Christ upon hearing a brief summary of my findings. When I shared with them stories of their own youth that revealed classist, racist, sexist and homophobic tendencies within our community, I found them to perform behaviors that were alienating and defensive rather than listening. I was further grieved because I once performed the same thing, and in this study, I directly faced the repercussions of those actions.

The other major response I received in sharing what I was learning within my own white evangelical community, or friends and family, was guilt. Guilt feels good because it feels like you are doing something, like you are not part of the problem, because you are upset by what you are hearing. Guilt is easy to move in and out of, also. A guilty member of dominant culture will slip back into guilt from time to time upon being reminded of an Other’s experience and will seek to remove the guilty feeling by volunteering to tutor at an after-school program, or by donating money to a shelter, or by writing an angry Facebook post about immigration. Then, guilt momentarily assuaged, they can slip back into a life of privilege feeling good about him/herself. Shannon Sullivan calls these efforts to distance one’s white self from racism and establish a “colorblindness” as “white middle-class goodness.” She critiques these behaviors for being more concerned with securing an anti-racist identity and assuaging white guilt than with confronting and acting against systems of racism and pursuing justice work.\footnote{Shannon Sullivan, \textit{Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism}, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014).} Guilt is the engine behind charity – it is not justice. Justice seeks to ask why – charity simply seeks to remove the thorn from the paw in the moment, so the dominant culture can feel good about being dominant, or at least identify someone else as the problem.

Racial Identity development models have been constructed around minority communities in the United States since the mid 1900’s.\footnote{While there are earlier models, W.E. Cross’s 1971 Nigrescence Model seems to stand as a landmark for racial identity development study. "The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience". \textit{Black World}.20 (9): 13–27.} In the 1990’s, psychologist
Janet Helm constructed a white racial identity development model.\textsuperscript{143} This model, obviously, was very different in construction than the minority racial identity development models, but in one crucial way: a white person can choose to exit development at any time. No one else enjoys that privilege. A white person may disengage from the hard work of understanding what it means to be white in the United States, surround him or herself with others who are also choosing to disengage (because there are a lot of communities to choose from), and never really think about it again. According to Helm, a white person choosing to abandon their racial identity development can exist quite successfully as a passive racist and simply change the channel, buy different music, live in a specific suburb, attend a specific school, and shop in certain places. To choose to continue to engage in white racial identity development requires the exact same commitment that hermeneutical circle requires of an ethicist from the dominant culture: The willingness to prayerfully sit with grief. These two must work in tandem. To just sit and grieve leads to hopelessness and can lead to immobility or wallowing. The goal of prayer is not to seek comfort or forgiveness, but to perform humility and choose a different path. Katherine Turpin challenges those from dominant culture to “come to terms with their limited agency and power in the face of injustice, to

feel the weight of unjust structures and allow this knowledge to become self-implicating.”¹⁴⁴ To grieve injustice is to “feel the weight” of it, to not attempt escape or comfort. To be prayerful in one’s grief is to seek discernment. To be prayerful in one’s grief seeks a next step and moves the griever beyond the sadness into action.

Grieving injustice is the only way for those of dominant cultures to understand that injustice does not only hurt those it targets, it damages those who benefit as well through feelings of separation from community, loneliness, fear, experiences of deception, and realization of loss of contributions of entire society.¹⁴⁵ The only way for this ethical process to be authentic was for me to prayerfully sit with the grief of my findings. My instinct was to do something, to fix it, to rebut it, to slide into guilt to buy a “Black Lives Matter” T-shirt. It is much more difficult to just sit in the grief and not seek relief, yet that is the only path toward authenticity.

**Step 4: Acting**

One peculiar pitfall of grief is its ability to freeze time. But at some point, the grieving must end and we must act. De La Torre posits that an ethic is not an ethic until it is performed: “Theorizing about justice, regardless of a person’s best intentions, changes nothing.”¹⁴⁶ This is not a hermeneutic of simple silent reflection and prayer. The liberation scholars are united in their calls to action; For those experiencing injustice,

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Boff recommends liberative action: “The poor, organized and conscientized, are beating down at their master’s doors, demanding life, bread, liberty, and dignity. Courses of action are now being taken to release the liberty that is being held captive.” Segundo calls for a move to apply new interpretations of the Bible into social liberation of the community. A question must be held constantly before the social ethicist from a dominant culture: Is it all possible for a cis-gendered heteronormative ethicist to act justly at all? Perhaps, but I propose that the hermeneutic circle for ethics requiring action involves a few extra steps.

I propose that the first act of the ethicist of the dominant culture is that of confession. The Christian church can only be true followers of Jesus Christ by aligning themselves with poor and oppressed, “working out the gospel of liberation.” Unless the ethicist recognizes the ways in which he or she has benefitted from and reified the structures and systems responsible for the injustice, those systems of oppression remain entrenched. Unless the ethicist admits and grieves over his or her latent racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and ageism, any act committed by him or her in the name of justice stands to possibly do more harm than good.

Although confession is the first action that must occur among dominant cultures, it must be deliberate and intentional. A true act of confession is one of humility and vulnerability, and requires the revelation of a soft spot, of a tender underbelly. The confession needs to be made to another who has the authority to offer correction and


\[149\] Boff, 7.
guidance and is not burdened by the act of confession. This is simply another way of recentering the conversation around the dominant group, because the issue was not actual confession leading to change — it was about the comfort of the dominant group. I am suggesting that actual confession is not about seeking comfort, or even seeking forgiveness. It is about recognizing that a wrong has been committed, and honestly seeking ways to try and correct a wrong if at all possible, not acting as though one is performing a favor by granting that someone else has been right all along.

**Step 5: Reassessing**

The process of “doing ethics” is never complete — one has never “arrived” as an ethicist with no more learning.\(^{150}\) The process of ethics is deeply ingrained within the ethicist and springs from constant reflection and correction on one’s motives, one’s impact, and one’s learning. This is again another reason why ethics is best done within community — the presence of conversation partners from like community is invaluable as we sharpen and challenge one another to greater growth. Based on the data from this study, the communities represented here are largely white communities who are white and unaware of their privilege, to a large degree, and have reinforced white fragility and used their communities as a form of social norming and re-norming, I am suggesting that this has happened because these communities have largely functioned within a vacuum in

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\(^{150}\) Scholars who employ the hermeneutic circle for theology and ethics understand it as a pliant, evolving thing, never firmly established and complete. Schleiermacher described the circle as movement between the individual and the whole (Friedrich Schleiermacher D. E. "The Hermeneutics: Outline of the 1819 Lectures," *New Literary History*, Vol.10, No. 1, Literary Hermeneutics (Autumn, 1978), while Segundo declared that the hermeneutic circle is alive as theology is alive, and as biblical interpretation affects change on our reality, our reality in turn requires repeated biblical interpretation. (Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 32). Because human context and experience is constantly shifting and adjusting, so must an ethical hermeneutic. Reassessment of hermeneutic conclusions results in a “decision for newness” that motivates new praxis that is “lived in the option for the poor” (Gilberto and Silva Gorgulho, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Mysterium Liberations*, ed. By Ignacio Ellacura and Jon Sobrino, p. 123-149, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 131.) and oppressed.
which “same” was rewarded and “different” was overtly punished or literally, emotionally, and psychologically marginalized. I am advocating for a corporate humility that welcomes different voices, that recognizes a communal need for repentance and correction, and that is willing to admit that perhaps they are cloaking prejudices and fear in scriptural mandates and community expectations for belonging. Continually examining power structures and retaining the humility to allow people a voice who will speak about our biases and privilege is crucial, because we naturally seek to be comfortable and correct. But because all of us do not enjoy the privilege of the option of constant comfort, let us balance encouragement and strengthening with conviction to do the willingness to be wrong. Above all, in our final step of the hermeneutic circle of ethics, let us be teachable, malleable and reflective, so that our final step may in turn become our first step again.
Part II: Qualitative Methodology

Social Constructivism

A variety of scholars have attempted to clearly delineate the differences between qualitative and quantitative research. In a nutshell, it seems that quantitative research relies on statistical analysis for data, and qualitative relies on a variety of lived experiences. Padgett names the common perception that quantitative research is understood to be a mile wide while qualitative research is a mile deep to be “useful heuristically if a bit simplistic.” This oversimplification seems to paint qualitative research as less scientific and therefore less rigorous. It is always suspicious if two enormous fields of practice are defined by their perceived flaws. Both are empirical, and both are systematic, but qualitative research,

seeks to represent the complex worlds of respondents in a holistic, on-the-ground manner...emphasizes subjective meanings and questions the existence of a single objective reality.... It assumes a dynamic reality... it is a bricolage, a pieced-together, tightly woven whole greater than the sum of its parts.

For qualitative research to be done well and correctly the project must follow the narratives of the subjects while the researcher constantly attempts to bracket his or her personal filters and expectations. It can be said that qualitative research seeks to “understand” while quantitative research seeks to “explain.” The qualitative researcher


152 Ibid., 3

153 Padgett, Qualitative and Mixed Methods, 3.

requires a degree of courage and comfort with the power of the subject to define the research project in order to honor the voices of participants. What if the answers you get are not the ones you expected? What if the repeated story completely flies in the face of your theory? Qualitative research includes a certain degree of risk.

Regardless, for this study, I utilized a qualitative approach. This is largely due to the fact that, as an ethicist, I believe that the nuances and landscapes of particular lives are important to gain perspective on what is happening with survival narratives in specific communities. Because the topic of my dissertation is about the carrying of these distinctive narratives within young adults, quantitative data does not lend itself well to finding out what I want. I worked with Latino/a and white religious communities, and I explored some very personal and perhaps painful areas in their lives. Qualitative research allows the community to speak for itself about the nuanced particularity of their own experience without predetermined variables or questions.155

Research Design and Rationale

This project deploys a social constructivist approach156 to generating knowledge: “This paradigm allows that ‘the core of understanding is learning what people make of

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155 While both qualitative and quantitative research rely on previous literature for theory, it is true that “qualitative researchers focus on depth rather than breadth; they care less about finding averages and more about understanding specific situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important or revealing.” [Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012), 2.] Focusing on the “moment in time” is precisely what phenomenology does, as I will discuss in a moment, and identifies one of the priorities of this study as it attempts to serve the participants of the study by avoiding stereotypes, assumptions, or filters. The best way I can conceive of how to do this respectfully is through a qualitative project, where each subject may speak for him or herself.

156 Sociological scholars identify several interpretive frameworks in qualitative research. The specific titles seem to depend on the author, but a few options are as follows: realist/postpositivist, postmodernism, pragmaticism, social constructivism, and critical theory. I briefly considered the realist/postpositivist angle. The realist/postpositivist stance “acknowledges the presence of values, the provisional nature of
the world around them, how people interpret what they encounter, and how they assign meanings and values to events or objects.”¹⁵⁷ In this paradigm the interpretive lenses people deploy as they describe their own experiences receive great value, as do the life experiences of the people in the study. The goal of the research is to rely as much as possible in the participants’ views of a situation (in this case, a phenomenon) while the researcher attempts to bracket her own views and experiences with the situation as much as possible. These views of a situation are “negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in people’s lives.”¹⁵⁸

No longer are people merely subjects who carry data to be accessed, but there is room for recognition of cultural and societal systems that the subjects bring to the table that inform their perspectives. The specific contexts in which research participants live become critical in order to understand the historical and cultural influences upon the participants.

As an example of how these interpretive lenses play out in this project, I chose evangelical communities in specific geographic regions because I knew I would be granted access through those communities, but also because evangelical communities along the US/Mexico border form and employ very specific value systems evident in their survival narratives. Social constructionists believe that “groups of people create then


share understandings with each other,”¹⁵⁹ which could almost stand as a definition for a survival narrative. The survival narrative is by definition a social and communal practice because it requires a community in which to exist and a relationship in which to thrive.

Social constructionists desired to “stress the importance of recognizing that social actors’ understanding of the world is socially constructed, but not in any arbitrary or ad hoc fashion.”¹⁶⁰ Social constructionists understand that people construct and reify their realities through everyday experiences. The study of survival narratives is an attempt to examine not only how specific lived realities in specific geographic and religious locations are constructed and reified through generational wisdom, but also, through the conduit of established and trusted relationships. If “social actors ascribe meaning to situations through socially shared interpretive practices,”¹⁶¹ then the socially shared interpretive practice in this case is that of the phenomenon of the survival narrative. Through the collective and individual transmission of survival narratives, this study discusses how a religious community has established a social reality that holds some people captive while liberating others, depending on specific socially constructed identities.

Bracketing

Part of the challenge of a social constructivist framework is the positionality of the researcher. It is important for me to recognize that my own background shapes my interpretation. I was raised in an evangelical household. My father is a Church of Christ

¹⁵⁹ Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data, 19.


¹⁶¹ Ibid. 38.
minister. I myself was a Church of Christ minister for many years. I have lived, worked, studied and have chosen or blood family in every city where I did interviews. It is impossible for me to interpret data without my own cultural, historical, and personal experiences clouding my vision. My familiarity with these communities and locations is a benefit because I understand the insider language regional references. My familiarity with these communities could be a detriment as I attempt to hold them at arm’s length and examine the data I received without a personal bias. I intended to write a dissertation exploring the racial aspects of membership in evangelical communities. I was prepared to find evidence of racism in my interviews, particularly where education and religion are under examination. I did not expect to find quite so much evidence that not only is the evangelical church doing racial violence to people, it is also doing substantial gendered, classist, and homophobic violence as well, particularly where education and religion are under examination. My research questions were written specifically to create room for such discoveries, but I neither want to write a dissertation that feels like a vendetta, nor do I want to write a dissertation that makes me a martyr. My personal experience with these communities is a benefit and a detriment, because these are painful discoveries that must be revealed. I know that the revelations in this dissertation will hurt people I love, and it therefore hurts me to speak it. But who better to speak it? Because these voices deserve to be heard.

However, part of my research philosophy rests in the heart of the critical/ideological perspective as well, because critical theory has a clear focus on social justice. This paradigm seeks to “challenge dominant social structures or meaning systems and
facilitate empowerment for research participants,”162 and values the same liberative priorities as exercised in this study. The critical/ideological paradigm holds that “a discernible reality exists, but this reality reflects the oppressive influence of social, political, and historical factors.”163 This oppression is a result of “inequalities based on gender, race, social class, and sexual orientation as hidden subtexts of much of the knowledge produced by Western science. Left unchallenged, these inequalities are reinforced through power differentials that are virtually self-perpetuating.”164 The best aspect of this paradigm, in my opinion, is that it allows an avenue of direct confrontation between one who has suffered at the hands of an oppressive system, and that system itself. When a member of an oppressive system, who has benefitted greatly due to the oppression of entire groups of people, is allowed access into a community that has endured generations of suffering at the hands of this same system, I hope it is empowering to that community.

While there is a vast array of identified approaches available for qualitative study, Cresswell identifies roughly five widely acclaimed and recognized methods: grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative study, ethnography, and case study.165 Padgett includes a sixth: community-based participatory research. Within this schema, this dissertation counts as a phenomenological project. To roughly summarize, phenomenology “explores

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162 Havercamp, 268.
163 Ibid., 168.
164 Padgett, 5.
165 Creswell, 7.
the lived experience of a phenomenon.” Phenomenology examines the shared experience of several individuals of a specific concept or phenomenon: “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence.” A researcher chooses a specific phenomenon, or human experience (death, puberty, terrorism, addiction, 9/11, love) and then interviews people who have experienced this phenomenon in order to develop a universalizing sketch of the experience of this phenomenon. This sketch can then be used to distill an “essence” of this experience.

Because of my commitment to liberative social ethics, I have some conflicts with the way that qualitative researchers define this method. To attempt to universalize a human experience sounds dangerously close to essentializing an entire population and sounded as though it may run the risk of minimalizing a life-shaping experience for the sake of control of knowledge or an epistemology that overvalues universalizing knowledge. It does not serve the purpose of my study to try and come to closure about a shared experience – I would prefer to open common perception and not leave with easy, concrete conclusions. However, it seems difficult to understand the individual experiences of survival narratives within a specific community as anything other than a phenomenon, and I now understand that my personal experiences with that community

166 Padgett, 35.


168 Ibid., 60.

169 For these reasons, I was initially drawn to narrative and ethnographic study because within those approaches it seemed easier to distance the personal bias of the interviewer from the data.
uniquely qualifies me to study communal survival narratives. I also now understand that, in qualitative research, easy, concrete conclusions are not always the goal. Indeed, comfort with qualitative inquiry requires a certain degree of comfort with ambiguity.

In the end, I borrowed a position from grounded theory in that I assigned absolute agency to the participants in my project, although I entered my study with some very clear ideas on theories that explain the human process of survival and maturation and the familial exchange of social and cultural capital. I believe the researcher must be aware of and responsible for the lenses they carry into the research but must also be vigilant in not looking for specific themes to emerge. In a way, they must be willing to be surprised by what they hear from their participants.

**Phenomenology**

A phenomenological study describes “the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.” The goal is to attempt to describe what all the study participants commonly experience from one specific phenomenon in a description of the essence of that phenomenon. This description includes not only “what” the study participants experienced but also “how” they experienced it. Often, phenomenological researchers are hesitant to name and employ specific analytic techniques for fear of creating rigid rules or inflexibility with the data. Rather, the focus is on “attitude and the response to the phenomena under study” in order to “achieve an analytic description of the phenomena not affected by prior

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170 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 76.

assumptions.” In this study, the phenomenon under examination is the survival narrative. A “survival narrative” may be best understood as wisdom, advice, oral histories, directives, or counsel passed down from an older generation to a younger generation designed to help the younger generation understand and succeed in contemporary U.S. culture. It would be remiss for a phenomenological study to not include at least a passing nod to the philosophical history undergirding phenomenological inquiry.

The roots of phenomenological inquiry rest in Western European philosophers, specifically with Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger. In Germany before World War I, Husserl declared the principal of “intentionality” as the fundamental concept for the understanding and organization of “conscious acts and experiential mental practices.” For Husserl, personal experience is the underlying source for all knowledge, and the aim of phenomenology is therefore the “rigorous and unbiased study of things as they appear in order to arrive at an essential understanding of human consciousness and experience.” Husserl proposed the strategy of phenomenological reduction in order to access the individuals lived experience of a phenomenon from within. The goal is to attempt to meet the phenomenon in as free and unprejudiced a way as possible so that the phenomenon may present itself in as pure a way as possible in order to be precisely

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173 Please see Chapter 8 for a description of the essence of the survival narrative.


understood and described. Husserl therefore championed the notion of “epoche,” a Greek word meaning “to refrain from judgement or stay away from the everyday, commonplace way of perceiving things.” The concept of epoche leads to the priority of bracketing, in which the researcher can only suspend his or her preconceptions and presuppositions by making them overt and as clear as possible, thus removing the self from analysis as much as possible. In this way, the researcher takes responsibility for the lenses he or she carries within, and names them in order to be as transparent and honest in analysis as possible, revealing possible agendas, either conscious or subconscious.

Heidegger differs from Husserl in his perspective on how the lived experience should be explored, and advocates for a hermeneutic research method based on the ontological view that lived experience is by its very nature an interpretive process. Heidegger argues that “understanding is a reciprocal activity and proposed the concept of “hermeneutical circle” to demonstrate that reciprocity.” In this way, the use of a hermeneutical circle as an interpretive tool fits within the phenomenological method as the phenomenological method fits within an ethical hermeneutical circle.

Merleu-Ponty proposed that the goal of phenomenology is the rediscovery of an initial experience, or what he called the “primacy of perceptions.” Like Husserl, Merleu-Ponty advocated for a phenomenological reduction to obtain an original

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176 Moustakas, 33.
177 Dowling, 132.
178 Moustakas, 26.
179 Dowling, 133
180 Moustakas, 52-53.
awareness in order to view one’s experience in a new light, not relying upon reflection. Merleu-Ponty identified this process as a “phenomenology of origins.” In order to accurately acquire a phenomenology of origins, the researcher must set aside his or her own experience as much as possible to allow the participant’s experience to exist in its purest possible form. The truth of this possibility is still up for debate among phenomenological philosophers.

As a philosophy, phenomenology is associated with many other additional thinkers, like Gadamer, Arendt, Levinas, Sarte, Hegel and Derrida. A philosophical discussion about phenomenology emphasizes the lived experiences of an individual as they participate in both a subjective experience of a phenomenon and an objective experience in community with other people. What the researcher is trying to illuminate is an individual experience with an objective reality while doing his or her best to remove him or herself from the equation. In an effort to streamline this summary, Creswell points the phenomenological researcher to some common ground of phenomenological philosophical assumptions: phenomenology privileges the study of lived experiences of people, the view that these are conscious experiences, and that the development of essential descriptions (rather than explanations or analysis) of these experiences is critical. These three foci are the priorities of this dissertation. The participants of this study each experienced the transmissions of specific evangelical survival narratives throughout their developmental periods. In retrospect, each participant is consciously

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181 Dowling, 134.
182 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 78.
183 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 77.
aware (painfully so) of these experiences as they were intentionally and consciously (although not maliciously) delivered, and the findings section will include vivid and nuanced descriptions of these experiences.

**Study Design and Timeline**

Now that my dissertation is established as a qualitative constructivist phenomenological project, let me describe my study design. (For a visual timeline, please see Appendix C). In the Spring of 2013, I enrolled in a Latino/a Ethics class with Miguel De La Torre. Dr. De La Torre was describing his upbringing, having grown up in Hell’s Kitchen in New York City after leaving Cuba as a child. He revealed that it was not an uncommon practice for him to carry a knife on his person, because he was often required to defend himself as a youth, or at least convince others that he could. Another student asked him if his son carried a knife on his person as well. Dr. De La Torre responded, “Oh no. I carried a knife so that he doesn’t have to.” I thought about that story for several weeks, wondering what it was that Dr. De La Torre had told his son, how he had raised him, so that his son didn’t need to carry a knife. This encounter was where I first began to understand a “survival narrative.” I began to wonder what generational wisdom Latino families were handing down to their children in order to help them survive and succeed in the US, and how those narratives might be different from white family narratives. I know that the social sciences have devoted a lot of study to generational wisdom, but I believed survival narratives were different, or distinct, in that they focused on survival strategies required for specific identities. I suspected that a Latino/a survival narrative would carry completely different wisdom than a white survival narrative and decided that I would explore those differences. If there were differences between the narratives, what does that
tell us about our society? Since I am not a Latina, the best way to find out would be through the use of interviews, so I decided to do qualitative research asking young people from Latinx communities to share with me their survival narratives. In the fall of 2013 I asked Dr. Deb Ortega if I could sit in on her Qualitative Research class, and she agreed and helped me develop a pilot study in order to test my research question. As a member of that class, Dr. Ortega guided us through the process of developing interview questions and submitting a proposal to the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver. The following year I interviewed some student colleagues at the Iliff School of Theology as a pilot study. I initially posted an IRB approved recruitment notice on our Joint Doctoral Program site on Facebook and sent out IRB approved emails to the JDP community asking for participants. Twelve of my colleagues volunteered for interviews, after which I asked for feedback on the interview. They each offered suggestions regarding better question phrasing, missing questions, interviewing technique and participant comfort. Most of the feedback I received from them was brief, so I invited them to email me with any further thoughts if they desired. I recorded all of this feedback in a log, which I referred back to as I was constructing my procedures and questions for the actual dissertation interviews. My findings from the pilot study were cloudy and unwieldy. I got a lot of history on personal religious journeys and family traditions, but I did not get clear answers to the question of how a survival narrative transmits cultural capital, or what any differences between Latinx and white narratives might tell us. I did learn better interview techniques, and especially how to respond to statements without revealing and pushing a personal agenda. Several pilot participants told me, “I knew what you were after, and I could feel you pushing me to tell you something specific.”
enrolled in a class on Ethnographic Study and practiced over the spring of 2014 better interview techniques.

After consultation with Dr. Ortega, we redesigned my questions to better get at what I was trying to learn. This proved to be a tricky balance, because we needed precise, incisive questions with a specific direction that were still neutral and open-ended. Perhaps the most fruitful question was Dr. Ortega’s suggestion, “What narratives would you pass down to the next generation?” This question provided great clarity to the participants and gave rise to some of the most fruitful data in all of the interviews. During the spring of 2014 I was also enrolled in a Dissertation Proposal class, and my school group included three other PhD students involved in qualitative studies. Each of those colleagues proved invaluable as we all shared advice and experience, as well as honest critique. It was during these two classes and consultation with Dr. Ortega that we agreed my study would benefit from more strict parameters, and I decided to limit my sample regionally and to a more specific group: evangelical communities along the US/Mexico border. I knew I could access evangelical communities in Ft. Worth, Texas and Denver, Colorado, so that is where the study began.

In the summer of 2015 I completed a request for continuation from DU’s Institutional Review Board, with amendments included for dissertation research instead of a pilot study. In the Spring of 2016, I applied for a grant from University of Denver’s Interdisciplinary Research Incubator for the Study of (In)Equality, or IRISE. IRISE granted me $2000 to fund my dissertation research to be used within one year, so over the spring and summer of 2016 I completed ten interviews in Denver and in Ft. Worth
through the use of that grant. The grant paid for gift cards as a thank you gift for the study participants, my travel to and from Texas to conduct interviews, and allowed me to hire a transcriptionist to transcribe my interviews. The grant also allowed me to pay for the use of Atlas TI software for one year in order to code my data. In the summer of 2016 I received a fellowship at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, so I submitted a further amendment to my research proposal through the University of Denver’s IRB. Upon arrival in Los Angeles, I began recruiting interview participants through local coffee shops and libraries. Fortunately, no one responded because it came to my attention that, as an employee of Pepperdine, I required IRB approval from them as well. By the spring of 2017, I had acquired joint approval from both the University of Denver and Pepperdine University to complete my research. I was having little luck finding participants, being new to the area, but one of my colleagues, Dr. Dan Rodriguez, invited me to a meeting of the Latino Students Association at his house on campus and allowed me to hand out IRB approved recruitment flyers and explain my research. As a direct result of that meeting, I received six inquiries over the next month and completed my interviews. Through the use of the grant from IRISE, I was able to hire a transcriptionist through UpWorks who transcribed all of my interviews and then returned them to me for approval. After I read through the interviews, I forwarded them on to the research participants who had indicated on the consent form that they would like to see a copy of the interview before my analysis began.

Data Collection

The beauty of the phenomenological study is the gamble of not quite knowing what the questions will produce. In this study, the overarching research question was in
two parts: “How do survival narratives contribute to the accumulation and transmission of capital across generations, and what do the differences between Latino/a and white survival narratives expose about inequality in social conditions and norms?”

The goal is to investigate the lived experiences of a group of people, to allow the subjects to speak for themselves and to draw conclusions afterwards. Therefore, I felt the best method of data collection would be through the use of semi-structured interview questions. Following the feedback from my pilot study, I knew it was important for the researcher to “bracket” his or her own experiences in order to best understand the participants’ experiences.184 Before beginning interviews, I began a log of my personal experiences with evangelical communities in an effort to sort them all before me so they may be set aside, to the best of my ability, to clear the way for a fresh perspective on survival narratives.185 This practice turned out to be ongoing through the interviews, as I was constantly journaling in my log after an interview, detailing what was actually said in comparison to what I heard, and what it reminded me of. The best I could achieve was what Cresswell calls, “A suspension of our understandings in a reflective mode that cultivates curiosity.”186 This suspension often resulted in what I began to think of as a “silent, knowing nod” after a participant stated something that resonated with me. I decided this was better than sharing my experience with what he or she was talking about, yet encouraging them to continue, hopefully understanding that they were speaking with someone kindred.

184 Cresswell, Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, 80.

185 In an effort to honor Husserl’s concept of “epoche” (Maura Dowling, “From Husserl to van Manen: A Review of Different Phenomenological Approaches,” 131-142, International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44(1), 134.)

186 Cresswell, 83.
In this study, I will be referring to the “research sample” as the “research or study participants.” I feel that the phrase “research sample” is appropriate in more clinical studies, because a “sample” need not be a person necessarily. A “participant” identifies a human and a volunteer and indicates the agency of the man or woman who has given me the gift of personal story. The sites where the interviews occurred were limited both by geography and religious involvement. The three sites (Texas, Colorado, and Los Angeles) are important for the following reasons:

1. Each site is in the Southwest United States, and two of the three border Mexico.
2. All three states enjoy a substantial population of men and women descended from Latin American families.
3. Each site is a location where I possess personal connections in religious institutions, which enabled me to recruit participants for my study.
4. Each site represents holds a significant population of evangelical communities.

In initial drafts of the research proposal, I merely aimed to interview Latino/a and white communities along the US/Mexico border. Recognizing that this is a rather large population from which to draw interviews, further boundaries on my sample were suggested. I created an age parameter, ages 18-25. This selection was made because an 18-year-old is no longer considered a child and is not a vulnerable population. In addition, since I was asking the participants about their experiences as adolescents and children, young adults would have a longer experience with survival narratives and possess the maturity and cognitive skills to critically reflect on them. I also created a religious parameter. Dr. De La Torre suggested at my dissertation proposal defense that I further limit my study to evangelical communities, in order to have a more focused
sample, because the study also asked about religious survival narratives and I possess social capital in specific evangelical communities where it would be simpler to recruit participants.

Initially, I contacted ministers and staff at churches where they knew me and explained my research. I asked if I could send them the recruitment flyers in case they knew of young adults who might be interested in my participating. Several of these churches were willing to post my flyers and share my email with their members. I also posted several flyers (Appendix D) around college campuses and coffee shops, and asked friends in Ft. Worth to do the same. From that point, I employed snowball sampling and allowed my participants and other community members to recruit members they thought might be interested. In Los Angeles, the faculty sponsor for Pepperdine’s Latino Student Association allowed me to attend a dinner at his home and explain my research, leaving behind my recruitment flyer in case any of the members wanted to participate. The president of Pepperdine’s Latino Student Association also included my recruitment information in a newsletter.

When a study participant emailed me asking for more information about the study, I responded with the email template (Appendix E) approved by DU’s and Pepperdine’s IRB, and attached the guiding questions (Appendix F) and a copy of the consent form (Appendices G and H.) I asked them to please respond with times, dates, and locations if they were willing to meet with me. Four initial responders never returned a second email, but 16 of them did.

The two data collection strategies I employed, then, were semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I chose to do interviews because this was the
method that seems to naturally fit phenomenological studies – the participant is invited to share a personal experience of a shared phenomenon. The individual’s perception of the phenomenon merges with the experiences of others to create an essence of that phenomenon. Each of the research questions was created to be open-ended, to invite further conversation, and to require personal introspection from the participant. I also felt that interviews created the greatest potential for thick and rich description from the core of the phenomenon and allowed the participant to speak for him or herself and portray their experience of survival narratives. The interviews were semi-structured because I prepared a list of questions to guide the interview that I sent to the participant ahead of time so they might be prepared. I also had a hard copy on hand at the interview site in case the participant wanted to look them over again. When we met for our interview, I walked the participant through the consent form, answered any questions they might have, and explained that I would be using the questions as a guide for our conversation but that they should not feel bound by them. Often, the conversation flowed from one question to the next, perhaps because the type of person who would agree to a qualitative interview is the type of person who would be prepared in advance of the interview.

My guiding questions were developed over the course of several years and the final draft was the product of several iterations (See Appendix F for final draft). I tested the questions and procedures with a culturally similar group to my final group of participants, drawn from Religious Studies and Theology PhD candidates, and they helped refine the final draft. I consulted with Dr. Ortega several times about the effectiveness of the questions I had created, and she regularly offered suggestions on how we might rewrite a question or phrase something differently in order to get at an
underlying truth. By the end of the pilot study, I felt that a substantive instrument had emerged, and, with Dr. Ortega’s approval, this was the instrument submitted to the University of Denver’s IRB for approval for my dissertation research.

In an effort to create triangulation, I also employed observation as a data collection method. During the interview, I took notes on our exchange and wrote down gestures or expressions of my participant, as well as my reactions to what they were saying in an effort to try and monitor myself from influencing their responses. I would also journal after each interview and describe interesting moments during our interview or write hints or reminders to myself to include an expression or tone during a certain part.

All of the interviews in both the pilot study and the dissertation research were conducted by me, and all of the interviews consisted of only the study participant, my recorder, and myself. The pilot study interviews occurred at a variety of coffee shops, library study rooms and empty classrooms according to the wishes and comfort level of my participants. The dissertation research interviews in Denver and Ft. Worth similarly occurred at coffee shops and public parks. In Los Angeles, all of the interviews occurred in my campus office at Pepperdine. In each instance, the study participant was asked to select a location where they would at ease for a conversation lasting from 60 to 90 minutes. Upon completion of an interview, the consent forms were locked in a cabinet to which only I possessed a key, and all further digital communications were conducted under the participant’s selected pseudonym.

Once the interviews were complete, I sent the audio recordings to a transcriptionist who lives in Georgia, who transcribed all the interviews using only the
first name by which the participant had chosen to be identified, although she was
unaware of that choice. She was instructed to transcribe the interview exactly as she
heard it, including pauses, mumbling, and laughter. I also asked her to please indicate
words or phrases she could not understand or did not know how to spell, which she did
by including the word or phrases in brackets with a note explaining her transcription
choices. Mari then sent me the transcribed interview to approve, and I would then reply
with any necessary corrections after I read through her transcription while listening to the
interview myself. I did not correct her when she would misspell a city or school
mentioned by a subject, and would correct such potential identifying features myself once
the transcription was returned in its final form. If I was unsure of the correct spelling of a
city name or region or a Spanish word, I asked the Dean of the Religion Division at
Pepperdine University, Dr. Dan Rodriguez, for help. He agreed to assist in translation as
far as it did not compromise the anonymity of the study participants. Google proved to be
minimally helpful in those cases.

Once those transcripts were ready, I forwarded the copy to the 12 study
participants who indicated on the consent form that they would like to see a copy of their
interview before I began data analysis. Of those 12, only six responded to my email, and
only one respondent offered corrections to his interview. In these corrections (there were
8), he clarified characters in a story he told about his family that he thought sounded
confusing, he corrected the spelling of the names of three family members he mentioned,
he corrected a chain of events he thought were jumbled, and he updated his section
describing his future employment plans. This particular respondent helpfully added
helpful information to my attempt at translating a phrase he used several times in his
interview, “echale ganas,” which I will discuss in chapter 6. The other five offered informal and brief updates on their families, their educations, or their employment. After these final corrections, I was prepared to begin analysis.

Data Analysis

Phenomenological research employs the construction of significant statements, the generation of meaning units, and the development of an essence statement of the phenomenon. In a phenomenological study, “the researcher analyzes data for significant statements grouped into ‘meaning units’ with the goal of producing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon by developing these of meaning.” The analysis of a phenomenological study, develops textural description (“What happened?”) and structural description (“How was the phenomenon experienced?”) as well as description of the “essence” of the experience, with narration of the essence being presented by way of discussion and visual representation. The first step I took in analyzing the data was to print out all the copies of my interviews and read over them again, to get a big picture. While I was reading over a specific interview, I would also have on hand my notes taken during and immediately following that interview, and I wrote thoughts and reactions in the margins of the transcript inspired by those notes. Since the interviews were spread out over one year and three states, and one major move and job change for me, I found it helpful to lift the data above my

188 Bloomberg and Volpe, Qualitative Dissertation, 238.
189 Ibid., 241.
immediate life context and read them together. Initially, I read the interviews in alphabetic order, mixing up the regions and genders, and made notes regarding initial awareness of regional differences. I then divided the interviews between Latinx and white participants and read through them, and then I divided the interviews into their respective three states and read through them again. At this point, I began a first cycle coding practice called “Initial Coding,” in which the interviewer “breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences.” I chose initial coding because it is an appropriate method for beginning qualitative researchers, but it also aligns with my thought process. Faced with a large collection of data, initial coding seemed to be the best way to begin to break it down and attempt to understand the big picture. I read through an interview, creating brackets of data in the margins. At this point I was not using codes or symbols; I was simply trying to figure out how to organize what I was seeing. Bloomberg and Volpe encourage the absence of predetermined categories, especially where phenomenology is concerned:

You run the risk of analyzing data by coding text units according to what you expect to find. Your conceptual framework must remain flexible and open to change throughout the entire analytic process. Remember, the reason you have spent so much time and energy talking to participants is to find out what their experience is and to endeavor to understand it from their perspective. Be aware that not all your data will fit into predetermined categories.

This encouragement to avoid assigning predetermined categories was helpful in the beginning stages of analysis, as the initial data appeared disjointed and unwieldy. I downloaded all of the transcripts into Atlas TI software and began trying to organize the


191 Bloomberg and Volpe, *Completing your Qualitative Dissertation*, 201.
data based on responses to the ten questions of the interview. This was proving unwieldy and disorganized. I had approached my interviews with a clear definition of a survival narrative and had narrowed the parameters of the study by region, age, religious affiliation and nationality, but it was during this phase that I realized I was dealing with much more than issues of Latinx and white survival narratives. My participants had broadened my definition of a survival narrative to include a focus: In this study, a “survival narrative” may be best understood as wisdom, advice, oral histories, directives, or counsel passed down from an older generation to a younger generation designed to help the younger generation *in possession of specific identities* understand and succeed in contemporary U.S. culture. During the initial coding, the companion themes of gender, sexuality, race and class emerged in addition to nationality. At the core of the survival narrative is the exchange of cultural capital designed to offset or balance inequalities based around identities.

I contacted Dr. Ortega, who immediately made herself available to me, and we initiated a Zoom meeting, during which she listened to my initial reactions to my findings and my frustration trying to code by the interview questions. She suggested I keep labels tentative, but to begin sorting the data into those themes around identities. She invited me to code larger sections around those themes, looking for the survival narratives. I believe the closest coding method I employed in this next phase is called “theming the data.” Saldana describes a “theme” in qualitative research as, “an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means.”

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define themes as “statements qua ideas presented by participants during interviews that summarize what is going on, explain what is happening, or suggest why something is done the way it is.” Dr. Ortega invited me to try coding the data around those themes of gender, race, nationality, class, and sexuality, looking specifically for the message of the survival narrative. In consultation with qualitative methods expert Dr. Deb Ortega, I refined the codes to include experience or commentary under specific survival narratives in addition to the actual survival narrative itself.

I constructed a coding system to identify the different types of survival narratives I was finding (please see Appendix I for my conceptual framework.) For the second cycle of coding, I employed Focused Coding, which aligns nicely with the themes I was gathering from my data during the first cycles. Focused coding organizes data based on thematic or conceptual similarity, and “searches for the most frequent or significant initial codes to develop the most salient categories in the data corpus.” During this stage, I not only organized the data by coding for themes around specific survival narratives, I also coded my data around the four specific types of survival narrative that Dr. Ortega and I had identified.

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194 I feel it is important to note that the labeling of “first cycle” and “second cycle” do not denote the accumulation of coding attempts. First and second cycle coding was done many time over at each stage. I appreciate the use of the term “cycle” because, like the hermeneutic circle, it indicates that the work is never quite finished.

Because Dr. Ortega had other things to attend to than my dissertation, I practiced “peer debriefing.” Peer debriefing is an effort to gain greater trustworthiness and reliability by asking a colleague to examine notes and coding and then inviting clarifying questions designed to reveal assumptions or consider alternatives. Peer debriefing serves to enhance the accuracy of an account. Therefore, I took my list of codes and a few sample interviews to a colleague who is a Professor of Sociology at Pepperdine who is an expert in both Qualitative Research and Atlas TI. I made sure to bring him interviews from young adults residing in either Denver or Ft. Worth, and all the participants were identified in the data by pseudonym only. He was concerned that I was including too much data and was “over-coding,” and needed to focus my efforts more on a few specific areas, saving the rest of the data for another project. His critique felt accurate as far as the amount of data I was trying to organize, but I felt that everything I had included in my coding was important to my conclusions. I decided to add another layer of organization to my second coding phase, so I began to parallel my coding with an outline for my findings chapter.

During this entire process, I continued to use memos in Atlas TI and journaling to mark my progress and record reactions and markers of progress. During meetings with my committee members I also took notes in my journal detailing decisions and requests. Finally, I arrived at a coding scheme and outline I believed represented the data well, and I took them to Dr. Ortega for confirmation. She agreed that it was time for a first draft of the findings. During the drafting of the findings chapters, I strove to incorporate my notes and memos from each interview in order to provide a vivid and detailed description of the

experiences of my participants. Including these details adds dimensionality to the findings, and more accurately represents a holistic personal perspective.

**Role of Research**

Purposes for research could be theory or construct-oriented, in which the goal is “gaining a more broad, abstracted understanding” of a certain theory or model. This purpose also desires to develop a theory or model in order to “elaborate elements of a theory in new domains, or to expand researchers’ understanding of specific constructs.” Practice-oriented purpose seeks to “illuminate specific problems or improve specific practices… to inform practice by providing rich, elaborated description of specific processes or concerns within a specified context.” While my project could fit nicely in with any of these purposes, I find the core of my research within an action-oriented purpose. Investigations with an action-oriented purpose have the explicit goal of effecting change and are conducted in response to an identified need. They often target a community specific problem. Their research designs reflect the researcher’s social values and tend to include active involvement by participation.

My research focuses on Latino/a and white young adults in a discussion at the intersection of religion, education, gender, sexuality, class and race, and therefore exposes several stereotypes and misconceptions within the evangelical religious community, at least along the US/Mexico border. Therefore, it is action-oriented in

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197 Havercamp, 273.

198 Ibid.

199 Ibid., 274.

200 Ibid., 274-5.
purpose – I see a very clear need, a community-specific problem, and while my social values are revealed in my study, the purpose of my study is (ideally, perhaps) to affect change in this targeted area.

**Methodology**

**Interview Protocol**

One of the most common complaints among qualitative researchers, at least the ones with whom I have interacted, is the difficulty in getting a project approved by an institution’s IRB. I only found the initial process of gaining approval for my pilot study to be difficult, but perhaps that is the case for every initial attempt at anything. Fortunately, I submitted a proposal as a member of Dr. Ortega’s Qualitative Research class, where she guided us through each step as a part of our class assignments. She also invited the director for DU’s IRB to class so we could ask her questions. Because of Dr. Ortega’s guidance, the following amendments and requests for continuing review were simple. The IRB process at Pepperdine, however, was more complicated and time consuming. Fortunately, again, one of the members of the IRB board met with me personally several times to walk me through the paperwork. I believe the key to a painless IRB experience is individual tutelage. Below are excerpt from the DU IRB protocol, which is identical to the Pepperdine protocol except for the name of the institution and my contact information.

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201 Please see Appendix D, E, and H for copies of the Pepperdine material. I have only included the documents that are different than the DU documents: the recruitment letter/email, the consent form, and the recruitment flyer.
Design

Study Population

Between July of 2016 July of 2017, I interviewed 16 young adults aged 18-25 in Denver, CO, Los Angeles, CA and Ft. Worth, TX about their experiences as adolescents receiving survival narratives. The recruitment materials (see Appendices 3B and G) asked for Latino/a or white participants from evangelical communities aged 18-25, so each of those demographics is represented by all participants.

Recruitment and Consent

The study population was all drawn from members of local evangelical churches. I began my dissertation research in June of 2016. At that time, I emailed recruitment flyers to area friends and asked for assistance from 18-25-year-old young adults I already know. I explained that I am conducting interviews for my dissertation research and would like to speak with 7-8 Latino/a young adults and 7-8 white young adults about their experiences as adolescents receiving survival narratives from older generations. I was also conscious of gender and chose to not limit my study to a gender binary, although I desired to diversify my study sample at a minimum with 7-8 young men and 7-8 young women, depending upon their willingness to self-identify. With the same information included, I also sent out emails inviting students to participate in the study and I personally asked friends and colleagues for their assistance. I recognized that these participants must all be self-identifying Latino/as, and that they must voluntarily consent to participate. If they agreed to meet with me, I had consent forms prepared to present to them at the beginning of our first meeting. I handed the study participant this information in person offered them space to ask any questions or to make any clarifications. The consent form ensured
their confidentiality and anonymity, as well as assured them of final say on the transcripts and research findings from their personal interviews.

**Procedures**

I desired that my participants be as comfortable as possible during the interviews, so after they agreed to take part in the study, I told them they would have the option to meet with me twice. For the initial interview, I asked them to choose a place to meet. They already knew they would receive a $20 gift card at the conclusion of the interview from the flyer, but they needed to choose a pseudonym in order to remain anonymous in the data. I told them in advance that I would have a consent form for them to review and sign, and that I would need at least one hour of their time, although I expected the interviews to often run longer than that. I asked them if they would mind if I recorded our conversation or if they would prefer that I only take notes, and then I told them that the content of our interview would be transcribed, and if they desired, they were welcome to receive an emailed copy and send corrections if needed, and then receive a second amended transcript. Additionally, they were welcome to schedule a second meeting with me and go over the transcripts if they so desired. Twelve study participants indicated on the consent form that they would like to see a copy of their interview before I began data analysis. Of those 12, only six responded to my email, and only one respondent offered corrections to his interview. None of these respondents requested a second meeting to discuss the data.

**Risk**

Despite my best efforts and intentions, it has always been possible that some of the information I gathered from the interviews might identify a specific participant in
some way. I guaranteed as much anonymity as possible and as much as was desired by the participant, and I asked them to approve any material I chose to use.

When discussing one’s family of origin, it is always possible that troubling memories may surface. I put a clause in the informed consent form explaining that any revelation of an abuse or a violation of any kind would lead me to ask if this incident has been reported to the police, and if not, that I am required to report it because I am a certified teacher and therefore a mandatory reporter. I also had tissues and a list of resources (programs, small groups, counselors) available if these memories proved too troubling to the participant. I will also guarantee that this information will remain private. As always, the participant was guaranteed freedom to change a subject, amend a statement or story, or stop the interview entirely, and was free to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, based on the study sample, it was also possible that a Latinx participant might identify a family member as an illegal immigrant, and I choose to keep this information private.

Interviews of this nature can prove to be inconvenient and time-consuming for the participant. I hoped to make this interview process as convenient and time-sensitive as possible. The participant was welcome to determine how much time and effort they would like to put into the study beyond the initial hour-long interview. The follow-up meetings to go over the material and the final sign-off on data are entirely up to the participant. I explained all of this to them when we first met during the initial interview.

It is highly possible I would see the subjects of my interviews in the future, and so they agreed to certain level of vulnerability with me. I ensured them that these future meetings would be as comfortable and personable as possible, and so I encouraged the
subjects to only share what information they are comfortable sharing, and I reminded them as needed that I am bound by the confidentiality agreement to keep whatever information I received private in our context and anonymous in any written work. Also, I tried to portray willingness to share personal stories with my participants as well to ensure the power dynamic wasn’t one-sided insofar as it didn’t shift the focus of the conversation onto me.

Confidentiality

I informed study participants on the consent form that I will make every effort to disguise any information, stories or artifacts that may identify them. I identify interview responses by their chosen pseudonym only. Transcriptions of the audio recording were kept in a private, locked location to which only I had access. My transcriptionist only received the subject’s pseudonym. Only I had access to the data of individual subjects, and any reports generated as a result of the study use paraphrased wording, and de-identified details to protect confidentiality. I stored data inside either a locked cabinet in my office or in a locked container inside a closet in my apartment where I live alone. No one else has a key, and guests will not have access to the container. In addition, study participants will have final say on the material I include in the study. I will ask for their confirmation of the interviews transcripts, and I intend to offer them a copy of the dissertation upon its completion, and they are welcome to be as engaged as they choose in the process. To keep the subjects’ information safe, all interview data will be secured on a password-protected computer, and I will hold the subjects’ choice to participate in confidence. All recorded responses will be deleted on completion of the study, as will all e-mail and online correspondence between the subjects and me. Interviews will not be
made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research study and will not contain information that could identify a subject. The results from the research may be shared at conferences or in published articles, but individual identities will be kept private when information is presented or published.

**Benefits to Subject or Future Benefits**

I hope that my study subjects find the exploration of their survival narratives very valuable and affirming. Ideally, the narratives from these subjects will raise awareness in the discrepancies between “minority” culture and dominant culture, between identities of power and identities of marginalization, and will cause questioning surrounding the inequality of what is required for different groups of people to “make it” in the United States, and in the evangelical church. My target audience is public school systems and evangelical churches sharing geographic space with Latino/a youth. An ideal outcome of the dissertation research would be some reexamination of pedagogical systems undergirding the silencing of some groups and the privileging of others. A realistic outcome would be raised awareness among educators, church members and leadership regarding ways their institutions are furthering the marginalized experience of these youth, as well as recognition of the privilege they gain by the oppression of these groups. I would call these churches specifically to examine ways they might actively engage in offsetting this imbalance.

**Issues of Trustworthiness**

The excellence of a qualitative research project largely depends on standards of reliability and validity: “If the research is valid, it clearly reflects the world being described. If work is reliable, then two researchers studying the same phenomenon will
come up with compatible observations.” ²⁰² While I feel I have mentioned each of these standards for trustworthiness in other areas of this chapter, it is perhaps best to gather the various criteria in one brief location. Richness in an interview is obtained by practicing a responsive interview. A responsive interview encourages richness by asking for extended descriptions, long stories, narratives which often include multiple themes, and offering alternatives to what interviewees have presented and getting their reactions. ²⁰³ I practiced responsive interviewing by attempting to restate a participant’s answer, asking probing and clarifying questions, asking for additional examples, and by maintaining eye contact and smiling and nodding often to create as comfortable a space as possible. Since I am so intimately connected to the communities and experiences as possible, I tried to keep personal stories and reflections to a minimum out of concern of tainting the participant’s response with my own filters, but I also tried to balance out the power differential by returning a vulnerability with one of my own. I believe that the copious notes and journaling that accompanied the interviews also adds to a rich and thick description as well, communicating a “holistic and realistic picture.” ²⁰⁴ These notes enable me “describe a scene layer by layer”²⁰⁵ in order to create an understanding not only of the spoken words but also the symbolic and experiential data as well.

²⁰² Bloomberg and Volpe, Completing your Qualitative Dissertation, 162.

²⁰³ Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data, 106.

²⁰⁴ Bloomberg and Volpe, Completing your Qualitative Dissertation, 164.

²⁰⁵ Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data, 69.
**Member checking**

Member checking is the priority of consulting with the study participants during the analysis and coding of the data as a way of validating the findings.\(^{206}\) Feedback is documented and incorporated into the interpretation of the study data.\(^{207}\) I incorporated member checking by sending transcripts of the interviews to each study participant who asked that I do so and asking for them to respond with corrections, additions, or changes. I documented and incorporated the changes returned to me by Carlos, as he was the only one who submitted them, but I also documented the personal, informal updates returned to me by the other participants in my journal. I will not be using that information in the analysis, however, because I don’t feel the participants gave me explicit permission to include those personal responses. If any of their responses added richness to the interview or changed the study data, I would ask for their permission to include those updates in the final analysis.

**Peer debriefing**

Peer debriefing is the process of asking a colleague to examine notes, codes and data from the study to provide a “reality check”\(^{208}\) for the researcher. In addition to providing fresh eyes, the purpose of a peer debrief is to test the reliability of the conclusions of the analysis by testing to see if another researcher comes to the same conclusions. Peer debriefing helps to identify personal assumptions and biases, offers alternative interpretations, and provides provocative questions to move the study

\(^{206}\) Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 35.

\(^{207}\) Bloomberg and Volpe, *Completing your Qualitative Dissertation*, 159.

\(^{208}\) Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 35.
forward.\textsuperscript{209} I practiced peer debriefing by asking Dr. Ortega to check in several times during my data analysis processes, and by asking my colleague at Pepperdine to examine sample interviews, journal entries and coding schemes. I did not ask him to do this more than once, as it is a very time consuming and mentally draining exercise. In future projects, I would like to engage in what Saldana calls “team coding” or “coding collaboratively,”\textsuperscript{210} perhaps with master’s students or even undergraduates, because a team effort would filter out personal assumptions and biases, as well as providing multiple analyses and interpretations.

**Summary**

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of this study’s research methodology. Since this is an interdisciplinary study, I am employing both a liberation ethicist methodology with a hermeneutical circle of ethics as well as constructivist qualitative inquiry, which is specifically a phenomenological project. These methodologies were employed to examine the phenomenon of survival narratives within Latinx and white evangelical communities along the US/Mexico border with specific analysis in the areas of religion, education, gender, race, nationality, class and sexuality. The participant sample was comprised of 16 participants selected through snowballing. Two data collection methods were employed: the semi-structured interview and observation. The data were reviewed against existing literature and emerging themes, and credibility and dependability were accounted for by means of various strategies, including member checking and peer debriefing. The intent of this study is to contribute

\textsuperscript{209} Saldana, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 35.

\textsuperscript{210} Ibid., 34-5.
to the understanding of how specific communities negotiate and exchange cultural capital that varies according to specific identities, and how these narratives are successful and how they are doing violence. I am hopeful that this dissertation will be useful to the members of those communities under examination, and that they will feel led to reexamine and assess the veracity of and motives behind the narratives which have been communally transferred to younger generations.
Section 2: Findings

Introduction

The original purpose of this study was to ask participants to share stories of conversations with their parent(s), primary care givers, or older family member, in which they discussed “how to survive/succeed in the United States.” The intent of the question is to reveal the impact of narratives on second and third generations of adults. In addition, this research sought to contrast Latinx survival narratives with white survival narratives to determine differences in the messages regarding education and religion as survival tools on their journey toward acquiring cultural capital. The study affirmed the survival narrative as a vehicle for cultural capital, and a disparity between Latinx and white survival narratives. Perhaps not surprisingly, this study further described four separate types of survival narrative and revealed additional disparities in the areas of gender, financial literacy, sexuality and ethnicity. This section is organized in accordance with the coding strategies detailed in Chapter 3. The coding structure and method created provided an avenue for respondents to discuss the messages they received from “elders” about how to survive and be successful in education attainment and religion devotion.

Organization

I will begin by introducing my participants and some key demographic information. I will then detail the survival narratives and redefine the subcategories therein and will then move into the themes which emerged from the data, concluding
with summary statements regarding the core findings which answer the research questions regarding cultural capital and demographic differences.

**The Participants**

The first several questions of the interview were basic demographic questions designed to break the ice and establish a basic familiarity with the interviewee (See Appendix A for general information on participants.) Participants were invited to discuss their family dynamic and history to the level of their comfort with two to three broad questions. As such, some participants shared very intimate details about their family dynamics and history while others gave very brief snapshot of their home life. The recruitment materials (see Appendices D-E, G-H) asked for Latinx or white participants from evangelical communities aged 18-25, so each of those demographics is represented by all participants. The sample was comprised of four participants from the Denver, Colorado area, six from the Dallas/Ft. Worth Texas area, and six from Los Angeles California.

**The Survival Narratives**

Remembering that we are defining a survival narrative as, “Wisdom, advice, oral histories, directives, or counsel passed down from an older generation to a younger generation designed to help the younger generation understand and succeed in contemporary U.S. culture,” the survival narrative proper [SN] actually accomplishes what it aims to do; it transmits cultural capital that provides the recipient with tools and knowledge that assist in understanding and succeeding in contemporary US culture.

In contrast, the well-meaning survival narrative [WMSN], as the title suggests, aims to equip younger generations with tools to succeed, but mainly served the
evangelical church by enforcing social norming in alignment with an evangelical value system. So a recipient who is entrenched in and committed to the evangelical church community is believed to be well-served by these narratives, but for young adults who have chosen to leave the evangelical church, or who choose to seek success in a different context than the evangelical church, the well-meaning survival narrative has led to experiences of marginalization and oppression. However, none of the subjects ascribed these narratives believed that narrative transmitters held malicious intent. Rather, participants viewed their parents and elders as caring individuals who were transmitting what they believed to be useful and true, and instead saw the enforcement of these narratives as a consequence of fear and social conditioning rather than malice.

The enduring survival narrative [PF] was largely the result of the question, “If you are ever responsible for a young life, what survival narratives will you pay forward?” This question provided some of the richest and most insightful reflection from the participants as they revealed what wisdom they valued the most. Their answers portrayed not only the narratives they would remember but the wisdom they chose to give to their children, students, or protégés. These enduring narratives were delivered directly from the older generation to the younger and will be paid forward to another generation.

All four types of narratives are only found in three thematic areas, but each type of narrative is well-represented in all of the interviews. Sometimes the difference between a survival narrative and a well-meaning narrative or a resistance narrative is simply due to the reflection of the listener and not the intent of the speaker; often different interviewees heard the same narrative, but their understanding of the function of the narrative really comes down to the listener’s ability or willingness to think critically.
about the impact of the narrative on their lives. Those narratives that were amended I am calling a reaction to or reinterpretation of a well-meaning survival narrative [RWMSN], or the resistant narrative.

The Themes

Rather than outlining my findings by listing each question and detailing the frequency of different answers, I will be revealing my findings according to themes through inductive analysis. My intention in interpreting the thematic data was to seek out differences between Latinx and white narratives, which became glaringly obvious. Furthermore, the data revealed survival narratives pertaining to gender, sexuality and class as well. Recognizing the reality of intersectionality, that no participant is going to only experience one identity to the detriment of all others, I am hoping it is not disingenuous to the participants to parse out the responses according to several different categories. For example, there were several education-based narratives around nationality, as well as gendered narratives discussing the value of education. In an effort to cover them all while not retelling stories in different sections, I am organizing the findings as follows: Religion, education, finance, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. Since my participants were gathered from evangelical communities, I am discussing religion first. All of the survival narratives were informed by this position, and all 16 of the participants discussed religion, specifically Christianity, as a path toward, and platform for, success. For each theme that emerged in the data, I will detail subthemes and use quotes and examples from the participants to support conclusions.
Chapter 4: Religion

“What really mattered was that we went to church...” Adam (Latino, male, 23)

Every member of this study identified as an evangelical Christian, through his or her upbringing as well as by current affiliation (for religious demographics of participants, see Appendix J.) Half of the participants were raised in Churches of Christ, while the other half were raised in either community churches, Bible churches or independent churches. All but two of the participants attended a university or college affiliated with the Churches of Christ, and three of the participants attended primary and/or secondary schools affiliated with the Churches of Christ. For all but two of the interviewees, “church” was seen as a foundational guiding force in their families of origin, either because of their parents’ upbringing in similar organizations or because of special needs of the family. Participation in and commitment to Christian churches affected the lives of the families of those interviewed in every way possible, often providing religious, social, financial and moral support. Every participant talked about the importance of “community,” as well as the price for being included in these church communities. For the majority of families represented here, church is the lens through which all other identities are viewed and is the overarching similarity between all of the participants. The role of church and religion for these families affects all the other areas
mentioned in the interviews, so it is vital to unpack the importance and function of
religion before moving to the other themes.

**Survival Narratives around Religion**

“Get in the car, we’re going to church. It was just what we did.” - Lynne (White, female, 24)

The religious survival narrative that seemed to provide the most successful
guidance to the study participants was the emphasis on the benefits of being surrounded
by a Christian community. Regardless of the inherit benefits of church membership,
twelve of the participants did not feel that they had the option of choosing to not attend
church as adolescents. Adrian (Latino, male, 18) describes a very common response in
the study: "'Everybody in the car. We're going to church.' Growing up - it was exactly
like that. Regardless of whether I liked it or not, she was going to take me.” Bethany
(Latina, female, 20), whose father is an elder in a Baptist congregation, shared a similar
experience:

When I was living with my parents, it was more like... When somebody says you
have to do ‘this’, it loses its appeal. That's very much how I was as a child. I didn't
have to do anything. I didn't have much autonomy when it came to church. It was
just, ‘You're going. This is what we do. That's how we're raising you.’

Sam (White, male, 24) elaborates on the importance of church attendance and
membership in his family:

It was central. It was central to the identity of my parents and family. We grew up
going to church three times a week (Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday
night)... Christianity was really central. My parents had hobbies—running and
exercise. Their friend group was from the church. They didn't have friends that weren't Christians. Everything was centered around that.

Many families, like Sam’s, saw church time as a family bonding experience. Six study participants attended church with members of their extended families and church was the primary meeting ground for weekly family reunions. Particularly for the Latinx interviewees, church was a family affair involving extended family on several sides. According to Mary (Latina, female, 22),

> Every single Sunday morning you knew you had to get up. You would know because your parents would be yelling at you to get up. We had to wear skirts to church. We still have to. I think it depends on the environment of the church. My family is just really big and the majority of the members of my church are all related to me. It's very hard to separate it from a family reunion. Only three or four families are not related to me. Everybody else is either a cousin or a second cousin. After services on Sunday, it was popular for people to either sell food or go to the park. Because it is family, you would play soccer or have a birthday party and spend the whole day there.

Carlos (Latino, male, 20) had a similar experience: “You connect with your family and you know everyone who goes to that church. The community is so packed. You go out to eat with everyone and you're there longer talking than you actually were during church.”

Participants saw the evangelical emphasis on family as benefitting both the church community and the family unit. The importance of investing in family is one survival narrative that threads its way through all of the interviews, regardless of age, gender, and
ethnicity. The message was, take care of your family, invest in your family, because family will always be there for you.

In addition to family commitment, several participants cited beneficial relationships outside the family. Manny (Latino, male, 21) attributed his current employment to a friend he met through a church event in New York who begged him to apply for the position and laid the groundwork for a smooth transition. Camille (White, female, 21) struggled badly with her grades during high school, but because her grandfather was on the board of a Church of Christ-affiliated institution, she gained acceptance to a four-year college with glowing recommendations. Several interviewees cited examples of success and access gained through relationships within church communities – internships, letters of recommendation, job opportunities, summer jobs, special discounts on cars or networks. Perhaps unintentionally or intentionally, parents’ insistence on regular church attendance provided the study participants with a transmission of privilege and power through connecting with people who could open doors and make introductions to the future many of these young adults are now enjoying.211

Lynne (White, female, 24) grew up in a Church of Christ of around 500, and describes her experience positively:

I guess some of the main ones are the community aspect of it; community of believers that have the same beliefs as you; that you act as like a bigger family than the family you were born into; the eternal life aspect, that was a big thing. I

211 In general, this finding was truer of the white participants than the Latinx participants regarding future employment and scholarships, although all of the participants granted credit to their communities of origin for their admission to and success in college.
don't know if this was ever told to me, but just the comfort aspect of it; just
having some higher power that you can look to, believe in for up until I was
probably 17 or 18 that I didn't have to question or that I didn't feel the need to
question—it's very comforting.

Several participants cited a feeling of comfort at being surrounded by a church
community. For all the flaws of evangelical churches, they seem to do inner-community
well. Will learned how to love himself from his church: “The church taught me to love
myself and that others love you, too. That was a big thing.” Participants shared stories of
sick family members flooded with visitors at the hospital and casseroles at home, or
church members who would share frequent flyer miles so a member with fewer resources
could travel, or intergenerational friendships with the elderly and with children from
whom they learned useful social skills. Patrick (White, male, 25) was mentored by an
elderly gentleman in his church of origin and describes the relationship as foundational:

I remember my going through mentoring through the church, the dude that I was
with was super, super old. He was just so full of wisdom and he was such a loving
man. I just remember, he looked into my eyes and said, ‘When you feel it, you
will just know and no one will be able to tell you any different.’

Participants shared stories of holiday dinners and family vacations shared with other
church families and staying in one another’s homes during home remodeling or church
events. Church members hosted baby and bridal showers for older siblings, made cakes
and decorated for wedding receptions and funerals, and showed up unasked to mow
lawns or shovel driveways. When Matt (Latino, male, 19)’s father left, his church was
there to support his mother while she got her feet on the ground:
My mom being a single parent with four kids on her own wasn't very easy for her and the church was able to help her a lot. Sometimes, we needed a place to stay or an extra something to have as kids. There was a single parents' ministry. It was like a bunch of people who understand what it's like to be raising a single child, struggling together. They were alone in a sense, but also united together. I think that's what made the community stronger; knowing that even though you're by yourself handling all this, you have other people you can depend on.

Adam (Latino, male, 23) named a similar experience when his father got sick and his parents lost their house, they returned to the church he grew up in where they found support, community and access to other types of employment. Elizabeth (White, female, 21) and Sam (White, male, 24) both credit their church family for holding their parents’ marriages together. If the evangelical church is going to survive into the next generation, it is going to be because of these types of embedded memories of community.

When I asked study participants about their experiences with authority figures, several interviewees discussed older church members outside of their families who served as mentors. Jerry (White, male, 25) grew up in the same congregation where his parents and grandparents attended, and felt loved and accepted by a large multi-generational community:

The good part (of church attendance) being that you're in a community of people that, for the most part, are going to have a positive impact on your life. You're going to be in touch with other people that can give sound advice and have mentor-type figures in your life, especially when you grow up at the same place for a long time. You're going to have people like that talk to you; people that see
you grow up in the church. Definitely, it teaches you how to be a part of
something and not be out on your own and the value of that; because I think that's
something you don't realize—who you are—out on your own. You realize you
need to be a part of something—a group of people. If you don't grow up in the
church, there's plenty of options for other ways to be a part of groups of people
that aren't necessarily going to have a great impact on your life.

Several participants cited stories of conversations or experiences with adult participants
in their youth ministries or with youth ministers or preachers that left them with clear
direction for their futures. Manny (Latino, male, 21) described a conversation with the
preacher at his church in New York that led him to ministry:

    I started by attending that church by my house. It was a non-denominational
    Christian church. I was 14. A few months after that, the preacher decided to put
    me in for this leadership position. He felt like he wanted me to lead a student
    group back home because it was a cell group. A few Wednesdays after that, after
    arguing and resisting, I said, "Okay. I'll try this." At 13…14…15… I really
    believed that this is what God wanted me to do, whether as a career or as
    volunteer. Whatever it was, I knew that the Lord was calling me to people.

Interestingly, Manny and Jerry are both employed by evangelical churches now, in
marriage ministry and in youth ministry. For Manny, Jerry, Camille (White, female, 21),
Maria (Latina, female, 22), Matt (Latino, male, 19), Will, and Noelle (White, female, 25),
those conversations and relationships with older church members outside of their families
were formative and inspiring. Interestingly, very few interviewees cited doctrinal issues
as a primary reason for attending church. Jerry believes it’s important to “know Jesus and
show them who He is.” Adrian (Latino, male, 18) wanted to “apply Jesus' teaching in the Bible to my life so I could bless others,” and Manny (Latino, male, 21) pursued a relationship with God to seek answers and comfort after the loss of his father: “My father (as I had mentioned) passed away when I was three years old. I never really knew why. I never got to meet him. That really fueled my curiosity and my desire to pray to God and ask him what happened to my dad and: Is my dad in heaven or not?” Besides these three, none of the participants discussed theology, worship style or personal relationships with Jesus. Relationships with family and other church members remain the primary cultural capital exchanged in the survival narrative of church attendance.

Well-meaning Survival Narratives on Religion

“Everybody loves a mirror.” – Sam (White, male, 24)

“Fake it until you make it.” - Noelle (White, female, 25)

Again, a well-meaning survival narrative is intended to provide the recipient with cultural capital toward success. In this context, the survival narrative actually only helps the listener succeed within the evangelical community. Subject participants assigned no malice to the speakers of a well-meaning survival narrative, and largely understood that these narratives stem from the belief that being a good Christian will make you a better citizen, a better student, a better employee, a better spouse, friend, partner, barista, etc. The speakers of the well-meaning survival narratives did not intend for these narratives to be oppressive and manipulative, but as we all know, intent does not equal impact, and oppression and manipulation was in fact often the direct result of these narratives. As the respondents describe the well-meaning religious survival narratives the problem of “well-meaning” becomes more apparent for the perspective of the respondents.
On the topic of religion, the well-meaning survival narratives largely enforced “conforming behaviors” supported by Biblical mandate as understood within the evangelical community. Several survival narratives centered on behaviors that comply with community expectations, to “fit in” or to be “like.” The expectation of appropriate behavior is often enforced by the community through the unveiled threat of loss of community. The ideas of “holiness” and “purity” have been wielded in this way – Christians are to be “set apart” and “different” from the world. In the Church of Christ, Paul’s command to “expel the immoral brother” in 1 Corinthians 5 is taken quite literally.

“Morality” for the study participants is best understood as a list of behaviors that are right and wrong. As Mary (Latina, female, 22) describes it, “‘What will people think?’ That’s what she (her mother) always comes back to. They literally list out things that we can't do.” This immoral behavior is familiar: no drinking at all, no sex outside of marriage (we will cover this later in more depth), no smoking, no cussing or inappropriate language or joking, no clothes that are too tight, low or high-cut for women, no R-rated movies, no drugs unless they are prescription and then only taken by doctor’s orders, no tattoos, and piercings are only acceptable for women on the ears.

In addition to these rules, there is a social norm that is unspoken yet clearly modeled and enforced. Noelle (White, female, 25) and Sam (White, male, 24) both identified this norm as "keeping up with the Joneses." You have to keep an eye on what the rest of the community is doing in order to fit in. None of the participants felt this practice to be life-giving or fulfilling in any way. When Noelle was describing how she felt growing up with a mother who was very concerned about this norm, she described it as being afraid to really live:
That is what I feel the church kept me from doing. My mom also said, "You're not here to be happy. He didn't create you to be happy. He created you to please Him." That really kept me from having fun, from doing things I wanted to do in life because I thought it would not be pleasing to God… The biggest thing was if I ever got upset, irritated or angry, I was not allowed to feel that emotion. Eyes are always on you. You are an example to other people.

Sam remembers a plaque that hung in his parents’ house that said, "The greatest joy is to know that my children are walking in the truth." He felt that this was all that his parents really wanted for him and for his sister – to walk in truth, which he understood to mean that they live a certain way, have certain values, and performed their faith in specific ways. For Sam, he learned those ways, “The way of the truth,” by reflecting the behavior of those around him:

It's really interesting. I remember for a long time not having any sense of identity.

Even more so, knowing what I did best was reflect back other people's identity to them when I was with them. A lot of that came from social anxiety. I remember thinking when I was 16 that I was not sure what I even liked. I knew this phrase, "Everybody loves a mirror." That was something that I thought at 16.

The participants who conformed to these expectations enjoyed great cultural capital through praise and reinforcement because they made their church communities proud. They were intelligent, clean-cut, well-behaved “good kids.” They made the community look good. Several interviewees described the event of their baptism at church as foundational rite of passage in which they were not only pledging their lives to Christ, but
to the church community as well. For Sam's family and church community, his baptism was a big celebration because:

To them, it was me following in their footsteps and doing it the right way. It was a way they knew I was going to be okay. My eternal salvation was secure; that's real to them and a thing that they worry about. I think they felt like I was okay and now on the right path. For them, they did their job—a good job. I think it's also a social status thing, even though they would not say that. In a church community, having your kids baptized means, "We did it right. We're doing okay.'

Adrian (Latino, male, 18), Carlos (Latino, male, 20), Jerry (White, male, 25), Lynne (White, female, 24) and William (White, male, 21) all described community celebrations at their baptism, including applause, tears, cheers, hugs, whistling, often food and a special Bible. Several interviewees described a “special song” that their church members always sang (a cappella, of course) to new converts to celebrate their initiation into the community. This theme of expectation and reinforcement of acceptable evangelical behavior was addressed by all the of the participants at length. The focus of these behaviors tended to be focused on correct behavior, entertainment, friendship, dress, and language. This code of conduct was told, retold, and reinforced into them from very young ages. Also, this particular well-meaning survival narrative was without exception identified as undesirable by all of the respondents. None of the participants felt that conforming to expectations of correct behavior allowed them to flourish in their authentic identities, yet very few of them pushed back against those codes of conduct until college, when almost all of them did. The reason that none of them pushed against those
expectations was the threat of loss of community, which could include anything from loss of resources or information to loss of relationships of any kind between the individual, or in the case of an entire church, with other Church of Christ communities. Additionally, non-conforming behavior brings shame to the immediate family, and the family then either may have to decide between a close relationship with the individual or close relationships with the community. To do both at the same time is difficult as close relationships are understood as enabling or affirming non-conforming behavior.

Perhaps because they were already leaving their church communities of origin, every participant of the study described going away to college as an experience of “breaking” with the church of their youth. None of the participants attend the church they grew up in, although some will attend from time-to-time when they return home with their families if their families are still members. Very few interviewees made an intentional break with their churches, they just left home and went to college and never came back. However, a few participants described separating from the church as a painful experience. Camille (White, female, 21) describes her experience of her break with her home congregation, where her grandfather has been a minister for 45 years:

Once I started to get older and start becoming into my own person and then wanting to do things that weren't exactly typical of the community or just accepted in general, I found a lot of resistance and a lot of relationship strains. Not just within my family, but also within the church atmosphere. I would visit my old church and people were so like, "Why did you leave?" If I was honest about it ... "I just experienced a lot of negativity." They thought I was lying or like there was something wrong with me. It wasn't something wrong with the
community; because that community couldn't have done anything wrong. If you're a Christian, you're perfect. It's everyone else's problem which is something that was really difficult. It's hard for me because I would say my grandparents are still extremely involved and I see so much obviously hypocrisy and negativity and just a lot of judgments.

Jerry (White, male, 25) returned home from college with some new ideas about how church should function and received some passive-aggressive push back: “By individuals, yes. Not collectively like, "This church wants me gone." (I have) never felt that way. There (are) some people in this church that would probably like to see me out of their hair. Yes!” Several study participants echo the feeling of just not feeling welcome, or a lack of warmth. It wasn’t overt or spoken, but rather, as Sam (White, male, 24) describes it, “a passive-aggressive, Protestant way; making it known they don’t like those people and making off-handed remarks.” For Maria (Latina, female, 22), not conforming to these expectations of her church community has not just cost her relationships with the church community, but with her mother:

I don't even talk to them anymore because my views have changed so drastically.

That's fine with me. If that's how you want to live, that's fine. It just wasn't for me. What's been so difficult in trying to figure out my mom in this sense (because we haven't spoken in almost two years) ... I am tempted sometimes to just extend that olive branch and see if she feels that way.

Even though Maria is very sad about the break with her mother, she still sees college as a time of liberation from her evangelical church upbringing during which she discovered “an incredible world outside of what her family knows.” She discovered so many things
she was not allowed to love in her adolescence, like craft beer (which she describes as a passion), science fiction, and her white live-in boyfriend.

Sam, Camille, Noelle (White, female, 25), Mary (Latina, female, 22) and Bethany (Latina, female, 20) all described moving away to college as a time of searching, experimentation and liberation from the evangelical church. In college they felt freed from the tight constraints of growing up in an evangelical church and household, even though each of them attended a university affiliated with the Church of Christ. All of the CoC universities have codes of conduct in place for students, students are expected to comply, but the interviewees still felt liberated away from their parents and the churches of their parents in a CoC college context.

**Enduring Survival Narratives on Religion**

Without assuming any of my study participants would become parents, I asked the interviewees what survival narratives they would pass down to any younger lives over whom they may hold influence one day. The responses to this question were somewhat different from stated survival narratives reported earlier in the conversation, and often included survival narratives they understood, or witnessed, as modeled narratives. While the proper survival narratives were usually intentional, the enduring narratives were often unintentional and are set apart by nature of the intentionality of the recipient.

The importance of belonging to a community is the overriding religious survival narrative the interviewees will pay forward to the next generation. Several interviewees will place emphasis on church membership, although not necessarily at a Church of Christ. Manny (Latino, male, 21) will not just take his children to church. He will
encourage them into leadership positions in that community the way he was led to leadership:

After church in our little small group, I'll never forget he told me: The best leader was once the best follower and it's important that that follower knows who he's following. It was the most confusing thing I ever heard, I think. There was so much verbiage and I was like, "What?" The way he explained it, it really marked me as a young man. It really reminded me that I'm the head and not the tail, I'm above and not beneath. I'm called to be a leader in my generation. That's something I want to pass down to my kids and their kids. I learned from my mom, too. You have the opportunity to either lead or follow. It's okay to follow for a season, as long as who you're following is on the right path. That's something that I think marked me and made me a leader at such a young age.

Adrian (Latino, male, 18) has decided he is going to be the “get in the car” dad: “It seems like it worked out well. I'm glad that she (his mother) held on like, ‘No, we're going to go. I know you're miserable but you're going to need it.’” Likewise, Jerry (White, male, 25) is also going to bring any potential family to church with him so they feel deeply connected to a larger community:

Be connected to a group of people that are all following God and are committed to serving a local church; and being a part of a local church; not just going a few different places on weekends or sitting in a Sunday service, but really truly connected to a local church in your community.
Patrick (White, male, 25) said he will encourage his children to go to church, with one caveat:

I would definitely go to church as a family, and I would definitely probably guide them, but maybe not push them… I think community is important, but I also think there's so much love in a church. I think that surrounding myself with that is just a beautiful thing. That was always something that I took for granted growing up.

The communal experience of the participants was profound and formative for them, and they would like for children they are responsible for to experience that as well. Lynne (White, female, 24) wants any children she may be responsible for to experience the depth of community she experienced, whether that is at a church or not:

I probably would try to instill in them that that community is really important no matter where you find it. I mean, church is a great place to find it, but there's also other places to find it. Personally, I think the church is one of the best places to find community.

William (White, male, 21) and Adam both felt their families gave them the freedom to choose church or not, and would both like the next generation to be able to choose what they would like to do regarding their own faith expression, but to be sure they find something to believe in:

Religion, I would say, use it to find something that you can believe in because if you can't, then the whole world will seem like it's a lot smaller and you'll get lost. It doesn't have to be God. I hope they choose God but I won't force them down that path. I think that just knowing there's something great or whatever you believe in will help you in times that you need help.
Neither William nor Adam ever felt pressure to conform to community expectations other members felt, and they would like for children they are responsible for to experience the same thing.

Elizabeth (White, female, 21) wants the next generation to be more concerned with a relationship with Jesus than with attendance or strict moral codes:

I want them to respect others. I want them to respect themselves and treat people the way they want to be treated, just like my parents taught me…I want to raise my kids as Christians to have a relationship with Jesus; less so a religion and more so like: This is the Bible. This is Jesus. Have a relationship.

Several interviewees would just like for children to have some sort of a moral code that helps them succeed at whatever they choose to do. Camille (White, female, 21) wants children she has, or she teaches, to “Love and respect, and just looking at another person and being like, ‘That is another living life form and we're all on this earth together. Who am I to say they don't have the same rights as me?’” Matt (Latino, male, 19) encourages future children to, “Don't give up yourself for the things of this world. Keep true to yourself would be the same thing that I would keep repeating to them. Also, try your best but have fun at it.” Sam (White, male, 24) merely wants the next generation to be mindful about their actions towards other and to the earth because, “The things that you do matter and the things you do to other people matter.” All of these narratives contain morals learned through upbringing in evangelical churches and are the kernels that the study participants felt should be carried forward to the next generation.
Reinterpretation of Survival Narratives on Religion

“Bad company corrupts good character.” - Sam (White, male, 24)

The benefits of growing up within a church community provided a lot of social capital for the participants, which is one element of this survival narrative that carries the most meaning for the participants. Even as participants provided a critique of church experiences they cited friendships that they gained through that community that helped them survive and thrive during adolescence. According to Matt (Latino, male, 19), “It was definitely a huge source for friends. Outside of school- I never lived in a neighborhood very long to get to know the people around me, but I had been going to this church my whole life. That's where I made most of my friends. I'm still friends with a lot of them today.” Noelle (White, female, 25) also found supportive and sustaining friendships through the church, but became suspicious of the elite and ostracizing requirements sustaining those friendships:

I definitely had a great group of friends in high school. At some point, I don't even think we bonded on faith. It was just a good group of kids that really did seek to help other people and had other people in mind. I really think that was the core of our friendship because that group of kids was just genuinely a good group of people. Yes, we would talk about God in our devotional groups, but I wouldn't say God was a part of our conversation outside of that. It was just very social. We just did everything together. We'd go to movies together, ice skating, game nights; whatever you could think of. It was always them. We were always taught, “You'll never have a group of friends like this. Church is the only place you'll have these
kinds of friendships.” That's not true. I have definitely found amazing friends outside of the church.

Interviewees recognized that being surrounded by a positive friend group was pleasing to their parents and was definitely a positive motivation for getting up and going to church on Sunday morning, they are not convinced that the guarantee of a positive friend group is a good enough reason to attend church. Several participants mentioned that the discovery of sustained, life-giving friendships outside the church community was the first in many cracks in their commitment to evangelical church. Jerry (White, male, 25) found himself isolated at high school because he was so committed to avoiding people who were not Christians, at least as far as he could tell.

Find good people to be around and don't be around people that aren't a good influence (which there's some legitimacy to that). I don't feel like I was necessarily equipped or pushed to talk to people who weren't in church or believing in God. "Oh, I don't think I'm supposed to really be around those people." Really avoiding those people and just thinking (in school I think) that that was a big reason I kind of went in, got out and didn't really want to be there; because most of the people I was in class with weren't living the way that I would necessarily want to. My philosophy was: Don't become friends with them. Don't be around them. Stay at a distance. Get out as quick as you can.

According to Jerry, Sam (White, male, 24), Camille (White, female, 21) and Maria (Latina, female, 22), people who were bad influences were people who were drinking, having sex, dressing immodestly, doing drugs and smoking. Mary (Latina, female, 22) adds that her family also included people who had tattoos or piercings. On the other hand,
participants stated that having friends from “outside the church” or friends who embodied those “bad” characteristics was acceptable if they were understood to be a project for evangelizing. If church members were befriending “lost” people with the intent to “save” them, then those friendships were more than fine – they were encouraged. For the evangelical community, “hell” is seen as a real, physical place for those who have not made a spiritual commitment to the church and “given their lives” to Jesus. Therefore, it is the job of the Christian to save these people. Camille (White, female, 21) grew up in a suburb of Denver with a large population of Mormons. She explained her experience of bringing a Mormon friend to church with her:

They [Camille’s childhood church] are very focused on the fact that if other people are not Christian then they're not going to Heaven; and that their goal is to get other people to go into Heaven; and if they're not Christian, they view them as bad people. I feel like I could say that just because I would bring a lot of people to church with me growing up into youth group. A lot of people ... I brought a Mormon friend to church once and the people, a lot of the kids I was in youth group with, afterward would be like, "I think that was really great of you to bring him but you know he's not going to convert. Why would you bring him?" Just because he's not going to convert, he's just kind of worthless.

If you choose to befriend a non-Christian, the role of the church community becomes that much more important. In order to not get pulled into a secular lifestyle, you need to meet regularly with other Christians to guard yourself. As Sam (White, male, 24) describes it, “They were taught messages like being "in" the world but not "of" the world. I think they felt the separation and they created the separation. They had to have some sort of
community, area or world to isolate themselves into.” Being in the world and not of the
world involves very thoughtful, intentional participation in non-church things, like sports
or music or theater. But regular church attendance is critical in order to keep the
Christian’s values in alignment. Patrick (White, male, 25) described his experience
outside of a Christian community when he moved to a different town and was not
involved in a church for a time:

   Thankfully, being in that community helps to guide you. It's like surrounding
   yourself with people who have had similar experiences. It helps reinforce that it is
   true and not just like something fading…I think it's like a whole city-wide energy
   thing. You can just feel the general energy of the city is relatively depressed.
   When there's such a large area that's got that resonant energy, it's contagious. It's
   hard to be like a light spot in a sea of dark.

The idea of being “a light in the darkness” is a very popular evangelical phrase that
reminds Christians of their purpose in the secular world. The non-Christian world is seen
as a place of darkness, of loss and sadness. The Christian church has what the world
needs to be hopeful, found, and happy. If you are a Christian, and you befriend non-
Christians, the church encourages you to use your friendship with that person to draw
them into the church community. Again, and importantly, none of the participants saw
this strategy as malicious or mean-spirited. They are, however, almost to a person
suspicious of this motive. The isolation of the church from the larger community seems
misguided at best. Sam (White, male, 24) is grateful for his upbringing in the church, but
attributes his positive experience not to the theology of the group or the message from the
pulpit:
It has nothing to do with the ideology and everything to do with the community. The community I grew up in, it wasn't fake. I had a great experience. A lot of my life-long friends came out of it, but I guess a lot of the peripheral people who made up the community were not my scene. I'm really tired of all the same songs. There was always a separation of that community and the real world. If they were to ever cross over and people from the church were acutely aware of what they were doing …

Interviewees who were interested in future or continued church membership or who would take their families to church affirmed the presence of supportive and sustained friendship in the church community but added the caveat that they would not carry forward this narrative of only having Christian friends, or, as Maria (Latina, female, 22) called it, “missional friendships” or “outreach friends.” Jerry (White, male, 25) describes the type of church he would like to be part of in the future:

From a group level, as far as a ministry in a church or a church itself (depending on the size of the church), finding a way to serve your community on a consistent basis. Making some type of commitment of what can we do for you on a consistent basis to help be connected to our community and to really know what's going on in our community outside the walls of this building that we meet in; and letting our community know what goes on here; and having that open door philosophy of: Hey, we want to be engaged with you where you're at, but we also want to invite you into what we're doing, too; having that open relationship with your community and the church.
A common theme arising throughout all of the narratives is that many of the survival narratives given to the interviewees were understood to come from a place of fear. I will discuss this at more length in the analysis in chapter 7, but here among the non-Christian friends is where we meet this idea for the first time. Parents were afraid that their children might befriend people who might jeopardize not just their standing in the church community, but their literal spiritual salvation. Study participants agreed that membership in a church community has its privileges but reinterpreted the narrative of mandatory attendance and controlled socializing as homogenous and suffocating isolation within that religious community.

**Conclusion**

A majority of the respondents prioritized diversity and inclusion over strict rules of behavior. Elizabeth (White, female, 21) is talking about her future students as well as her future children when she says:

I want to teach them that they can learn things from people who are different from them and not to stereotype or associate them with some sort of negative thing just because they're different. I think everyone has value. I think acceptance is something that's really important to me; open mindedness.

Camille (White, female, 21) optimistically imagines a future generation raised with different narratives than she heard and holds hope for religious communities to partner with families and schools in positive, life and identity affirming ways:

A lot of what Jesus teaches, I agree with 100%. Like, putting others before yourself no matter what (no matter your status in society or anything), I think is incredibly impactful and people respect you so much more for that. I think that if
we teach kids that, they'll be able to learn how to coexist with other people, other people from different religions and races. I think that will just end up creating a healthier society, in general.

Regardless of the effects of these narratives on the lived experiences of the interview participants, none of the participants assigned a malicious or cruel intent to the speakers. Rather, the study participants understood the narrative speakers as coming from a place of fear. Several participants shared stories of experiencing manipulation, sadness, and even control, but none described their story tellers as enemies. Many participants, in fact, expressed sympathy for the narrative givers who are still living under the oppressive edicts valued by evangelical communities. Carlos (Latino, male, 20), speaking of his parents, stated, “It's sad that they have to live in fear.” Maria (Latina, female, 22) is experiencing an estrangement from her mother because Maria left the church and has chosen to live with her boyfriend. She understands her mother’s position but chooses to no longer participate in evangelicalism:

I think, for her, it's two things: control and salvation. I think she firmly believes that (because I have fallen out of my faith) if I were to die, I would go to hell. I would not be saved, I would be lost. I can see that (from her perspective) being a very scary thing when you believe it. Right? It's hard for me if I totally believe that to say, "I'm going to lose my child." I understand that. I always felt this tug-of-war pull. I think that's what it was—a fact that I don't do what my mom says. Deep down, I think she wants to control me because she fears for me.

All of the topics understood as designed to control the participants in this study through the use of survival narratives come from a place of fear, according to the participants.
The fear comes from potential loss of salvation, from potential expulsion from or a lessening of privilege within the evangelical community, or from the belief that deviating from the enforced and expected norms would result in a lower quality of life. Each of the following themes also contains a foundational message and experience of control and fear, which each of the study participants struggle against in some way.
Chapter Five: Identities

Introduction:

Chapter five was originally intended to address one identity, ethnicity. When interviewing participants for this project, I made sure to have eight Latinx (five men, three women), and eight white participants (four men, four women), in an effort to collect equal voices to discuss the messages both demographics received from religious communities regarding their identity. I wish I could have interviewed four men and four women of both groups, but that is not who stepped forward. During the coding portion of the methodology, I realized I was getting some very telling data around ethnicity and how Latinx and white evangelical students were experiencing very different churches, but there was also some surprising data revealed as they spoke about the intersectional identities they possessed, specifically around gender, finance, and sexuality. I did not ask any questions targeting the participant’s gender, financial literacy or sexuality, but perhaps I should have. Survival narratives around these topics just emerged during the course of the interview, and in the context of other topics (See Appendix K for frequency of participant’s responses in these areas). But the survival narratives around maintaining and managing these identities point to some troubling aspects of evangelical churches, specifically within the Churches of Christ in this case. The narratives surrounding gender are very overt and are clearly articulated and policed, often using similar language and
phrases, regardless of location. The narratives surrounding finance actually emerged during conversations discussing family finance and financial literacy. The narratives surrounding sexuality are striking in their absence and are included here largely because one participant in particular bravely chose to reveal his struggle with his identity as a gay man within his family and religious community, and it deserves to be heard. With the exception of finance, each identity will be discussed according to how the study participants chose to self-identify, and where they are silent, so shall the data be silent. Furthermore, participants did not offer all four survival narrative types for each identity, so those sections will be marked accordingly.

Many of the study participants spoke about financial survival narratives, but the connections drawn between financial narratives and social class are my own. Twelve study participants, and all eight Latinx participants, spoke about their ethnicity or about their experiences with ethnicity. Nine study participants, including all five of the women and four of the men, spoke on evangelical gender identities; while only three spoke about sexuality, including one white gay man, and one white woman and one Latina who didn’t self-identify.

**Section 1: Finance**

I would be remiss to allow my audience to assume any of the study participants self-identified as members of a specific social class. Several of them identified their families while discussing the neighborhood they lived in or the schools they chose to attend, or the work their parents did, but there was not a direct question regarding class level. This section has emerged from the surprising unanimous inclusion of financial survival narratives in the interviews – every member of this study discussed their
financial concerns, or their financial struggles, or the way their families taught them how to handle money or not handle money. I will not be dividing responses according to my perceptions of their class distinctions, although certain assumptions might be made in light of the number of students who attended or are attending private evangelical universities. Bourdieu’s description of social class guides this discussion on class distinctions, and offers a helpful direction in which to move – social class is defined by the structure of relations which assigns value and impacts practices:

Social class is not defined by a property nor by a collection of properties, nor even by a chain of properties strung out from a fundamental property in a relation of cause and effect, conditioner and conditioned; but by the structure of relations between all pertinent properties which gives its specific value to each of them and to the effects they exert on practices.212

So in this case, the relationships between religion, education and each of these identities determines social class in a way that by nature is very subterranean and instinctual, which makes the study and dissecting of class tricky and awkward. It is much simpler, although perhaps more essentialist, to simply stand on Weber’s definition of class distinction as “a person’s economic position in a society.”213 Because the participants are discussing economic strategies, concerns, and lessons in this section, perhaps that would be the simplest and clearest path.

Many of the participants did not feel they received adequate counsel regarding the use of money or financial literacy, and those who did receive instruction found it vague or generic. Regardless, a few respondents offered narratives they identified as helpful. Survival narratives around money that were helpful came largely from the white


respondents, which might identify an undergirding class distinction and the assumption that those who start out with money are better at knowing how to keep money. There seem to be two camps here – those who had money in the first place (from an upper or middle-class family) learned how to hold onto it, and those who did not have money to start with did not learn how to make more. At best, both groups might have received some wisdom on how to keep other people from getting your money, but that is debatable. A few respondents who came from financially stable families had the luxury of holding down jobs in high school or earlier to earn spending money and to practice saving and investing, while those who did not come from financially stable families had to get jobs in high school or middle school to help support the family. One conclusion seems to be that it’s much easier to learn how to manage money if you have money to play and practice with in the first place, and another conclusion is that everyone knows it is better to stay out of debt, unless going into debt is the only way you can buy an education, transportation, shelter, or food. So “stay out of debt” is less than helpful advice and points to class-based assumptions.

**Survival Narratives around Class and Finance**

“You don't need everything that you want.” - Elizabeth (White, female, 21)

Survival narratives around money tended to be very broad and trite with a distinct moral leaning. Participants were told to live beneath their means, to hustle and make connections to get where you want to be, to work hard, to keep an eye on your money, and to be able to take care of yourself. Both Latinx and white evangelical communities seem to believe and enforce the “education is the path to financial success” narrative.
Elizabeth (White, female, 21) is trying to break into the entertainment industry once she graduates from college, and she has had a plan in place for a long time:

I think I've had big dreams, so to speak. Ever since I was little. I've wanted to work in entertainment. I know that to make it in this industry, you have to hustle and make connections. You're not going to make those connections unless you're in the right place at the right time. I knew I wanted to come to Los Angeles for college. To do that, I had to get a certain grade point average, take certain classes, be involved in certain things. Otherwise, I wouldn't get into the colleges I wanted to get into. That was really important to me. I think the college selection process is something that really pushed me to work my hardest.

Elizabeth is graduating with substantial student loans, despite an academic scholarship, but firmly believes it will be worth it, and she will be able to find a job in the entertainment industry she can use to pay off her student loans in a timely manner. School was a wise investment, in her opinion, and the debt is part of how to get what she wants.

“I always learned: Treat others the way you want to be treated.” - Patrick (White, male, 25)

Curiously, many respondents articulated a connection between financial literacy and morality. While none of them overtly mentioned any tenets of prosperity gospel, there was a definite undercurrent of good financial stewardship being spiritually rewarded. Or at least financial stewardship as a moral priority. Patrick (White, male, 25) explains the philosophy in his family: “I always grew up knowing that—we were like middle class—but always grew up knowing that we had enough and that you should always share anything extra that you have.” “Sharing” was a very popular value among
the study participants, and several participants shared stories of financial assistance or mysterious gifts appearing on porches at just the right time.

Three white participants and one Latino participant shared their experience with a faith based financial literacy curriculum called “Financial Peace.” Lynne’s (White, female, 24) father used the class taught at their church to teach his children about money:

There were certain things that they were being taught in the class to try out with your kids. There was a whole section in the program about teaching your kids to be financially responsible—teaching them young, teaching them early. I remember when I was in 8th grade (when they started doing this for us) we would get little cash envelopes. They'd give us a set amount and say, "You need to set aside this much for each thing you do." One, school lunch money. One for activities on the weekends like going to movies. Since I didn't drive at that point, gas wasn't a thing, but for my older sisters it was. They just gave us this set amount of money. It was a lot of money for a 13-year-old kid to manage every week or every two weeks. Since I was 13 and I didn't really go anywhere or do anything, I saved most of it. Honestly, I think I have a lot of that saved in my savings account still.

The Financial Peace class was helpful for Lynne because her father was modeling the precepts for her at home, and the family had enough money to give Lynne to learn with. For the participants who represented wealthier families, the connection made between faithfulness, stewardship and financial stability was comforting and reiterated. For those who did not represent wealthier families, this connection was troubling.
Elizabeth (White, female, 21), Lynne (White, female, 24), Camille (White, female, 21) and Jerry (White, male, 25) all had jobs in high school for extra spending money and to learn how to manage their finances, because their families did not require their labor to assist with meeting basic family needs. Camille felt her grandparents were also trying to teach her a larger lesson: “That's a huge deal for my grandparents. The more secure I am, the more safe I'll be—the more I can provide for myself.” Elizabeth and Lynne both learned personal responsibility along with financial literacy from their jobs. Elizabeth’s parents taught her to think ahead and delay gratification by having her save coins she found on the sidewalk by telling her: “That goes toward your future car.” Lynne had to get a job her junior year in high school because she got into a car wreck and needed a way to pay off the damage. Jerry worked for his local church and used the money to buy a computer. Again, none of these families required the labor of their children to help support the family, so these lessons helped maintain a specific class system into which these participants were born.

Mary (Latina, female, 22) was unique, and got a job in high school in order to exhibit personal responsibility for her family. She got a job in high school so that she could have money to pay for things she needed so her mother wouldn’t have to:

And then, my mom has always been the saving type. She did save her money.

When I ask her, she would give me money. I hate asking my parents for money. I try to find ways where I don't. Until the last second, if I can't, I'll ask maybe for $100. That's every couple of months.

Mary found creative ways to find money for clothes, books, shoes and food that she has carried with her into her college years. Several members of this study exhibited an ability
to earn money in creative ways, what they called their “side hustle.” In addition to regular minimum wage jobs in retail or food, they were opening Etsy shops to sell handcrafted items, or serving as private tutors to younger students, or driving for Uber. The survival narratives of personal responsibility and strong work ethic seem to be serving this group well.

**Well-Meaning Survival Narratives around Finance**

“She (mother) was always the ‘don't do what I did’ type of model.” – Maria (Latina, female, 22)

The well-meaning survival narratives in this case were often modeled by friends and family, and less overtly taught, in contrast to the survival narratives. As with the other identities, two conflicting narratives were often coming from the same person. Maria’s (Latina, female, 22) mother, for example, always encouraged Maria to save her money but struggled to do the same herself: “I think my mom had a really hard time budgeting money. I don't think she ever had more than a couple hundred dollars in savings. When I had that falling out with her, I realized that one of our issues of our falling out was her mismanaging of money. That really struck a chord with me to not do the same.” Adrian (Latino, male, 18) learned a similar lesson from observing his mother’s interaction with his brother, who works all the time but spends all of his money on his girlfriend, which frustrates his mother. Mary (Latina, female, 22)’s family lessons around money were divided between what she heard from her mother and what she observed in her father:

I don't even have a savings account right now. My dad has been very bad with finances to begin with. The whole thing with cheating, that was a huge thing. He
did have a good amount of money at some point where he was able to afford a BMW. Randomly, he just came with a new car. It was over a period of time when he was cheating on my mom. He did have a lot, but my mom didn't know what he was doing with it. We never discussed where money was going. There was never an allowance or anything like that. As children, we would have nothing to do with that. I know my mom and dad didn't really communicate about it. There was a lot of money at some point, but my mom found out he was spending it on other women. The mismanagement of finances there- My dad is terrible with finances. My mom will be like, "Save your money!" She never told me how. The first time I got my debit card, that was literally on the way to orientation. We stopped by the bank. We did that. I know I have a savings account, but since it's so easy to transfer money from one account to the other, I'm always on the zero or close to that. I've never had over $1000 or even $200 in my savings account.

The participants in this study found the inconsistency between the spoken narratives of “save, be responsible, and don’t go into debt” very frustrating as they were so often accompanied by conflicting action. Because the parents wanted their children to be better with money than they were, but clearly did not know how to handle their own money, they often left it up to outside institutions to teach their children about money management, most commonly the church.

Like Lynne (White, female, 24), Adrian’s (Latino, male, 18) family also participated in Financial Peace at their church. But Adrian and his single mother had a completely different experience: “My mom took him (brother) to a seminar. I guess because she thinks if we believe in Jesus, He would lead us down the right path and keep
us out of trouble; out of debt; all that stuff.” One of the major object lessons in Financial Peace is placing cash in envelopes with a specific budget item written on the front. Once the money from that envelope is spent, there is no more money for that item until the next month. Unfortunately, Adrian’s mother did not have enough cash each month to teach her sons how to budget specific things, and she felt ashamed and dropped the class. Adrian found the connection made to financial “failure” and his mother’s faith troubling, because if faith in Jesus could get you out of debt, then was his mother just not being faithful enough or was there something else happening?

Bethany (Latina, female, 20) learned the connection between financial management and faithfulness a different way. If she showed herself to be financially responsible as a teenager, her parents would pay for her to attend college:

For my dad, church was very important to him and my mom. We were given a deal, actually. We would work (it's legal to work at 14 in New York) from the time we were 14, earn our own money and buy our own things. I would buy all my makeup, clothes, shoes; everything that wasn't essential, everything that wasn't food and school related. They would pay for our college, if it was a Christian college. That really narrowed the options, I guess.

Bethany learned a lot about the value of working for her own money and feels she has a good grasp on how much things cost in contrast to an average paycheck but felt a little stifled by the parameters of the deal her parents struck with her. For many participants, making financial literacy a moral imperative created some unnecessary tension in the family and seemed to instill a sense of shame in parents, as many of the families represented believed that part of being a good Christian is being a good steward of
resources, which translates to living within the means of family income and not going into debt. None of the participants were aware enough of family finances to understand that often, going into debt is the only way to take care of people who depend on you and is unavoidable given certain states of an economy. This lack of understanding of how the U.S. class system works, and how the U.S. economy depends on a certain amount of debt and poverty, created some confusion and uninformed judgements around who was or wasn’t “good with money,” and then assigned moral consequences on top of that.

“My parents had always led me to believe that I'm going to marry somebody that's going to take care of me instead of my having my own independence.” – Noelle (White, female, 25)

One of trickiest parts of this dissertation was parsing out the data on different identities because they are all so intertwined. One of the well-meaning narratives that participants shared is unique to the women: the idea that she doesn’t need to worry about understanding how money works because they will get married to someone who will handle it. Noelle (White, female, 25), Maria (Latina, female, 22) and Camille (White, female, 21) in particular shared that this was not only a narrative that was modeled, but one that their parents and their faith community verbally shared with them at one time or another. These three women understood that they were expected to graduate from high school, find someone to marry in college, have children with that man and then stay at home to take care of them while he worked and provided for the family. Additionally, several of the men shared that this was a narrative that they were taught as well. Matt’s (Latino, male, 19) grandfather taught him that being a man means taking care of your family financially: “For being a man, he always said to take care of your family; never let
myself get to the point where I can't take care of myself or them.” None of the women were given the narrative that family financial care was the responsibility of the woman, or even a shared responsibility. All the participants, if they had two parents in their home growing up, had a father who worked. Far fewer had a mother who worked consistently, although all of the single mothers represented by the group worked at least one full time job, and often held additional part time jobs.

For the participants who had single mothers, a few of them expressed tension created by this dynamic within their churches. For a woman to be the sole bread-winner for a family, something had to have gone wrong. Adam (Latino, male, 23) felt uncomfortable at church because he felt the other members were judging his mother for having to work because his father left, and he felt they were placing moral consequences on her for working so much, and for losing her husband.

“I remember my mom told us, ‘keeping up with the Joneses was really important.’” – Sam (White, male, 24)

The final well-meaning narrative that participants shared was the message that, even if money was tight, appearances were very important. The implied pressure to live up to a certain standard was understood by several of the participants as a contradiction with the narratives of living beneath one’s means, and being a faithful steward of resources provided by God. For example, almost all the participants will leave school with debt, and many participants witnessed their parents making appearance-related choices while knowing that these choices were above the financial means of the family. In most cases, these narratives were modeled and not articulated by the family, but Sam
(White, male, 24) in particular very astutely observed his parents’ need to appear a specific way:

Yeah everyone was buying a suburban so she (mother) bought a suburban. Later, she admitted she didn't want it. My dad is a little more subtle. He is in the business world and he bought a Lexus because that's what you do to show you have excess money. I think showing they were good parents was important to them.

This observation from Sam points to a larger issue in many Evangelical churches – the need to be doing “just fine.” For Sam’s parents, he believed they were performing “good parents” by each possessing vehicles other “good parents” had, without considering what vehicles they might actually want, might be best afford, and might best serve the interests of the family. This obsession with appearances comes through in many of the identities in this study, specifically in the area of finance and gender.

**Enduring Survival Narratives around Class and Finance**

*They definitely said, "Be wise. Make sure your necessities are covered first. Don't rely on credit cards. Be smart about it." – Elizabeth (White, female, 21)*

The enduring survival narratives from this study on finance are simple, perhaps so simple as to be unhelpful. All of the participants believed financial literacy is critical, but not for moralistic reasons. When I asked them what narratives they would pay forward to the next generation, they reiterated the exact same phrases from their families they had just been critiquing. Upon reflection, they expressed an understanding that it is important to know how your money works and where it goes, to live beneath your means,
to actively practice saving, to learn budgeting at a young age, and above all, to avoid debt if possible.

However, those participants who could articulate a strategy for how to do these things, or how to build a life around these principles, were very few. This inconsistency produced a sense of shame or guilt in a few participants, and some of them expressed frustration at their parents and communities for not making these skills more of a priority.

“Money is for the family.” - Carlos (Latino, male, 20)

The study demographic who most clearly valued a narrative to hand down to the next generation were the Latinx participants: we earn money in order to take care of our family. Take care of your family, and your family will take care of you. Carlos’s (Latino, male, 20) family has a fund set up just for the education of the children:

Most of the money my dad made was always sent back to Mexico and dispersed. My dad and two other uncles who make the most money, would disperse the money back into Mexico and live moderate or modest means—middle class. You don't spend over the top on clothes, you don't buy luxurious cars. I'd say it's conservative. That's the custom. All that money that's brought back is put into funds for education. Another one of my cousins is in Australia. They valued education over everything. They don't care what they have to pay for it, or what means they have to live in. They live in a really beat-up house, but it's very important for them.

Each of the Latinos in the study expressed a desire to be able to take care of their families after their schooling, particularly the young men who had been raised by single mothers. Manny (Latino, male, 21) says his mother taught him that success is: “An education, to
get jobs that can help support our family, but then also not drain our time, either.” Adam (Latino, male, 23) shared that his family used their financial resources to ensure he “had a better life growing up” than his older family members had, and he feels the need to return his success back to them. Carlos feels convicted to not only send money back home to support his family, but he is also using his education to enter law school and become an immigration attorney, because he truly believes, “That's the backbone of the U.S. economy; immigrants, in general. If you try to get rid of us, your economy's going to go to shambles.” At the same time that all of the Latinx participants expressed an unquestioned understanding that money is for supporting the family, several of them articulated a mistrust of the U.S. banking system. Carlos explained that, “we don't trust banks. No stock market. No mutual funds or 401Ks. No retirement. My mom keeps it in her shoes.” This distrust of the U.S. financial institution is striking given the trust placed in other U.S. institutions, specifically educative and religious organizations.

**Reinterpreted Survival Narratives around Class and Finance**

“*Success would be a comfortable income where I don't have to worry about bills.*” - Maria (Latina, female, 22)

Many more of the study participants expressed a conviction that became a common refrain: Money isn’t everything. At least in their current life stages, they were unanimously less concerned with appearances or status than they claimed their parents were. They seem to agree that earning money is not about wealth for them but about security, and very few of them were willing to sacrifice personal happiness in a job they don’t enjoy to gain wealth. Most of the participants expressed a willingness to work in a job they enjoyed for less pay than in a job they didn’t enjoy for more money. This
willingness to choose job satisfaction over a paycheck is due to myriad potential reasons, but participants claimed many other things were more important than being financially secure.

This generation seems less afraid of going into substantial debt than their parents’ generation. Perhaps because for most of them, obtaining debt at a young age is the only way forward. For many participants, getting a college education was more important than not going into debt, or being financially stable for a few years. Adam’s (Latino, male, 23) grandfather was very concerned about Adam’s quality of life and encouraged him to explore his options. Matt (Latino, male, 19) was committed to gaining an education and finding work he loved, even if he acquired debt to do it:

A side note for myself, I didn't want to become like those typical people who go straight out of high school and just get a job and get stuck in that same thing; they don't like it, but it's the only way they can make money. Even if I have to go in debt for college, I would use the opportunity to make something of myself and when I'm out, I would pay it off and be more well off than I would be if I just worked straight out of high school.

Matt’s grandfather made sure to balance Matt’s drive to succeed by emphasizing good character as a virtue as well. Noelle (White, female, 25) was raised to believe that as soon as she got married, she and her husband needed to begin budgeting for their future children and their college expenses. She learned growing up that a good Christian virtue is to think about the future and plan ahead. Instead, she and her now husband are enjoying travel: “We're already planning our trips in the future. Forget kids! None of that money's going towards that. All of that money is going towards travelling right now. A
lot of people save for a house and their future. Cole and I are living for the moment.”

Additionally, Noelle would also leave behind the pressure to maintain appearances, and chooses to support differences in lifestyles in her present family:

I wouldn't necessarily pass down the "keeping up with the Joneses" attitude (because that's something Mom lived by). I want my kids or somebody else's kids to know that differences are okay. We don't have to be just like our neighbor and we should celebrate those differences.

Because Maria (Latina, female, 22) didn’t have an adult to teach her money management, she is a big advocate for self-taught financial literacy, although she hopes to be a parent one day who can teach her children what she had to learn on her own: “I think I'm one of the biggest penny-pinchers and frugal persons because of those life experiences. I've done a lot of online research Googling saving methods to do and becoming a little bit more savvy; I'd pass down Money management and savings which I've come to learn on my own.”

In general, study participants defined financial success like Sam (White, male, 24) does: “To be able to pay for stuff.” They are not concerned with wealth or appearances, but more concerned with finding work they enjoy and sharing experiences. They believe financial success is good, but it is not a worthy life pursuit, and your ability to save and stay out of debt does not define how faithful a Christian you are. Instead of chasing money, they are choosing to value relationships, experiences, and meaningful work more than financial success.
Section 2: Ethnicity
They were kind of invisible. – Bethany (Latina, female, 20)

As I’ve stated previously, this section was intended originally to provide the bulk of the findings. The subject’s responses were more than likely tilted toward my identity as “white teacher lady” as the participants did not identify as Latino/a or as Latins at any point except for when they accepted the invitation on the flyer or the email to be interviewed. I understand that the terms “Latino/a” and “Latinx” are used only when people who don’t share heritage with Latin America are involved in the conversation, and the responses from my participants were largely in an effort to help me understand their experiences as second or third generation Latinx Americans. As expected, each of my participants went to great lengths to try and communicate their experiences of marginalization, knowing I have had no experience that remotely aligns with theirs.

I struggled with the correct terminology for this section. Initially, it was to be called “nationality,” because I requested interviews from 18-25-year-olds who were descended from people who were raised in Latin American countries, or self-identifying “Latino/as.” I did not ask any of my study participants if they knew that the interviewer would be white, based on the recruitment materials, but I would not be surprised to know this is the case. Through conversations with my participants and with Dan Rodriguez and Miguel De La Torre, I’ve learned that “Latino/a” or “Latinx” is a term designed by and for white people, because white people are managing the conversation. Then I switched to titling this section “race,” because some of my participants were conflating stories using the terms “race” and “ethnicity.” I realized that the participants were performing for me the very thing I was searching for in my interviews: they were agreeing to the term
“Latino/a” and “Latinx” because they knew that is what I would understand, what white
culture understands, that all of these people share a history because they all speak
Spanish.\textsuperscript{214} They are used to distinctions between race, ethnicity and nationality being
collapsed under umbrella terms like “Latino” or “Hispanic” or “Chicano,” and working
forward from there.\textsuperscript{215} These group identifiers are very loaded and nuanced when used in
the US context by white people, because these terms represent an oversimplification of a
whole continents’ worth of identities.

So, of course I would have a hard time titling this section, because I was using the
common paradigm that basically claims that everyone whose ancestors were born south
of the US/Mexico border are all one type of person. In reality, I interviewed Mexican
Americans and Colombian Americans and Argentinian Americans and Guatemalan
Americans. Therefore, because I am identifying my participants based on the nation of
their ancestry and the culture that surrounds the religiosity of those communities, I have
chosen to title this section “ethnicity,” because this term allows a more level playing field
in contrast to the white study participants.

Twelve of the sixteen participants discussed ethnicity beyond my initial question
about their family identity. All eight of the Latinx participants could provide me with
detailed histories of their families of origin, and frequently shared their stories of
migration and resettlement. In stark contrast, only 3 white participants knew their

\textsuperscript{214} Miguel A. De La Torre, “Language,” in \textit{Hispanic American Religious Culture}s, vol.1, ed. Miguel A. De
La Torre, (Denver, CO: ABC-CLIO, 2009 (225-226.

\textsuperscript{215} Ed Morales makes a case for “Spanglish” instead of Latino/a/x or Hispanic because: “There is no better
metaphor for what a mixed-race culture means than a hybrid language, an informal code; the same sort of
linguistic construction that defines different classes in a society can also come to define something outside
it, a social construction with different rules. Spanglish is what we speak, but it is also who we Latinos are,
how we act, and how we perceive the world.” \textit{Living in Spanglish}, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2002),
3.
ancestry, and none of them knew their family’s stories of migration. I myself was unaware of my ancestry until I began these interviews, which shamed me the first time a participant returned my question and asked me about my family. It turns out we are Irish.

The four white participants who discussed ethnicity at all - Sam (White, male, 24), Noelle (White, female, 25), Lynne (White, female, 24), Camille (White, female, 21) – discussed it in a very generic sense. They affirmed as witnesses the truths the eight Latinx participants described: how their evangelical worlds were very white, how there was very little diversity in evangelical schools and churches, and the diversity in existence was evangelistic or separated. Sam and Noelle talked about how their parents moved to neighborhoods that were largely homogenous, and Camille and Lynne described how their college experiences were largely consisting of white students. All eight of the Latinx described living in liminal spaces of every kind, and straddling worlds of religious denomination within evangelical churches, between parent nationality and citizenship and their own, between skin color and language assumptions, between parent’s dreams for them and their own dreams for their futures, and between family expectations and their own desires.

During the coding process, I realized that I was seeing evidence of three major concepts made famous in postcolonial theory by Homi Bhabha: hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence. Each of these terms determines some way of resisting colonial dominance. Hybridity is the result of colonization and results in something more than the sum of its parts: “elements that are neither the One… nor the Other… but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both.”\(^{216}\)

\(^{216}\) Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 2004,) 42.
either/or. It is the emergence of a new form demanding transformative understanding. The colonial hybrid is “the articulation of ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory.”

Mimicry occurs when the colonized subject desires to take on the attributes of the colonizer. It is “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.” This “almostness” creates a doubling effect in which the colonial discourse is “transformed into uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as partial presence.” Mimicry will never be mistaken for its object, and the colonized becomes stuck, but the colonial discourse is also disrupted because it “raises the question of the authority of colonial representations.”

Ambivalence means “going either way,” and it is ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its weight. Ambivalence describes “knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.” Ambivalence is the experience of the colonized in mimicry of the colonizer, and along with hybridity and mimicry defines the colonized as an amorphous borderland upon which the experiences of colonization can enact change and transformation. Bhabha contends that this moment of liminality “produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of iterative ‘unpicking’ and incommensurable, insurgent

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217 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 160.

218 Ibid., 122.

219 Ibid, 123.

220 Ibid, 129.

221 Ibid, 95.
relinking.”¹²² My study participants felt required to be fluent in at least two cultures if not more, in the name of “passing” and surviving.

“Sometimes it did feel like I was a fly in this bowl of milk....” - Maria (Latina, female, 22)

As a result, and because of the nature of this study, all 8 of the self-identified Latino/a and Latinx participants described their experiences of liminality in church and school specifically, and sometimes, at the same time. The two major borderland locations discussed by the participants were school and church, although many of them spoke about general experiences in North American culture. All of the Latinx participants have familiarity and close personal experience with the Catholic Church, although most of them shared the common experience of having to explain to someone how and why they were not Catholic. Mary (Latina, female, 22) experienced this assumption regularly in her college: “Because I am first generation Hispanic, a lot of my friends are Catholic, and people here assume I am Catholic because I am Hispanic.” Mary and Carlos (Latino, male, 20) attended churches that were predominately Spanish-speaking, but the others attended multi-racial congregation where they were the miniscule minority. A few participants attended churches where they were part of the “Spanish Congregation.” These are predominately white churches that have a minister on staff who is Latino (usually) and who speaks Spanish. The Spanish congregation meets in a separate section of the building during the service, or sometimes at a completely separate time, and does everything in Spanish or in a combination of English and Spanish. Occasionally, the Spanish-speaking minister will preach in the main auditorium in English, or in both

¹²² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 265.
Spanish and English, and occasionally the praise team or worship leader will try to lead some songs in the corporate worship in Spanish. But the majority of the time the two groups are separate. Adrian’s (Latino, male, 18) Spanish-speaking congregation met in a loft area of the larger church: “They have their class time and then, during the service, you can stay there. Then, the minister he translates the messages.” Adrian’s Spanish-speaking minister would listen to the English sermon being preached downstairs and would translate it verbatim for the Spanish-speaking congregation. The two congregations met at the same time but were physically completely separate. This was not an uncommon dynamic for the participants – many attended churches who advertised their diversity but were actually quite homogenous in practice. Maria (Latina, female, 22) attended the same church Adrian did, and Maria’s mother attended the Spanish-speaking service, but Maria participated in the larger congregation because her English is excellent, and her mother pushed her to blend in. Yet her experience was deeply uncomfortable, and she never felt like she belonged:

It's always kind of been that issue with churches that we go to. I think that's more of an issue; another thing is the race. When I went to the Hills, I don't think I felt like anyone was intentionally mean to me or racist towards me, but it is a little uncomfortable when you don't look like the people that you're surrounded with.

In addition to their churches, the Latinx participants described this experience of hybridity, of being either/or and neither/nor in school and the community at large as well. Bethany (Latina, female, 20) was adopted by a white family in Upstate New York as an infant, and although her family celebrated her Mexican heritage, she grew up knowing very little Spanish and having very little first-hand experience with Mexican-American
culture. In Bethany’s town the only other Mexican-Americans were field laborers, and she did not feel she fit in with them either:

   It was really weird because I very much identify as being Mexican, but I didn't grow up in the culture and speaking Spanish. It's important to me, but I feel about I have to learn about my own culture. It seems very odd for me on the outside looking in. I'm not quite white, I'm not quite Mexican, I'm not quite enough for either. It's definitely weird.

In Matt’s (Latino, male, 19) middle school, he was too light skinned to be accepted by other Latin America descendants, and at college he feels he is only seen as “Mexican:”

   In my middle and high school, it was mostly Latinos. But I'm very light-skinned compared to other Latinos so I stood out as a white person there. Coming here, it's completely a different story. It's like I'm the Latino. There, I knew I was different because they would call me gringo, which means white boy; as opposed to here, the misconceptions that people get up; it's not intentional, but you can tell they're misunderstanding.

Because these types of experiences are no surprise to anyone in this community, the survival narratives passed down through the generations regularly deal with hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence. The shared experience of being a minority in a white community, of living in different iterations of a liminal space, of not quite fitting in either identity, and having to figure out how to handle it and “learning how to pass” were all shared experiences by the Latinx participants in this study. The categories I have created around survival narratives take on different meaning here, and I have collapsed “survival narratives” and “well-meaning survival narratives” together. Up to this point, “well-
meaning survival narratives” have been the narratives that hurt people, or confused or marginalized them, but in this context, these are all narratives that communicate an understanding from the participant’s families and communities that they are working from a disadvantage, and these are the things required to make it work, to do what is necessary in order to survive, and in order to remain in the States and gain access to oportunidad and the American Dream. Many of these narratives have to do with fitting in or safety and are the respondent’s perceptions of how to make it here. In describing the survival narratives, the respondents were stoic and direct – they seem to share an understanding that “this is just the way things are.” I have chosen to place all these stories in the “survival narratives” section because they provide an avenue for survival in dominant culture, but what these narratives actually share are methods of dealing with discrimination, and they do not point to flattering truths of evangelical churches or schools, or in fact U.S. culture in general.

**Survival Narratives around Ethnicity**

“There was a constant fear that everyone's white; so if you do one thing out of the norm, that they're going to catch you.” - Carlos (Latino, male, 20)

Survival narratives in this section carried a heavy burden, as many of them were designed to provide not only financial success or cultural capital, but personal safety and physical survival as well. The first stage of narratives in this section achieved actual personal survival before moving ahead to success and thriving. In this section alone, “survival narrative” quite literally means personal, physical survival. Several of the participants shared stories of generational advice on “how to pass” or “how to be safe,” and much of it had to do with disguising their true identity. Carlos (Latino, male, 20) was
raised in Orange County, but regularly travels back to Mexico to visit his extended family. Here he elaborates on his parents’ advice to him as he travels back and forth across the border south of San Diego from Tijuana:

My parents bought me an American car, American clothing, and bought a house in the most white community. They sent me to the whitest school. I look white, for the most part. They instructed me very well. "This is what you need to do. Don't listen to Mexican music in the car." They live in constant fear. My mom has a green card and my dad is a citizen here. You still fear it. The biggest thing was how you dress. Dress American. Typical Mexican is blue jeans, white shoes, tucked in polo; typical. They're like, "You wear shorts, you wear flip flops, you wear baggy T-shirts, you do your hair a certain way, don't use a ton of gel in your hair because it makes you look more Mexican, you shave because it makes you look more American." They're going to think “You look too Mexican.” It's sad that they have to live in fear. “Don't speak Spanish. If you're asked where your parents are from, say from Spain.” Because my dad's part Spanish, “Because of grandpa; you say you're from Spain.” I get it, but it didn't help that I grew up in Orange County. But they were over the top, in my opinion; especially since we're all citizens. There's no reason why we should be scared.

Carlos learned from an early age that to survive and succeed was to hide his true identity, to mask himself and pretend to be something other than who he actually is. Although he is not frustrated with his family or angry at North American white culture, he has developed a chip on his shoulder, and he has turned his bi-cultural fluency into an advantage. Carlos has pursued every scholarship and academic award for which he might
be eligible, he has pursued mentors and employment with Latinx leaders in the greater LA area, and he has learned remarkable networking and social gifts. Because his parents taught him how to read a situation so carefully, how to recognize and play into the assumptions undergirding a situation, Carlos has become fearless. Carlos recently approached Oscar Mondragón, who worked with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers for ten years, for a summer internship. After graduation, Carlos plans to go on to law school and become an immigration attorney and maybe run for public office.

Adrian’s (Latino, male, 18) father passed along insight he gained from experiencing racial profiling because of his appearance:

He shaves his head. He's got tattoos. He's not in a gang or anything like that, but he's very serious-faced. He got a lot of racial profiling like that when I was growing up. He tells me all these horror stories of him getting pulled over. I feel like I've honestly escaped it and I think it's the way... My dad didn't want us to fall into that area so he moved us out of rougher neighborhoods and into more predominantly white neighborhoods. He didn't let us wear hats weird. He wouldn't let us sag our pants. We always had a belt on. He wanted us to be proper, I guess.

He didn't want us to be like hoodlums and thuggy; and what not.

One of the striking features of Latinx survival narratives is the thread of “different than what we did” or “not who we are.” It is troubling that so many Latinx people of older generations are passing down narratives that are the opposite of who they are or what they did, not because there is anything innately wrong with who they are or what they did, but because they have experienced first-hand that who they are and what they do is unacceptable in US culture, and carrying this natural identity north of the US/Mexico
border has negative legal, personal and educative repercussions. For both Carlos’s (Latino, male, 20) and Adam’s (Latino, male, 23) families, the young men heard how to act differently than those how have gone before them, how to perform “American” and hide “Mexican.” For the very basic foundations of a person’s identity to be so vilified that one’s children must be warned away from emulating them must feel very demeaning indeed. Matt’s (Latino, male, 19) family did not teach him to behave as an “American,” but they left his search for an identity in his own hands: “They didn't want to try and identify us as something that we would grow up identifying ourselves as for the rest of our lives. They wanted us to grow the opportunity to find ourselves.” Matt proudly self-identities with all his family’s heritages and describes himself as an Argentine-Guatemalan-Mexican. But when Matt is at school in California, he is known as Mexican or Latino.

Manny (Latino, male, 21) received similar advice from his mother, although she did not have specific capital to pass down to her children. But she knew they would face obstacles and encouraged them to develop personal skill sets and a serious work ethic to prepare for it: “She was very like, ‘There's that wall for you and you've got to find this for yourself.’” For Manny’s mother, she found a way to get to the US and to do work that provided for her family – she set them up to take the next leap forward into success and opportunity.

“She always told us her favorite word, I think, (in Spanish) is oportunidad. She really believes that's all it takes.” - Manny (Latino, male, 21)

One thing that the Latinx survival narratives supported was the idea of oportunidad: The American Dream. The Latinx families and communities represented in
this study believed that all their young people needed was a shot at a better opportunity in order to succeed. Almost all of the participants mentioned *oportunidad*, and it almost always had to do with either access to better education, better job prospects, or sometimes for the women, access to marriageable men with U.S. citizenship. The Latinx participants of this study all feel the weight of their families’ expectations on them – they understand that their families did what it took to position them to access an education and therefore better career options and they feel proud of their families and the strength they showed in providing an entrance to the Dream.

The Latinx participants were all very clear that *oportunidad* was the reason their ancestors came to the United States. Manny (Latino, male, 21) described his mother’s dreams for her children:

To her, success meant the same equal opportunity and happiness. For her, it wasn't really about money or any materialistic thing. She came to this country because she wanted her kids to have an equal opportunity, to be happy; that's what it was. That was our conversation growing up.

Manny’s mother earned a degree in the Dominican Republic that did not follow her to the States, but that loss was worth it for her to provide a different future for her children. Like any family, the true dream behind these narratives is for the safety, security and happiness of the younger generation, but for these families from Mexico, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic and Argentina, that dream requires extra labor and sacrifice.

The participant’s families wanted their children to maintain pride in their ethnicity, and a desire to maintain contacts with family who still live in countries of origin, but there was no question of leaving and coming to the United States. Those
participants who described the migratory catalyst for an ancestor seem to understand that, while their countries of origin are home, they could not stay, for a variety of reasons.

Bethany’s (Latina, female, 20) Mexican birth mother chose to put her up for adoption and would only consider adoptive families within the United States: “She didn't want me to stay in Mexico. Her family lived in Monterrey. I'm not exactly sure what trouble her dad got into, but they literally had to flee the city.”

Adrian (Latino, male, 18) is very clear on what he would be doing if his family hadn’t left Mexico: “If you were born in Mexico where my mom grew up, what I'd be doing right now is probably herding cattle.” The biggest reason for immigrating to the States was without question access to better education. Carlos (Latino, male, 20) explained why leaving Mexico so he could go to school was so important to his family: “The Mexican education system's much different. It's very much different. That's why when I got into high school my parents said, 'you've got to stay in the United States.'”

Carlos’s grandfather had saved money for decades for his grandchildren to attend school in the U.S. and had even sold some of his land in Mexico to put all of them through four-year colleges. Adam (Latino, male, 23) remembered in great detail a fight he had with his father when Adam mentioned the possibility of taking a year off from school between high school and college. He did not quite understand how important it was to his family that he earn a degree until that moment. A few of the participants spoke about how scary it must have been for their families to send them to college in the States, even though that opportunity for a college degree was what they had dreamed of and sacrificed for. The children were going where many of the adults had never been, and they were unsure how to prepare the children.
The younger generation responded differently to this dynamic. Mary (Latina, female, 22) expressed an ongoing fear against which she struggled into her college years; that people would think she was dumb because she was Latina. Because of this fear, however, she was greatly driven to succeed and did so. Bethany (Latina, female, 20) and her adopted brother from Jamaica grew up with an adoptive white family in upstate New York who had no idea how to prepare them for the discrimination they would face.

Their solution, as she sees it, was to teach them strength of character, confidence, how to work hard, and above all, courage, so they could handle whatever life threw at them: “They trust us a lot. Really, when we were growing up, they knew it was different for us. They trusted us to handle it. Probably, when things started getting more dangerous, that was when we weren't kids anymore. We could handle ourselves.” This strategy seemed to be another commonality among all of these families represented by this study: if we provide our children with access to opportunities that can lead to success, and we can teach our kids values and character, they will be able to handle whatever unknown challenges life throws at them.

Enduring Narratives around Ethnicity

“I feel an obligation to give back to that village.” – Carlos (Latino, male, 20)

“You have to give back to family.” - Mary (Latina, female, 22)

Since the participants in this study are largely fulfilling their family’s dreams for them and getting good educations and pursuing meaningful work and relationships, many of the survival narratives they grew up with may not need to be carried forward to the next generation. None of the participants mentioned feeling the need to tell any future children about how to dress and behave for safety, or how to “pass,” or how to handle
discrimination. Specifically, within the Latinx families, and the Latinx communities represented by these participants, was the enduring narrative of the importance of community. Each Latinx study participant mentioned their larger familial support system, and often that of their church or larger community. Adam’s (Latino, male, 23) family overtly talked to him about leaning on them for support and encouragement: “They said stuff would happen and we'd get knocked down. They'd always be there to pick us up, help us out, dust us off, keep us moving forward.” Carlos (Latino, male, 20) is already looking into his future and planning on opportunities to return the sacrifice he has received in his own education:

I feel an obligation to give back to that village; all those people who've ever wanted to come to the United States; being able to speak up for them through legislation or through some sort of diplomacy; to be able to bring them to the States and have their kids and have the opportunities that I had. I'm one in very, very few. The primary amount of Mexicans come from rural areas. They have that dream. The American Dream is alive and well; giving those people the opportunities that I was fortunate enough to have.

There is a definite tone of gratefulness and solemn responsibility among these Latinx participants – they understand that their successes reflect upon and benefit many others beyond themselves. For those attending school far away from family or community, or for those who are in a space of tension with their families, they have created surrogate family systems around them who have similar backgrounds. For this reason, Bethany (Latina, female, 20), Mary (Latina, female, 22) and Matt (Latino, male, 19) are all members of the Latino Student Association at their schools, and Matt is part of the Posse
Program at his University. As Matt describes it, these groups provide a safe space in the university setting, a way to stay together and watch each other’s backs.

**Reinterpretation of Survival Narrative around Ethnicity:**

“I wouldn't be living the American Dream. I wouldn't be taking advantage of all those opportunities given to me.” – Maria (Latina, female, 22)

“Don't let anyone talk down on you.” - Carlos (Latino, male, 20)

While the majority of the participants feel deeply connected to and responsible for their families and communities of origin, that was not the case for everyone. Not every participant clings to family or desires to return home or give back to their family. The story of Maria (Latina, female, 22) is particularly relevant here, and reminds me of the song “La Jaula de Oro” by Los Tigres del Norte:

Tengo mi esposa y mis hijos que me los traje muy chicos y se han olvidado ya de mi México querido del que yo nunca me olvido y no puedo regresar.

“Y escuchame hijo, ¿te gustaría que regresáramos a vivir México?”
“Whatcha talkin’ about Dad? I don’t wanna go back to Mexico, no way Dad.”

Mis hijos no hablan conmigo otro idioma han aprendido y olvidado el español. Piensan como americanos niegan que son mexicanos, aunque tengan mi color.

I have my wife and children Whom I brought when they were young And they've already forgotten My beloved Mexico Which I can never forget And cannot return to

“Listen son, Would you like to go back and live in Mexico?”
"What are you talking about dad? I don't want to go back to Mexico, no way dad."

My kids don't speak to me They've learned another language And they've forgotten Spanish They think like Americans They deny that they're Mexicans Though they have my skin color.
This song is the story of Maria’s mother. Because of her courageous immigration from Mexico through the deserts of Arizona, she was able to provide Maria with an excellent education, a supportive community and opportunities for a successful career. Maria grew up in the States, and has been very successful academically, and is so intelligent and thinks through things so deeply, she now inhabits a space unfamiliar to her mother, that scares her mother. For Maria, the life she is living is the American Dream and, in her mind, she has fulfilled her mother’s wishes for her. Because Maria’s mother has provided her the opportunity to choose her future, she is doing just that, even though it is different than what Maria’s mother envisioned, and this choice has driven a wedge between them:

All my life growing up, I always championed my mother and my grandmother as my heroes; I still do to this day. They still do things for me that ... Just the simple fact that they came here to give me a better life, not even knowing in their plans that I would exist or that their grandchildren would be here. That first step of bravery, I will always appreciate. I think that when you're an American or when you're born here, you have to really take full advantage of that. I wouldn't be taking advantage of all those opportunities given to me.

Maria understands that her mother is not trying to control her future and her choices out of maliciousness or a sense of entitlement – Maria believes that her independence, freedom and range of options is frightening for her mother. Maria’s mother dreamed of sending her to college one day, and ironically, it was Maria’s time in college that drew her in a different direction than her mother. When Maria left home to attend college, she was drawn to a professor who showed her a new version of who a Latina could be:
When I met Professor Navarro, I thought, ‘Oh, my God! She's like me, but she's not! She's all these awesome things that I want to be.’ It was awesome. That was kind of my first step, when I left my little bubble in Mesquite where I lived. There was this whole world outside of it.

This new mentor changed Maria’s perspective on her future, and on what she might be capable of. When Maria tried to explain to her mother that she did not want to find a husband in college, to get married immediately and have children as her mother wanted, but rather wanted to start a career and travel, this was the beginning of the breach between them.

Although Maria’s mother’s English is excellent now, she still relied on young Maria to translate much of her communication with the larger community. Maria remembers having to miss school in order to go to the bank or post office with her mother to translate her mother’s business. Maria was also not able to take long trips with her church as a teenager because her mother was nervous to do without her for very long: “I think she was just anxious because she couldn't really speak English; just the communication aspect. Me translating always was good.” Maria enjoys returning to Mexico and visiting extended family occasionally but feels no desire to return one day or to send any kind of support back to her relatives. The States is her primary home, and she is building a new family with her boyfriend and his family:

I've never had the desire to go back and live because of the fact I had visited where my family grew up. I've never had the desire to go back and live there. This has always been my home. I love going back and visiting. I think my mom sometimes said she might go back to Mexico and retire, but it always changed. I
know for my grandparents, that's something they would love—to retire in their hometown.

Maria would like to have children one day, but when she does, she will teach them the story of her mother and her journey to the States. She will teach them about their heritage and she will teach them Spanish, but she will also encourage them to dream big dreams for themselves and to make fearless choices, to take risks and create their own happiness. She also believes that her mother will be part of their lives, and that this estrangement will be temporary. But when they reunite, it will be on Maria’s terms. Carlos (Latino, male, 20) has also developed a different philosophy than his parents in one specific area, and that is how to deal with discrimination. Carlos will teach his children how to turn the prejudice of larger society into a chip on the shoulder that motivates them to great success, as he has done:

Don't let anyone talk down on you. I have a different philosophy than my parents. I think you should embrace it, if anything. If you're discriminated against, so be it. You should be willing to accept it. I think that's part of my transition into college. I embrace it. I'm Hispanic. The whole fighter mentality is common in Mexico. You keep fighting and struggle. It's not like Americans. It's a bit narcissistic; just how we view them. You keep your head up. With Mexicans, it's you keep your head down and you work. You bust your ass and you work until you make it. It's a different philosophy.

Carlos perceives that many immigrants are in the States fearfully or apologetically. Carlos believes they are afraid of systemic repercussions from law enforcement or access to labor and education resources, so many immigrants just try to blend into the
background and do what it takes to get along. Carlos learned many of these lessons from his family, but from Carlos’s perspective, the citizens of U.S. States along the U.S./Mexico border are the ones who exist illegally. North Americans are the ones who stole land and resources, and they are the ones who built, and continue to build, their economy on the backs of Latin American through slave labor. From Carlos’s perspective, the States need immigrant labor, and believes the U.S. economy would collapse without it. Therefore, Carlos is proud to claim resources in the United States and does so loudly with authority. He will not be teaching any children he has to just get along to make it, he will teach them the Mexican fighter mentality.

Section 3: Gender

“Being a good Christian woman is like being a good waitress...” - Camille (White, female, 21)

In general, strict gender roles have been the norm in evangelical churches, specifically in the Churches of Christ in this case. Regarding gender, there are only two binaries – man or woman. Only these two poles are recognized, reified and rewarded. Because of this assumption in the Churches of Christ, in this dissertation the conversation will revolve around “men” and “women” as understood in the traditional evangelical sense. There is a steep penalty for stepping outside of these binaries. Like many of us, Churches of Christ conflate gender and sexuality, so people who push gender boundaries often have their sexualities called into question. For example, women who are excellent athletes are often taunted for being “lesbians,” and men who are good at singing and calligraphy are often teased for being “gay.” There are easy correctives to these assumptions, however. For example, if you can sing and like to dance, as a man, you
need to be really good at a contact sport, so the first part can be overlooked. If you are a female athlete, you need to be invested in styled hair and clothes and makeup. For all the pain and disillusionment these participants, especially the women, expressed regarding their understanding of religious gender roles, there were some rays of hope. Some of the participants could share both positive and negative experiences with gender expectations. Some of the women learned about certain roles and behaviors at church, but then learned something different at home. Some of the participants were raised by single mothers who shattered the stereotype of the housewife. Some of the participants had a role model at school or through extended family who redefined gender roles for them. Of the 16 total participants, 9 of them discussed gender in some form during the interview. Again, none of the study questions had anything to do with gender, yet the subject arose repeatedly. The respondents who discussed gender expectations included 5 of the 7 total women (2 Latina and 3 white) and 4 of the 9 total men (all Latino.)

**Survival Narratives around Gender**

"My family loves to say: 'You can do whatever a boy does. You're equal.'" - Elizabeth (White, female, 21)

Not all of the women shared negative experiences with gendered narratives, and some of the women shared positive narratives from their families. A few of them drew distinctions between narratives they heard through their church community and narratives from their families, but most commonly the participants shared a combination of positive and negative survival narratives. Elizabeth (White, female, 21) in particular shared some very positive gender narratives from her family. Elizabeth was raised with two younger
sisters, and her parents always affirmed their abilities and equality, although she wonders if that message would be different if she had a brother:

There are no boys in my family. That's something interesting I've always wondered. How would it be different if there were boys in my family? I do wonder sometimes if I did have a brother, would he have been told something different? One of my sisters is thinking about studying music, the other one is thinking about studying creative writing. We've always been encouraged to follow our dreams, if that makes sense. My parents trust we'll work hard and survive however we need to.

Elizabeth’s mother is a stay-at-home mom, which she affirms was her mother’s choice. There was a period where her mother worked but she felt she was missing too much so she left work. For Elizabeth, choosing to parent at home is a personal choice that has nothing to do with gender but with desire and ability:

My mom became a stay-at-home mom when she started having children, but that wasn't until her early 30s. She did have a period of time where she worked. She always encouraged us to have drive and ambition, but that wasn't the be-all, end-all. She believes motherhood is a respectable profession, obviously.

For Elizabeth, and for a few other participants, the choice does not have to be between parenting or work. For now, Elizabeth has professional dreams to chase and she is going to worry about what it would mean to have children later. At Elizabeth’s school, no one graduates married, and people who get married right out of college are in a vast minority.

Camille (White, female, 21) and Noelle (White, female, 25) both expressed a desire to pursue a career and professional opportunity without worrying about starting a
family or getting married, and both women found ready support for those decisions. Camille’s family encouraged her to pursue degrees that would enable her to support herself well, once they understood that she was determined to not get married any time soon. Noelle was raised to find a husband in college, but she graduated without any potential mates on the horizon. When she moved back in with her family after graduation, she began working at a coffee shop where she met the man she is now married to, who pushed her to pursue her professional dreams:

I'm going to start nursing school. He's actually a graphics designer, does freelance stuff. He does provide for me so that's great. I chickened out with nursing school because I thought I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. I thought, "Why would I get a career in that when I could easily just sail through this Family Studies degree?" I'm actually starting school in January. I'm going back. My fiance's super excited for me. He's really pushed for it.

Noelle is very happy, because she did not think a marriage could work like hers has turned out. She and her husband travel often, have put conversations about children on hold, and they are both pursuing professional goals. For these three women, stereotypical traditional gender roles are being reshaped and redefined through their experiences with immediate family, education or with new family.

**Well-Meaning Survival Narratives around Gender**

“If a woman is submissive then that makes her strong. And she's sacrificing all of her own wants and needs for the sake of others; which is very Christian-like.” - Camille (White, female, 21)

“Now, I look at church as something that damaged me.” – Noelle (White, female, 25)
I feel it is critical to the validity of this study to point out that this section is the one that has been the most difficult for me to bracket myself. As a middle-aged, single woman in the Churches of Christ who chose to not have children and instead chose a career, these are narratives that are still very tender for me. Although I grew up with 4 sisters in a preacher’s house, my family has always been supportive and encouraging, and has pushed me not just to succeed but to excel. My experiences within the church have been different. I was the second woman to serve a Church of Christ as a full-time paid youth minster, and the first woman to do so with an advanced degree. Within that congregation, I was the first woman to earn a paycheck commensurate to the men’s wages, the first to preach before a multi-gendered group, and the first to attend Elder’s meetings. I developed a very thick skin, but now, observing my 3 nieces struggle in this area, approaching these stories with a clinical, academic lens is difficult, but I am hoping that naming the issue will make it easier for me to do so.

The well-meaning narratives for women in evangelical churches shared during this study are no surprise. Separating out the responses into quotes is tricky because each of the participants could rattle off a whole list of attributes and behaviors the evangelical church expected of its women: women do not work outside the home, they are faithful to their husbands and they do not get divorced, they get married to a man who provides for the family and who serves as the spiritual leader of the family and as the head of the house, they raise Christian children, they set a good example, they are “pure” before and during their marriage, they do not drink, they are submissive, quiet, and happy, and they take care with their appearance to be modest but pleasing. Several phrases were repeated verbatim across the demographics, regardless of age or location of family of origin. Some
of these phrases were pulled from scripture, especially Proverbs 31, 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3, but some of them were from outside sources. I believe this is due to children and youth curriculum and programs that were popular within the Churches of Christ and were handed down through generations of women, programs for little girls like “Bullfrogs and Butterflies” or “Bad Girls of the Bible,” and the prevalence of gender-specific retreats and events in churches. Interestingly, a few women participants mentioned an event their youth group provided for them when they entered middle school in which they got makeovers or “got their colors done.” In researching this phrase, there is no absolute answer, but it seems to lead back to a type of training activity for those new to wearing makeup provided by the makers of Mary Kay makeup. Selling Mary Kay, like Avon and TupperWare before it and LulaRoe clothing after it, seemed to be a popular and respectable “side hustle” for stay at home mothers, or working mothers looking to pick up some extra money. For the girls who participated in a Mary Kay makeover, it was usually through someone else’s mother who sold the makeup.

Because of all of these factors, none of the participants who discussed evangelical gender roles expressed any hesitancy or vagueness about the expectations of women. In Elizabeth (White, female, 21)’s family, her mother allowed her father to serve as the head of the family, and Elizabeth felt it went well, even though she challenges that idea in her own life:

My mom considers my dad the head of the household, ultimately. They've said that, as Christians, they believe that both the husband and the wife play a part in the family; they're both authorities; but when it comes down to the big things, my mom prefers to leave that to my dad's discretion and believes that the man is the
head of the household. That's something that I've personally grown to think it can
go either way. I think that's the decision of the family. For my family, it works.
My dad's a good dad. He makes the decision that will benefit the whole family,
not just what he thinks is good. He's a peacemaker.

The state of the private home is without questions the priority for a Christian woman in
evangelical churches. She is held responsible for the environment in the home, for
cooking, feeding and cleaning, and for providing a nurturing, peaceful and supportive
atmosphere. This is what Camille (White, female, 21) meant when she said that being a
good Christian woman is “like being a good waitress:” “She is always in the background.
They don't want the spotlight, and they get things done before anyone notices that they're
not done. I'm trying to fill a need before people notice that it needs to be met.” Being able
to intuit needs before they are felt by family members is difficult for anyone, and
especially difficult if you have to work outside the home.

The single, working mother received a lot of attention in this study, as several
participants were raised by these women. Several participants expressed feeling defensive
of their mothers within their church communities if their mothers had to work outside the
home. Adrian (Latino, male, 18) and Adam (Latino, male, 23) both felt their mothers
were looked down on at their church because they were divorced and had to work full-
time, and Camille (White, female, 21)’s mother received a lot of criticism from her own
mother for not being a better example for her daughters. Maria felt condemnation from
her church because her mother was not married, and she felt her mother accepted that
burden without standing up for herself:
In all honesty, this has also been a driving wedge between me and my mom. We've kind of fallen apart because anything the church or pastor says, she blindly believes. I had a very big issue with that because I saw a lot of prejudice, particularly because my mom wasn't married. At the last church we went to (and it was predominantly Hispanic), I always felt like an awkward duck because my mom wasn't married. People maybe saw her as a threat, in that sense. For me, that really broke my heart.

Based on the responses in this study, the evangelical church seems to have no idea what to do with unmarried or childless women, especially a woman who is clearly choosing to not marry or have children. She is suspect, perhaps seen as a threat. Camille realized this when she left her private Christian college and moved into a community living situation:

> Since I'm not married yet and since I don't really plan on getting married any time soon and I haven't graduated college yet or the fact that I don't go to a Christian school anymore, I've gotten a lot of people from my old community who act really concerned. Which is so interesting. That community, especially, is so kind of fixed in this set timeline for everybody's life and that if people don't follow it, then there must be something wrong with them.

The women in this study did not express any negative perspectives on the idea of getting married or of having children, but they definitely expressed negative perspectives on the feeling that they were expected to get married and have children. These women consider those two options some of many potential futures and resent being forced to follow a specific timeline.
Two women in particular shared some very tender experiences with gender expectations in their religious communities as filtered through their families. Noelle (White, female, 25) in particular was raised with some very specific, pointed instruction on how women act and perform. As a girl, she felt her mother in particular raised her to only express positive emotions and was never allowed to express anger because it reflected poorly on her and her faith witness: “The biggest thing was if I ever got upset, irritated or angry, I was not allowed to feel that emotion. You are an example to other people.” As a child, Noelle’s mother would intercept any potential tantrums with a loud handclap, a command to smile, or they would leave. As a result, Noelle identifies as a “people pleaser” and felt confused about positive and negative experiences, and how to express and defend boundaries with others. Additionally, Noelle had been groomed by her mother to find a husband in college:

My mom pulled me aside before college and said, "You really should think about ACU. There's a lot of really good Christian guys there. You're not really going to be able to meet guys like that at another university. Give that some thought in your choice." In my mind, I'm thinking, "I've been taught my entire life to get married, have babies; this is the life order." When I went to school and didn't meet anybody, didn't get engaged and came home not married or not dating anybody, my mom didn't know what to do with me. It was almost like, "I paid this $100,000 education bill ..." She was almost like it was for a waste. We paid this much money and you didn't even get married! Even though I didn't realize it at the time, that was my purpose for picking a Christian school. People made fun of it
all the time because they were like, "You're here for your MRS degree." There's this "ring-by-spring talk."

When Noelle graduated without any potential husbands on the horizon, she moved back in with her family and fell into a depression. She had no viable career options and no circle of friends to lean on, and began to panic and date men she, in retrospect, admitted she was not that attracted to or compatible with. When Noelle was date raped by a boy she knew from high school, her mother accused her of leading him on, or teasing him, or “just saying that” because she knew she wasn’t supposed to have sex before she was married. Like Maria (Latina, female, 22), Noelle is not in communication with her family, and began seeing a therapist to come to terms with her upbringing and the rape:

I think there are a lot of things that did scar me, but a lot of things that made me who I am. I do see myself as a good person and I like the fact that I think about other people and that I'm interested in helping them. It's the other principals of the church that I think damaged me—guilt, shame. There's a lot that I feel guilty or shameful for that I don't necessarily think I should feel that way for. I was in counseling for months for something that was not my fault, but I was made to feel like it was. There's emotional damage that can't be undone.

Noelle met a man at her job who pushed her to follow her dream of nursing school and his family provided her with a foundation that felt safe to ask hard questions and not be so pleasing all the time. Noelle now recognizes that her mother loves her and was passing down expectations that she herself was taught through her church, and they are on the path to reconciliation.
“What will people think?” - Mary (Latina, female, 22)

The Latinx participants shared some different narratives around gender that were unique to their ethnicity. Like Noelle, Mary (Latina, female, 22) grew up in a very strict Christian household and was taught some very restricting messages about being a good Christian woman. Women were to wear dresses or skirts, they were not to drink or have tattoos, but above all, they were to be “pure.” This purity expectation went beyond mere virginity. They were to be “above reproach,” blameless in act and thought. Many of the messages Mary received were about modesty and purity were in direct contradiction to the behavior of her father. In the following story, Mary draws a parallel between her mother’s response regarding her father’s cheating, and her mother’s response to the unplanned pregnancy of Mary’s older sister:

My dad cheated on my mom and my mom wanted to divorce him; but because my religion doesn't agree with that, she still stayed with him. I constantly ask her, "Why don't you? This is for your own good. God wants you to be happy." She will be like, "No. What will people think?" That's always what she comes back to. My oldest sister Jesse, she got pregnant her senior year of college. She didn't get married. She had the baby because we disagree with abortion. That was a huge part. They literally list out things that we can't do. Yeah. It's so clear. She obviously wasn't going to give up the baby. She didn't tell my parents until... I don't know how many months she was. She was pregnant prior her graduation and we had no idea because of the whole idea of miscommunication. My mom eventually found out when she was home for the summer. After graduation, she was home. Actually, she still lives with us. She's never lived on her own. She did
two years with college friends her junior and senior year, but besides that, she's lived home. Right away in the kitchen, my mom recognized that she was losing weight from everything except her belly. She asked her straightforward and my sister responded, "Yes. I'm pregnant." My sister hasn't wanted to come back since then. It has been four years since my nephew was born. The same thing, I constantly ask her, "Why don't you want to come back?" It's the whole thing—what are they going to say. Literally, because we are family, everybody knows he exists. Everybody knew when she was pregnant, too.

Mary experienced the same pressures Noelle felt about having to present a certain model of femininity to the world, but she learned many of these narratives through observing the experiences of sisters. Mary’s family is from Mexico and explained that she grew up learning that there are two types of female gender expressions in her community: the woman is either pure like the Virgin Mary or she is a whore. In Mexico there exists a Virgin Mary mystique: “Hispanic women are forced to choose between two extremes. She exists within the dichotomy of virgin or whore – there exists no ambiguous space between these two extremes. As the ideal virgin, women are to be chaste, pure and docile.”223 A woman is to care for the family, obey her husband, and suffer in silence and acceptance, as the Virgin did. This form of housewifization claims women are valued as virgins, wives, or mothers, and “to aspire to be independently minded, to be self-supporting, or to develop self-esteem is to forsake her traditional role.”224 There are only

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224 Ibid., 348.
two options, and to make sure that your daughters turn out like Mary (and not the whore) their friends, social activities, dress, makeup and schedule need to be closely policed. The conflict is that the stereotypical expectations on the men are in direct contrast to the expectations for the women: the men are expected to be “aggressively hypermasculine…obsessed with status, power and control…rigidly self-sufficient” with “misogynistic and domineering attitudes typically ascribed to authoritative husbands, patriarchal fathers, paternalistic landlords, ad abusive womanizers.”225 “Machismo” expects the men to be sexually active and gifted; they are to be found at bars soccer fields, and their mistress’s bed when they are not working. Mary said it was not uncommon for husbands to have a wife and family at home, and a mistress in an apartment elsewhere. At least that is what happened with her father, and he was the leader of their church.

This “machismo/Virgin/whore” formula reveals that gendered roles of this nature are not life-giving or healthy for anyone and have led to some very confusing parenting in Mary’s family. While her father was taking extra income, and spending it on his mistress, her mother was budgeting and saving money to take care of his family. One point I will discuss more in-depth in the sexuality section was the theory that knowing nothing about sex meant that a woman was pure. If she didn’t know anything about sex or dating or flirting, the better her chances of staying pure. In Mary’s house sex wasn’t discussed at all, which led to several awkward encounters when she arrived at college. Mary is benefitted, however, from her older sister’s experiences and her family has lessened restrictions on her and has trusted her to attend college away from home and live

on her own. This strategy is working for Mary and for the family, because Mary feels the weight of their trust and also sees many potential futures for herself which are leading her to make the kind of choices on her own that her family had previously tried to force on her and her sisters.

Like Mary (Latina, female, 22), Maria (Latina, female, 22), Adrian (Latino, male, 18), Adam (Latino, male, 23) and Matt (Latino, male, 19), Carlos’s (Latino, male, 20) family is from Mexico. In Carlos’s family, the best opportunities for women were tied up in the image of the American Dream:

For my mom and aunt, sad to say, it's marry an American and get the green card. It's cultural. A lot of girls, it's very customary to take a year or two off from school and try to get a visa to babysit in either Boston or New York or the primary cities. Then, they'll try to find a husband; try to marry an American and get the green card. More opportunities. In the whole Machismo aspect of our culture, it's just alive and well in that. They know they don't have an education but they have the ability to cook, clean, do laundry. Sadly, that's how it is. They just figure, "If I find a husband who will provide for me, I'll do everything else. All he has to do is put the food on the table.” The village where my mother grew up, there's no schools, there's no college, there's no upper education system. They believe, "The only way we're going to prosper is if we come to the United States or give our daughters opportunity to go." So my dad came around, they were like, "Oh, he sounds like a nice guy. He's Catholic. You should marry him. He's going to be a doctor. He'll be successful."
For the white women participating in the study, the concept of marrying for security or opportunity was not foreign, but it meant something different. For white participants, the messages they received around marrying for security meant marrying a man who could provide a good enough living for a family, so she did not have to work. For the Latinx participants, “marrying for security” meant providing citizenship as a way out of an environment that was not securing access to resources such as education, opportunities for equitable labor, and personal safety. Carlos pointed out that his family is actually comparatively wealthy, and he recognizes that families who do not enjoy financial stability and a family lawyer on retainer would view “marrying for a green card” as an even more viable and helpful option. For a poorer family who is looking to access U.S. resources through the American Dream, the ideas of marrying for love or attending school to pursue something you are passionate about or choosing to stay single and childless to pursue a career are luxuries that are not taken seriously by Mexican women and point to national privilege. To find a man from the United States who will marry you and will provide for a family, who merely needs to put food on the table because she will cook and clean and take care of home and family, is merely a way to leverage the one source of capital some women feel they have – their gender expression/identity.

“Deep down, I think she wants to control me because she fears for me.” - Maria (Latina, female, 22)

In a strange twist of circumstances, after several failed attempts, Maria’s (Latina, female, 22) mother immigrated to the U.S. as a young woman through the deserts of Arizona. Now a legal citizen, she works as a hairstylist in order to provide Maria with an excellent education, and it is now that very education that has given Maria eyes to see
possible futures for herself that terrify her mother and have created a rift in their relationship. When Maria graduated from high school and enrolled at a state school, she had a Latina professor who defied the gender stereotypes Maria had grown up emulating. She was not quiet or submissive; she was brilliant and assertive. She pushed Maria and recognized gifts in her that Maria and Maria’s mother did not see. Because Maria could attend a state school and learn economics and marketing, she is choosing a different American Dream than her mother pursued:

If I would have just been this girl that went to church and just married and Christian man and was a stay-at-home mom and did what the church and my mom wanted me to do, I wouldn't be living the American Dream. I wouldn't be taking advantage of all those opportunities given to me.

Maria recognizes that her mother is protective and champions stereotypical gender roles because that is what she knows and how she was raised. Maria knows her mother is not trying to crush her dreams or silence her voice out of spitefulness or to dominate her, but because she is afraid for Maria. All the advice Maria’s mother offers her about success and survival is quite literally, in her mind, about surviving. For Maria’s mother, surviving is what she had to do. Maria has entered an arena that is completely unfamiliar and foreign to her mother, and Maria knows that is terrifying for her. Still, Maria is pursuing her own dreams and goals, and hopes that one day her mother will be able to see that what Maria has in fact accomplished is a new iteration of her mother’s American Dream.

Only two of the men shared gender role expectations for men, and they are both Latino. Carlos (Latino, male, 20) later shared during the interview that he has a very clear understanding that his family expects him to marry a Mexican woman. He dated an Irish
girl for a while and his mother had a talk with him: “With the ingrained values of Machismo, we don't view it as much as making the women feel inferior to us, we just have different rules. My mom would murder me if I did not marry a Hispanic woman. Columbian would even be pushing it.” Carlos and Matt (Latino, male, 19) also shared a sentiment mentioned by many of the other Latino participants: they are expected to take care of their families, and to return the sacrifice and generosity given him for his education to the next generation. Since Matt’s father was not present, he turned to his grandfather for counsel:

   He was essentially my father since I didn't have mine. I think he would have been like that anyway. It also helped because my mom didn't have a spouse, so she would go to him a lot. I would see him a lot and I would just get close. He became my dad. For being a man, he always said to take care of your family; never let myself get to the point where I can't take care of myself or them. No matter what I do, if I do something, it's my responsibility to take care of it and to follow through with it.

Matt and Carlos both had parents, family and community members who went to great lengths to teach them what it meant to “be a man,” through direct conversation and modeling. Neither man felt these expectations were stifling or burdensome and both are actively planning on and pursuing careers that will enable them to do exactly as their families have asked them.

I am struck by a consistent thread in the women’s narratives. None of the women mentioned teaching from the pulpit or from a male religious figure about their roles as women in the church, although I know they heard that. The narratives they most
remembered, that burned the deepest, were from older women. The older women, either in the church community or in the family, were the ones who policed the younger women’s bodies – their behavior and appearance, especially their dress – who taught the classes, lead the retreats, and confronted them on “inappropriate” clothing. As a youth minister, I spent a lot of time telling girls their skirts were too high, or their shirts were too low, or their jeans were too tight. I am wondering about the intentions behind this trend, because this monitoring feels very objectifying. I feel like this is a topic for another study, but the policing of female bodies by older women makes me wonder about the nature of generational oppression and the exercise and nature of power dynamics around gender and sexual expression. Causing “our brothers to stumble” was a blanket indictment on anything perceived by the older women to be inappropriate and perhaps dangerous. The messages these corrections sent about male and female sexuality is troubling.

Section 4: Sexuality

“Growing up, we didn't talk about sex at all.” - Sam (White, male, 24)

“They would never talk to us about it. They were just very opposed to us doing it. It wasn't even discussed. Just, ‘No boys.’” - Mary (Latina, female, 22)

This will be a very short section. It is particularly striking how much information arose regarding the other three identities in a qualitative study that had nothing to do with three of them, but around sexuality, very little was said. There were three participants who discussed sexuality at all, one only in brief passing, and it was mostly to point out

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226 This word appeared multiple times from several different interviews. That which is “inappropriate” seems to be a sort of umbrella term for “what we do not like/ find offensive.”

227 Romans 14:13-23. Scripture plays an important role in the construction and understanding of these survival narratives, and I will flesh them out more in the analysis in chapter 7.
how little they were taught about sexuality. I feel it is important to include a section on survival narratives and sexuality in order to point out a dramatic void in narrative practice. The common practice around sexual education in the Churches of Christ seems to extend very little beyond “Don’t have it until you’re married,” and beyond that, there is deafening silence. The only survival narratives shared were well-meaning – there was no other conversation about sexuality, definitely no positive conversation around sexuality, at least that the participants offered.

The three study participants who brought up narratives around sexuality were Sam (White, male, 24), who has recently come out to his community and his very traditional family, and Mary, a Latina who is in her senior year of college, and Camille (White, female, 21).

Well-Meaning Survival Narratives around Sexuality

Although both participants stated repeatedly that there was no room for conversation around sex in their families of origin, they were still very clear on the “things you cannot do.” I can speculate that this knowledge came from direct teachings at church, since both families represented are deeply involved in and committed to church community, and modeling from those communities. Participants clearly understood that God hates divorce, that extra-marital sex of any kind is bad, and that abortion is a sin. There were many rules constructed around these rules to defend “even the appearance of evil,” about dress, language, dance and alcohol. But to the best of their ability, family and religious communities seemed to put great effort into not discussing sex or sexuality. Above all, there was very little room for conversation in the immediate family. Sam (White, male, 24) suspects that this silence may come from social conditioning and fear:
I think, in terms of politics, it might be they are socially trained not to talk about that stuff; in terms of things that would be considered bad in Christian circles, but not normal circles, I think drinking or smoking cigarettes—they're just scared that it's bad and they don't want to think about it. It's very cut and dry. Growing up, we didn't talk about sex at all. We got the message of: ‘Don't have sex.’ We were like, ‘Got it. Don't think about it ever again.’ There wasn't ever a dialogue. There was no room for conversation.

The repercussions of this silence around sexuality have been very difficult for both Sam and his sister. Because they both grew up with such clear barricades against honestly discussing sex and their personal sexualities, they were left to their own devices to try and figure things out. For Sam, this resulted in personal isolation and depression, and has left him with some issues he is trying to manage:

I found that what it has done for me is make me seek solitary, sexual pleasure or prefer having sexual pleasure isolated rather than seeking out a relationship. It's something I'm now conscious of and trying to work on or get over.

As Sam has gotten older and has found safer, supportive communities, he has sought out help and has enjoyed a few successful and healthy relationships. But Sam has no interest in ever darkening the doors of a church building again, and is not often troubled over thoughts of God’s existence or activity in his life.

Mary (Latina, female, 22) believes the silence in her family was a result of her family’s strict religious environment and out of shame for her father’s cheating. Mary’s older sister lived with her boyfriend when she was away at college and got pregnant. She never told her family, but her mother could see that she was pregnant, and eventually
asked her about it. It’s been four years since her sister had a child: “My sister hasn't wanted to come back since then. It has been four years since my nephew was born. The same thing, I constantly ask her, ‘Why don't you want to come back?’ It's the whole thing—what are they going to say. Literally, because we are family, everybody knows he exists. Everybody knew when she was pregnant, too.” Mary’s other sister is currently living with her boyfriend and rarely visits home as well. Mary sees that this unwillingness to discuss sex and sexuality is damaging her family, and has experienced a difficult transition into an independent life because she was uninformed as well:

I think sex is a huge part in that transition from child to adulthood, but they've never talked to us about it. They wouldn't even talk about protection at all because they wouldn't even have the conversation about it. It's definitely religious. I grew up a shy child, but I feel that other Latinos are more sexually confident or aware. They're just more comfortable exploring that. I'm not at all. Especially coming to Pepperdine and transitioning. That hasn't helped me.

Mary draws a direct parallel between education and success, including education about sexuality. She has had to discover most of her sexual awareness on her own: through her friends, through life experience and through the internet. Fortunately, her sisters are willing to speak with her about their experiences with sexuality, and she is grateful to have someone to talk to and answer questions.

In the Churches of Christ, as in many evangelical churches, to be sexually attracted to someone who is perceived to share a like gender is considered a psychological illness or an abomination at worst, or a grab for attention or a “stage” at best. It is a sad state of affairs to explain that the Church of Christ has progressed in many
areas to now be willing to accept a gay or lesbian church member as long as they are
totally celibate and do not flirt or romantically pursue anyone. Single evangelicals are
also expected to be celibate, but are permitted to, in fact are often uncomfortably
encouraged, to date and pursue a marital relationship with each other. In essence, for a
gay, bisexual or lesbian member to enjoy the fellowship of community, no one should be
able to “tell” that that person is gay, bisexual or lesbian. The Church of Christ still holds
a very firm, forbidding position against transsexual or pansexual persons, although I am
not positive how they would describe those distinctions.

“I came out to a friend last week. It was really funny because we grew up in the
church together and the first thing he said was, ‘What is your faith, Christianity,
relationship now? What is your relationship with a religion that doesn't want
you?’” - Sam (White, male, 24)

Mary (Latina, female, 22) and Camille (White, female, 21) affirmed in their
interviews that they come from very homophobic church communities, and both
expressed that their colleges have policies in place regarding “homosexual relationships.”
Actively engaging in a “homosexual relationship” in either of their colleges will result in
disciplinary action, ranging from mandatory counseling to expulsion. Usually, if
someone comes out as gay, bisexual or lesbian, the first question the Church of Christ
community will ask is, “What happened?” While the community will verbally express
that this person is loved and welcome, the larger community will immediately begin to
search the person’s history to find some sort of trauma to explain their sexuality. A gay,
bisexual or lesbian person is often suspected of having been molested, of having an
absent or abusive parent, of being a pedophile, or of having an addiction to pornography.
Currently, several members of Sam’s (White, male, 24) home church have recently come out, and these were children who were specially groomed for leadership by the church:

The exclusion didn't happen until I identified myself as something other than the church. Growing up, there was no possible way to be excluded because I was in every major demographic. There was no way. I was a white, male American, upper middle class ... Unless I was getting piercings and causing trouble, there was no way. I was a really good kid. I hadn't felt excluded. I can see the things people would come up with, but their narratives are like, "This happened because his family abandoned him and kicked him out." But that doesn't make sense when you consider the fact that I knew when I was 12. It doesn't really allow for easy explanations for people who feel like they need it.

Sam was raised by two very devout parents, who were incredibly active in his personal life and provided for every need. He attended private Church of Christ schools from kindergarten through his sophomore year in college, to which he received an academic scholarship. He won character awards, he got straight A’s, he played competitive sports, and he was a spiritual leader at school and at church. He was the worship leader for the youth group praise team and was a high school intern for the youth staff. Sam attended every retreat, mission trip, movie night, game night, service project and special event for which he was eligible. This shift is creating some very divisive conversations in evangelical churches. When a young person comes out as gay, bisexual or lesbian, and the church looks to their family and their history and finds someone like Sam, who has exactly the kind of Church of Christ pedigree every CoC parent wishes they could design for their child, they have lost the ability to vilify and condemn their sexual identity. For
Sam, he is sad to have lost those relationships, but he is working on maintaining and mending a new type of connection with his family. But he is not optimistic about ever enjoying an easy, comfortable family again: “What it's done is it's taught me that every relationship that I have or every person that's going to be in my life romantically ... It's going to be uncomfortable to bring them to my family. It's not going to be a positive experience.” Sam, Mary (Latina, female, 22) and Camille (White, female, 21) are optimistic, however, about the future of Christianity and gay, bisexual and lesbian identities, because they feel that their generation simply does not care. No one offered a carefully constructed theology around sexual identity, they just know people like Sam who have been wounded by the church’s stance on gay, bisexual and lesbian identities and feel that this stance does not reflect the nature they know of God. As Camille stated, “They keep saying they are doing it out of love. I don’t think love feels like that.” The problem is that the Church of Christ has only recently begun to seriously wonder about their historic stance on this issue, after they have begun to lose their youth. In my church, we were enjoying a series of rotating visiting preachers from other congregations while we searched for a new one. Each time one of the preachers (all white men) made a comment against “homosexuality,” youth group members would stand up and walk out of the auditorium. The youth are forcing the conversation, hopefully not before it’s too late.

**Conclusion**

As a quick reminder, in this study, a “survival narrative” may be best understood as wisdom, advice, oral histories, directives, or counsel passed down from an older generation to a younger generation designed to help the younger generation *in possession of specific identities* understand and succeed in contemporary U.S. culture. In addition to
data around education and religion, the companion themes of gender, sexuality, and class emerged in addition to ethnicity. At the core of the survival narrative is the exchange of cultural capital designed to offset or balance inequalities based around identities.

In summary, the survival narratives in general around identities, especially in the context of the Churches of Christ, often failed as a means of preparation for success and survival in larger society. In contrast, these narratives adequately prepared the participants to continue to stay within the confines of the Churches of Christ, but for these participants, every one of whom chose to leave the Churches of Christ, these narratives resulted in confusion and reorientation at best and psychological and emotional trauma at worst. Evangelical survival narratives often succeeded in creating and reifying the experience of marginalization and performed the opposite of their expected function. I suspect that the actual survival narratives, out of the four types I’ve identified, are the reinterpreted narratives. The actual successful survival narratives are created by the agency of the participants as they choose what to do with the old ones. Through the critical thinking of the study participants, they create their own survival narratives by keeping what has been helpful in offering valuable cultural capital larger society and discarding the rest. Unfortunately, much of what has been discarded is foundational identity to the Churches of Christ.
Chapter 6: Education

“The expectation was always college. It was ridiculous to think we would not go to college.” - Sam (White, male, 24)

Every member of this study was either enrolled in college or had recently graduated from a four-year university. At the time of the interviews, there were two freshmen, four sophomores, two juniors, four seniors, and four recent graduates (See Appendix L). Each member of the study expressed feeling an expectation to attend college from his or her family or community, and all the participants expressed a desire to attend college. Five of the participants took a break from school at some point after enrolling in a college, and two of the participants were active in the military during their college education. All but five of the participants attended one of the six primary universities or colleges affiliated with the Churches of Christ, and three of the participants attended primary and/or secondary schools affiliated with the Churches of Christ. Seven of the participants are first generation college students, (three white and four Latinx, three women and four men), while three participants have parents who both graduated from college (two white men, one Latina.) The remaining six participants had only one parent graduate from college, four their father, two their mother.

228 The six institutions are: Pepperdine University, Abilene Christian University, Lipscomb University, Harding University, Lubbock University, and York College.
Survival Narratives about Education
“The whole idea of how to make it here and how to succeed, education has been the huge gap; the point between the difference. You need to get educated; go to college.” - Mary (Latina, female, 22)

This study revealed no surprises regarding the expectations placed on the education system in the United States. The only thing more expensive than attending a college or university is not attending one. Matt (Latino, male, 19) explains: “Even if I have to go in debt for college, I would use the opportunity to make something of myself and when I'm out, I would pay it off and be more well off than I would be if I just worked straight out of high school.” Graduating with a college degree, especially with a business or hard science major, is understood by the study participant’s families as the surest path to stability, security, and success. Based on the results from this study, the general evangelical community also seems to make formal education a very high priority. The only participants who remembered any positive conversations about alternatives to a four-year university were Adrian (Latino, male, 18) and William (White, male, 21), who both enrolled in the military, largely in order to pay for college. The military seems to be the only acceptable alternative to a four-year institution. Each participant communicated an expectation from family or community to attend college after high school, and the majority communicated an expectation to attend college immediately following high school. None of the participants remember any positive discussions around the idea of a gap year or a trade school. As Lynne (White, female, 24) describes it:

I think they encouraged it—going immediately. Just because I can't remember if they told me this or if this is just something we learned in high school: Most
students who wait a year will wait more years and not end up going. It's better to
go immediately. That's probably something my dad told me. Yes. He emphasizes
it's important to get your degree.

Whether the expectation of attending college was spoken or modeled, every participant
had a clear understanding of what comes after high school. If the understanding that
college was mandatory was not audibly communicated, the expectation was understood
through rewards for good grades or penalties for bad grades. William (White, male, 21)
was assigned additional homework during the summer, just so that he and his brother
remained competitive academically:

Growing up, we were always expected to get good grades. Mom always made us
do extra homework. She'd go get different books or create different games; help
us with math or the alphabet. We always had to do two hours of homework in the
summertime, even when we weren't in school. The reason we were so
academically inclined was how much school was hammered in our head. "You
need to do this! Grades are good!" I think they just value education.

In some cases, like Adam’s (Latino, male, 23), parents who never finished school
enrolled in college as modeling: “They didn't go immediately after high school, but they
eventually did go back. I remember when I was in high school, my mom got her
associate's in business. My dad's currently in school now.” Approval or disapproval was
expressed in myriad ways. Camille (White, female, 21) described the informal
consequence of choosing to not attend college right out of high school and stay at home:

My graduating high school ... I can only think of maybe like five people who
didn't go to college. If you didn't go to college, you were kind of looked at as
freeloader; like if you stayed at your parents' house or if you just kept working, you kind of seemed like a deadbeat.

Sometimes the experience of an older sibling revealed the family and community priority for formal education before the younger sibling was even aware of alternatives. In Sam’s (White, male, 24) case, his older sister eventually ended up going to MIT:

My sister was a very smart and hard-working person. I think she set the tone. If she had been a slacker, I think it would have been a different experience. It was expected that we got "A's" in every single class. Something I really appreciate about them is that they always told me I was smart and bright. For as long as I remember, that's the narrative that's been told to me. That really helped me when I was doing my education. If I wasn't doing good, I had this innate sense that I could do better. It was on me.

Interestingly, it wasn’t just the family or school system enforcing the importance of attending college for these participants. The church enforced it as well. Noelle (White, female, 25) described the celebration of rites of passage at her church coinciding directly with academic progression:

Fifth grade you got to go into the youth group; that was a big thing. Then, you got to be in youth center where the games were, and all the kids were running around with music blaring. Celebrating the next step, the big thing that comes to mind is when you graduate high school and there's this big thing they used to call Senior Sunday. They present this Bible with your name in it. Your parents write you letters and cry over you. They make it a spiritual thing. I didn't necessary understand the spiritual-ness behind it just because I'm thinking, "This is just like
any other graduation." That's the two things that really come to mind—celebrating your age and progression.

Several participants described a similar rite of passage at church, during which recent graduates were celebrated during the formal assembly of the community. In Texas, participants described elaborate blessing events called “Teas” for the women and “Coffees” for the men, during which church community members would offer gifts, words of wisdom and often financial and emotional support. The passing of young men and women from high school into college was truly a community celebration, and those students leaving for four-year colleges, especially expensive, prestigious colleges or those affiliated with the denomination, were particularly rewarded and honored.

The reason that this religious celebration of academic achievement is so striking is because every participant in the study described college as a time of spiritual upheaval and questioning of the very faith community that passionately encouraged the participants to attend college. As stated in Chapter Four, none of the participants attend the same church or denomination in which they grew up, and they describe their college experience as the catalyst for that break.

The emphasis placed on earning a college degree was clearly communicated and understood: education is the path to success, for opportunities and access to lucrative work in order to support oneself and one's family, and for some, a diploma from a four-year institution represents the fulfillment of hopes of generations. Specifically, for the Latinx participants in the study, earning a four-year degree represents the American Dream, a fulfillment of sacrifice and hard work for the family. According to Adrian (Latino, male, 18), attending college and graduating means, “Definitely a better future for
us. If you were born in Mexico where my mom grew up, what I'd be doing right now is probably herding cattle.” For Carlos (Latino, male, 20), his degree from Pepperdine will fulfill generations of sacrifice and saving on behalf of his extended family:

The way that my mother's siblings were brought up is they have a specific fund purely for education. All the kids on my mother's side of the family, education is everything. The family itself- The whole family will pay for each kid's education wherever they go. They valued education over everything. They don't care what they have to pay for it, or what means they have to live in. They live in a really beat-up house, but it's very important for them. That's what all that money had been saved up for. All the land that my grandpa sold was just for education, so all of his grandchildren could have an education; preferably in the states. He wanted all of us to come to the United States. I think through their own experiences, they saw how corrupt the Mexican education system is; and the lack of government support. They couldn't afford private universities growing up, so they went to public schools, which were poorly run, poorly funded. They had always heard about the American Dream. For them, it was the staple of their life.

For the Latinx participants in my study, when they elaborated on what their families wanted for them when they came to the States, the answer was some version of Mary’s (Latina, female, 22): “The American Dream. The social ladder to success. They definitely think that education is the bridge between financial difficulties and success.” In Adrian’s (Latino, male, 18) opinion, earning an education will provide him a path to take his turn as the caregiver for his family:
For me, being successful is to be able to provide for the ones I care about. At the moment, my mom is working at a factory that makes airplane seats. She gets paid $11.00 an hour. It's not the best job. She does it to support me and my brothers. I hope that one day I can support her where she doesn't have to work anymore.

Maria’s (Latina, female, 22) family came to the United States seeking financial opportunities, which translated into educational access:

My mom's side of the family has been very open about why they came. My grandma wasn't able to go to school. My mother did have the opportunity to go to school and she even went to college, but she ended up getting up pregnant with my brother and didn't finish school. Her opportunities were increasingly diminished. That was the reason they came here—to start a new life.

But Camille (White, female, 21) understood that just attending college wasn’t enough—she needed to choose a major that promised hope for sustainable future employment in order to succeed:

Right now, I'm an Art Education major. If I just wanted to do art, that would not be an option for me. Because if you throw education into it, that is more acceptable; it's more of an honorary thing. It's also more secure. That's a huge deal for my grandparents. The more secure I am, the more safe I'll be—the more I can provide for myself.

Patrick (White, male, 25), on the other hand, felt free to choose whatever major he wished, as long as he graduated: “They always said that not going to college would close doors and whether or not you ... Even if you graduate from college with a degree that you're not necessarily going to use, that's still not hindering you in any way.” For all the
families represented in the study, an education equals security and success. A degree from a four-year university means you’ve made it.

**Well-Meaning Survival Narratives about Education**

“She (mother) just knew there was a place called college and this is where you go. She believed college was going to make your life better if you study hard enough and work hard enough.” - Maria (Latina, female, 22)

“We're preparing kids for more school and not for life.” - Lynne (White, female, 24)

The majority of the study participants expressed support for the idea of post-high school education for various reasons, but twelve out of sixteen participants challenged the path of traditional education. These participants felt they were expected to earn a degree from a four-year university, but they seemed frustrated that the four-year degree could not deliver what their parent’s generation believed it could deliver, and they felt their older family members and religious communities did not understand that the promise of success via higher education was no longer valid. When Lynne (White, female, 24) graduated from college, it took her two years to find a job, even one outside of her field. Her father, in particular, did not understand the problem:

Because when he was going to college, it was an important thing. When you got your Bachelor's, you were set. Now, not so much. Me and my sisters have had countless conversations with him about that. I didn't find anything that was related to my field. I applied countless places. Then, our parents are like, "Maybe you're not trying hard enough. Maybe you're not putting it out there enough." We're like, "You don't understand." Way different from whenever you went to college and when you were coming out of college.
The idea that the traditional path through the US education system is no longer providing young people opportunities for sustainable and accessible careers is terrifying to evangelical families. Equally terrifying to the young adults in this study is the amount of personal debt they must incur to earn a four-year degree;\(^{229}\) debt they will not be able to pay off if they are only able to find part time jobs in coffee shops after they graduate. Part of the problem, according to Lynne, is that the US education system is not preparing people for sustainable careers:

There's been a major shift in just the past ten years. Public education is still trying to crank out carbon copy students and they're all college oriented where it should just be career oriented.

Particularly for students in creative fields or the humanities, jobs are rare and extremely competitive.\(^{230}\)

Regardless of this perceived shift, the participants in this study still believe language around educative institutions connecting education to personal success. Perhaps if we were willing to redefine “success” beyond financial stability, the narrative of education as the path to opportunity and success would still be accurate. But the participants in this study are suspicious. Each of the participants seemed much more open


to alternative paths to future success beyond traditional education and the military, such as trade schools or apprenticeships. Several participants expressed the wish that alternatives to a four-year college had been presented to them as valid options. As Camille (White, female, 21) explains:

I had no idea until I moved out that that's not what everybody's supposed to do. It has kind of forced me to question if I'm in school for the right reasons. Am I going to school because I want to, or is it because my family wants me to, or is it because I feel pressure from my community to? I realized that if I didn't go to school that people would ask me, "Oh, are you okay?" Especially growing up in a church community, especially.

Study participants did not engage in discussions with their parents or religious communities about the possibility of attending a trade school or of taking a gap year. The idea was not even approached. According to Maria (Latina, female, 22):

It was always: ‘You're going to college.’ I think if I would have known then and wanted to take a ‘gap year’ to figure out what I wanted to do, my mom would have had a heart attack. I think she probably would not have accepted trade schools because college is all she knew. I think, for them, it was what they hoped for; if not more.

Again, in the communities represented by in this study, deviating from the norm feels risky. Going to school and earning a four-year degree has worked in the past. Therefore, that is the narrative being handed down. The trouble with enforcing the narrative is that the system has shifted and cannot sustain the promises placed on its back. It does not
seem that the US education system, in its traditional guise, is capable of bearing the weight of the promises it has made any longer.

For the communities represented in this study, the connection between churches and schools is striking. Every participant interviewed who grew up in an evangelical church experienced some version of Senior Sunday. Graduating seniors were celebrated by the community in a special Sunday morning service, given Bibles and gifts from the community, and provided with community contacts at various schools. Particularly for the students from Texas, the lines separating where they went to church and where they went to school are blurry. Jerry (White, male, 25) attended a public school across the street from his church, but for Sam (White, male, 24) and Noelle (White, female, 25), their school and their church were on separate campuses, but were composed of the same people. As Sam explains it:

They were intertwined. I went to a Church of Christ school. All of my friends who went to my school also went to my church. On Wednesdays, I would spend all day with them, get a break, and then go see them at church. It was completely intertwined. Most of the faculty of the school went to that church. It was one big community I guess you could say.

What is even more striking in this community are the layers of overlap. For example, many of the people who graduate from Sam and Noelle’s private school attend the same Church of Christ college in North Texas, where they marry each other, and then move back to Ft. Worth and send their children to the same private school from which their
parents graduated, and attend the same church with their parents and grandparents.²³¹ Sam, Noelle and Jerry are all descendants from such a dynasty, and their parents all attended college and youth group classes together. Because the religious network is so vast and interconnected, Sam, Noelle and Jerry have each had job opportunities made available to them through their church and school networks.

This backstory explains the unusual merit behind the well-meaning narrative encouraging students to not only “graduate from a four-year college,” but rather to “graduate from a four-year Christian college,” specifically, a Church of Christ college, of which there are five major institutions. For the young adults who choose to stay within the evangelical religious system, this narrative works well. For those who choose to leave or modify their religious system, this narrative is merely well-meaning.

One of the most popular reasons for encouraging high school students to attend a Christian university is parental and community concern for morality standards on campus, and the desire for the young adult to have a “safe community” in which to grow. Sam (White, male, 24) and Bethany (Latina, female, 20) were both offered full tuition by their parents if they chose a Christian school. Bethany’s offered her a deal when she was in middle school. He wanted her to attend a Christian school because he was concerned about the morality of non-Christian schools:

For my dad, church was very important to him and my mom. We were given a deal, actually. We would work (it's legal to work at 14 in New York) from the time we were 14, and they would pay for our college, if it was a Christian college. That really narrowed the options, I guess especially for my dad, the idea of him

²³¹ None of Latinx participants in this study attend this school, as there are very few Latinx students among this population.
paying or even partially paying for a non-Christian school was something he wasn't willing to do. I think it was just more important to him that we had Christian guidelines. He's very against mixed dorms and Greek life and that whole college social aspect, the partying and drinking. He's very anti that. He thought at a Christian college there would be less of it, if any.

Camille (White, female, 21) felt pressure to attend a Christian school because her family felt it would be a safe place for her to grow up: “Because that's kind of like what my grandparents had told me. The church community would be like, ‘You just go here, you'll be loved, you'll figure it out, you'll find yourself.’ All these things. But I didn't find that at all. There was no outlet for that.” Noelle (White, female, 25) found attending the school closely affiliated with her home congregation debilitating:

I went to the university that is also very closely linked to my mega church. That in itself was damaging. I didn't get to spread my wings at all. I created this cocoon around my life shielded myself. Not only that, but when I got into college, I was so fearful of making any kind of bad decision that I did nothing. I locked myself in my dorm room and made zero friends. I graduated early just to get out because I wasn't happy. I just wanted my degree. Socially, it just crippled me—and all because I was fearful of making a bad decision trying to do the right thing.

Noelle also felt she was expected to find a husband at college. Friends and family regularly joked with her about “getting her MRS degree.” When Noelle graduated and returned home unmarried, her mother expressed disappointment in her: It was almost like,
'I paid this $100,000 education bill ...’ She was almost like it was for a waste. We paid this much money and you didn't even get married! Even though I didn't realize it at the time, that was my purpose for picking a Christian school.

Along with Noelle, Camille also expressed regret or frustration at having attended a Christian school. The school where Camille attended in Nebraska had an active recruiting program where the school would offer scholarships to students from large urban centers scholarships to come play sports for the college. Camille saw this as an evangelistic effort with series ethical repercussions:

There'd be kids coming from totally different environments, totally different communities, who grew up in homes that were okay with smoking weed or okay with partying and drinking and all that stuff. Then, they just would pull these kids in this community and lure them in and be like, "Oh, you get a full ride to this school." But then, once these kids would come into the school to play basketball or baseball, they would be so focused on their sport that they would not be involved in anything else because they didn't fit in with the rest of the community.

If they started doing things that they did in their old home or their old life, they'd get kicked out of the school. But they didn't want to lose their free ride. They wanted to go to college. Most of the time, they're first generation college goers so their parents were extremely proud of them. But, it's just like forcing a round peg into a square hole sort of idea. It just created a lot of negativity. It's like a mission; a missionary sort of thing, but within the same country.
Several participants who attended private Christian universities affiliated with the Church of Christ expressed some version of a public morality code in conflict with private activity, or what they saw as blatant hypocrisy from the administration. Camille saw it as manipulative and dishonest:

At the same time, it was really manipulative because they would say that it was a religious reason like, ‘Oh, we're going to take all these impoverished people and help them.’ But then at the same time, we're going to force our religion down their throats. But then, we're getting money and funding and we're going to call ourselves diverse, so we can get more funding from the state.

Elizabeth (White, female, 21), on the other hand, enjoyed attending a Church of Christ university, because the entire campus feels like she is at church:

It's been less of a pressing thing for me to find a church body because I feel like, in a way, I have that on campus already; which is really cool. It's not like you get the diverse point-of-view you would get from going somewhere else, but I have really appreciated that we have a sense of church community just on Pepperdine's campus alone.

Elizabeth’s statement is important in order to illustrate that each participant who attended a private university did not have a horrible experience and shared both positive and negative aspects of their college life. But each participant did share a story about enduring a time of questioning their faith and particularly their home congregations or denominations, with varying degrees of withdrawal from those communities.
The College Break

“You don't really think about who you are and what you believe in until college. I've done a lot of that.” – Mary (Latina, female, 22)

“Life was new after college.” - Noelle (White, female, 25)

The college years can be a time of self-discovery, of experimentation, and of testing boundaries and possibilities. Several study participants expressed the desires of their families and communities that they “attend a Christian school,” because it was perceived to be a safer place for experimentation and self-discovery. It might be fair to suppose that the participants of this study might have experienced a form of religious disillusionment no matter where they attended college, or if they even attended college at all. It is possible that the age of most college students is the age for disconnecting with home, for setting out on the path to forge your own life, opinions, and values. Because 11 of the 16 participants of this study attended a university affiliated with the Churches of Christ, it may be valid to assume that their religious wandering was informed by their context and history.

A few of the study participants found college to be an experience that strengthened their faith, even if the outcome was not conventional. Patrick (White, male, 25) distanced from faith communities for a time and pursued a more personal relationship with God while exploring other religions:

There was a period where I hadn't gone to church, but I would still pray daily. I would still have more of a relationship with God and feel like ... It's because I couldn't find a church that really meant what I wanted. I kind of had come to terms with it like, "Oh, maybe I don't need a church. I can just have a relationship
with God." I've always believed in God, but I also believe in a lot of other religions and what they stand for. Through those years, I was kind of experimenting with Buddhism and Hinduism. I was going to a Quaker church for a long time; and things like that. It was kind of just knowing that that was a constant for me, but also feeling like all of these other religions had something for me to learn from them.

Lynne (White, female, 24), William (White, male, 21) and Noelle (White, female, 25) began to visit other denominations and faith communities as well within the Christian tradition and found aspects of community churches or orthodox churches to be very spiritually fulfilling. Jerry, who is currently employed full-time by a community church, found his faith challenged in its direction and inclusivity:

That was a big shift for me after my college years, a shift from: How do I figure out to stand firm in my beliefs, stay close to God, and to have a close, tight-knit community of other believers that I can be with and find refreshment from and be challenged by, but still engage those not in the church. I've got to get away from this mindset of "come to church" instead of going out and being the church?

Church of Christ schools attended by the participants shared the moral code of the churches, and did not allow drinking, drugs, sex or immodesty from its students. These behaviors were policed in the dorms and on campus in particular, but in some of the smaller towns where schools were located, school staff were known to roam down streets populated by student housing, checking for parties or non-school sanctioned activities, especially from athletes or student social clubs. Because of the strictness of these moral codes, many of the study participants expressed freedom in discovering that all Christian
denominations did not hold the same position on alcohol, sex, and media as the Churches of Christ. Some participants joined other fellowships, but some left churches completely.

Three of the study participants experience of college discovery cost them relationships with their families and their personal faith. Sam (White, male, 24) rebelled against his parent’s expectations that he would attend church every Sunday and once during the week, and began to experiment with life outside of private school and church community:

The first one (break) came in college when I was physically away from my parents. I realized I could experience everything that I wanted. That's when I signify my own event of turning from a child into an adult because I was listening to all this music that I had never heard before and it was changing my life. I was experiencing all the things like sex, drugs and alcohol; things you're not supposed to do. As a kid, I was actually like, "Let's see why." I think it was really important for me to get lost in that for a minute. I always felt like I was grounded for some reason. Even though, looking back, there were times I probably wasn't; but I always felt like I had a "true north." That was probably the moment when it broke because I was allowed to decide for myself. Before that, I wasn't allowed to decide anything for myself. That's really important.

Eventually, Sam’s parents did not know how to communicate with him any longer and they sold his car, removed financial support and would not allow him to return home.

Noelle (White, female, 25) belonged to a family who attended every event at their church and were present if the doors were open. From a young age Noelle attended weddings, funerals, baby and bridal showers, engagement blessings, retreats, service
days, mission trips and movie nights. In college, Noelle learned that a whole world existed outside of church activities:

All of my hobbies were going with my church friends to a church event. There's other things out there! I hadn't done any of that before. After I got out, it was fresh and it was new. I didn't feel like the same person. I think my parents had a really hard time accepting that. I wasn't the same person. I wasn't their sweet little girl anymore. I was kind of defiant in some areas.

This “defiance” culminated in Noelle moving in with her boyfriend after graduation, and damaged Noelle’s relationship with her family, especially with her mother. They do not often speak to each other. Maria (Latina, female, 22) attended a state school and took a class from a Latina professor, who changed her life. This professor was loud and confident and strong, everything Maria secretly suspected she was herself, and encouraged her to discover her passions and gifts outside of the constraints from her family. Because Maria felt she had permission to question and enjoy her life instead of closely monitoring everything she ate, drank, read and watched, she experienced a newfound sense of freedom. The cost, however, was a connection with her family and her faith:

I think because of those things and pursuing education has led me away to live a more agnostic life. I feel very happy at this point in my life, in not having to wrestle with those demons of the past. It's something of an issue my mom and I have yet to work out because of that wedge.

The church community seems to really struggle with young adults who go away to college and return changed and unfamiliar in scary and secular-looking ways. It seems
that the common recourse, at least among these participants here, is attempted correction and punishment by withdrawal of relationship and community.

The well-meaning narrative of attending a private school seems to work well as long as you stay within the religious system and follow the rules. Many young adults who attended denominational schools were expected to marry like-minded opposite gender partners and were often offered career positions by older community members who were school administrators or company executives. The community rewards those who listen to and follow the survival narratives, but for those who do not the cost can be heavy, including being rejected or destabilizing family relationships.

**Enduring Survival Narratives on Education**

“I think the most important thing in education is learning how to learn.” - Patrick

*White, male, 25*

The enduring narratives on education walk a fine line. Absolutely none of the study participants entertained the idea of not finishing high school. The option of obtaining a high school diploma was not even approached – it was a foregone conclusion. However, while all the study participants would not push a decision to attend college, they would each push a college experience. The participants of this study who attended college describe that time as meaningful and formative. It was a time of seeking, struggling, conflict and emerging independence. They found the time spent at an educative institution important because of the friendships they developed, the growth they experienced, and because of the relationships they developed with college mentors. All of the participants would encourage others to seek out an experience similar to theirs, although not necessarily through attendance at a four-year institution.
unanimously affirm some sort of post-high school “life experience.” The participants in this study advocate for an educative experience and a season of breaking away from the family of origin, but they seem very comfortable redefining what they mean by “education.” In addition, they all find education very important and useful, but for their own reasons rather than the ones they were given by adults and church community members. Ultimately, participants would encourage attending college for personal growth, rather than for employment, economic stability or to appease family. With notable exceptions, many study subjects would be in favor of younger people attending college as they were encouraged to attend college, because college is where the participants learned good work ethics, how to be independent and take care of oneself, build lasting friendships, and where many discovered life passions.

Adam (Latino, male, 23) confessed he would like his children, should he have children to attend college for the experience, although he would be willing to accept the military as an acceptable alternative, much like the messages passed to him by his family:

I think it's a really cool experience to live in the dorms, make those friends. The friends I met that first semester—still friends with; I talk to them all the time. I think you meet really good people; get a lot of life experiences and different things that you learn you can do. There's just so much that you can learn and do. I would definitely be pro you should go to college. I'm not going to force you. At the same time, if you don't want to go to college, you should join the military or something. You can still get really good life experiences. You can meet really good people. I've met tons of people in the military that are all about it. They absolutely love it. They want to retire with it. They want to keep moving it. They
get all these degrees and stuff like that. I would have them pick between the two kinds of a thing.

Carlos (Latino, male, 20) is one of the few subjects who will insist his children attend college, because of the weight his family places on education:

Yeah. Like my parents have told me, as soon as you get a good job, start saving half of it for your kid’s education. They wouldn't tell me this personally, but I feel obligated that part of it also has to go back to Mexico.

William (White, male, 21) learned in college what it means to feel responsibility for other people, and he uses that knowledge to motivate himself to do well in school. He would encourage younger people to attend college, because that is where you learn about sacrificing yourself and working hard to benefit others: “In times when you are tired of studying, you're tired of having to go through the same process, in the end—you have a goal you want to achieve. It's not just for you. You have to think about the people you're going to benefit and affect later on. I think once you realize what you're doing it for, that pushes you to go, ‘It's not you, it's other people.’” Patrick (White, male, 25) has maintained his faith in the promises of the US education system, and advocates for higher education because it has been the site for great personal development for him. He has learned skills that translate into every other area of his life, and he would encourage younger people in his life to attend college because he believes education is useful for shaping the whole person:

I think the most important thing in education is learning how to learn. It's not the classic banking system of I'm going to tell you things and you're going to repeat
them. Having you learn how to learn and think for yourself. That's how strides are made. That's how education bends, which is super necessary.

In general, the study participants were much more flexible about the type of education younger people receive, but still used much of the language that was passed down to them by their families and communities. Instead of simply encouraging others to attend college, they uncovered the reasons why college was important and useful to them and used those reasons to support a college-type adventure in which a young person can experience self-discovery and independence.

The most popular response given for the importance of a college-type experience was the construction of the “work ethic.” One survival narrative that will be passed down to future generations completely unfiltered is that of the “good work ethic,” especially among the Latinx students. One of the biggest jobs of college or a college-type experience is the construction, development, and fine-tuning of an individual work ethic. Eleven study participants specifically discussed the importance of a work ethic, and seven of those responses were from Latinx participants. For the Latinx college student, the idea that hard work pays off, that other people will benefit from your hard work, and that working hard to earn something valuable creates strength of character and integrity exists in its original form in these participants, handed down through the generations. For Adam (Latino, male, 23) and Adrian (Latino, male, 18), college was a time when they had a chance to apply a work ethic they saw modeled in their families, and to reap the benefits from their labor:
They just wanted us to apply ourselves and work hard. They said stuff would happen and we'd get knocked down. They'd always be there to pick us up, help us out, dust us off, keep us moving forward.

William (White, male, 21) received similar advice from his mother:

My mom always told us if you have a good work ethic, you can get anywhere in life. You will have a lot of obstacles that you can overcome. You can always find ways around it if you have a good work ethic.

The willingness to work hard and overcome obstacles with the support of family was a virtue carried forward by the vast majority of the members of this study, and unanimously by the Latinx participants.

While some participants needed to be encouraged, motivated and inspired to work hard, other participants had to learn how to mitigate their work ethics. For some participants, like Sam (White, male, 24), the work ethic acquired and paid forward amounts to management of perfectionism, self-care, and acting in support of your own abilities and gifts:

It's the one's I've read that stick. In terms of education, work ethic: "Done is better than good." When I read that, I felt liberated. If someone wants to go into an artistic profession, the desire to make something great and wonderful—a masterpiece—is huge when you're starting out. When you can step away from that and just do it, and not worry about whether or not it's good, you have so much freedom. "Done is better than good" is such a great phrase because "done" is quantifiable." "Good" you can actually never measure. If you focus on things that
are tangible, you can get stuff done. As somebody who's trying to make things, that's been a piece of advice that I've clung to.

Elizabeth (White, female, 21) also was encouraged to tailor her work ethic in order to best benefit from her drive to succeed:

They have always wanted me to work my hardest, but not overwork myself. Achieve what I can to sustain myself, but not feel like if I don't become top dog I'm not valuable. That was always a big thing for them.

Similar to the redefining of “college experience,” several participants (largely white) seemed very comfortable broadening what “hard work” looks like and seemed to understand that what might be hard for one is not necessarily hard for another.

Several of the Latinx respondents, those with family from Mexico, used a phrase to describe the encouragement of work ethic received from their families and communities: échale ganas\(^\text{232}\). Échale ganas is a popular informal Mexican phrase and is almost impossible to translate. Literally, it means “to throw the desire.”\(^\text{233}\) I checked with several Spanish speakers from Mexico, who told me it meant something close to, “Give it your best!” or “Put your heart into it!” Dr. Rodriguez said to imagine it as something yelled from the bleachers at a baseball game, meaning, “Give it all you have!” or “Kick some ass!” Subjects in this study who mentioned échale ganas did so in the context of remembering how their families affectionately supported them when their school work was difficult. Mary (Latina, female, 22) attempted to define it for me when she described her family offering her support while she is in school:

\(^\text{232}\) Many thanks, yet again, to Dr. Dan Rodriguez for attempting to help me understand the meaning behind this phrase.

\(^\text{233}\) [http://www.spanishdict.com/translate/eche%20la%20ganas](http://www.spanishdict.com/translate/eche%20la%20ganas)
Again, doing your best in whatever you do—whatever that is. That will get you far. Yeah. They believe in that work ethic taking you far. My mom has had clients for over 20 years, because she's still cleaning houses. Do your best. 110%. That's a huge thing I've learned. Whenever I go to church or if I'm home for the weekend, that's what they tell me. “¡Échale ganas!” All my uncles and aunts and stuff- When I post on Facebook. "Oh, my gosh. This 20-page paper. It's so hard." They'll be like “¡Échale ganas!”

Carlos (Latino, male, 20) described the prevalence of this phrase in his family because, although few of them attended college and none of them attended school in the US, they all understand what it means to work hard:

I embrace it. I'm Hispanic. The whole fighter mentality is common in Mexico. You keep fighting and struggle. It's not like Americans. It's a bit narcissistic; just how we view them. You keep your head up. With Mexicans, it's you keep your head down and you work. You bust your ass and you work until you make it. It's a different philosophy.

Reinterpretation of Survival Narratives on Education

“What's expected of you from society isn't always what's best for you.” – Lynne (White, female, 24)

“Follow your curiosity.” – Sam (White, male, 24)

Study subjects did advocate for some sort of life-experience adventure following high school and agreed with many of the reasons their families and communities expected them to attend college, but the majority of participants expressed the priority of providing a variety of post-high school options for younger generations. Lynne (White,
female, 24) studied to be a teacher and has a different approach to education. She does not believe that everyone is cut out for college, and that far too many students are being automatically shuffled into college. She trusts the younger generation to choose wisely for themselves:

Money isn't everything. What's expected of you from society isn't always what's best for you; like going to college and getting a bachelor’s and thinking everything's going to be okay after that; it's not necessarily true. Follow what you think is best for your life, I guess. If that doesn't mean college right now, then that doesn't mean college right now.

Camille (White, female, 21) is also studying to be a teacher and agrees with Lynne that the education system is not doing what it promised to do. Because of her family situation, Camille fell through the cracks in the public education system, and so she would encourage younger people to pursue some experience that provides holistic development and growth:

For me, I really struggled with being a part of the educational system because I was having such a terrible home life. I couldn't focus on school. The thing is, none of my teachers, nobody ever said anything. They just thought I was being stupid. They just thought that I was ... There was something wrong with me, not that I wasn't having my basic needs met. I wasn't getting fed every day. I had to ask kids in my class if I could have some of their food so I could eat lunch some days; just because my stepfather would forget to give me lunch money.

Camille, as a future teacher, is suspicious of the promise of education as the path to success. She would like to teach her students to choose their own life paths and feel
encouraged to pursue their own dreams for their futures, to be embraced for their differences and not feel like there is something wrong with them if they choose to not attend college:

I'm not convinced that higher education is the path to success. I don't think it's for everyone. I think everyone's different. I think that our educational system is extremely flawed, mostly because we're only focusing on a certain group of people. I think we're only focusing on certain types of learning. Not everybody learns the same way. Everybody's different. I think people forget that; especially, people in the educational system with power. I think people are terrified of change.

I think that we change the way that we go about educating children, then I think it will be more for everyone; just kind of doing it on a kid-by-kid basis. Just treating each kid like an individual, not like a bunch of sheep. Once I started having my own ideas and kind of going against the grain, that's when it became difficult. I think that when I'm a teacher, I want to encourage that. I want kids to be able to come up with their own philosophies of life and their own personalities; and to become their own people.

These two future educators highlight a common theme running through the education data from this study – the actual experience of the US education system seems to be different than the promise of the US education system. The majority of the participants in this study do not seem to feel hopeful or optimistic about emerging from college prepared to succeed and take care of themselves. Many of them attend elite private universities.
and, on the surface, represent the best aspects of the US education system. They are well-spoken critical thinkers, many of who received academic scholarships to their universities. They participated in sports, they attended classes, they did not get in trouble, and they went straight into college after high school. They have done everything correctly. Regardless, they still seem suspicious of the education system supporting them and returning the investment of their labor. They are not sure what to do next. Several of them expressed a dilemma over whether or not they should attend graduate school, because perhaps having a master’s degree in something would assure future success and security, but the trust they once carried in the education system has tarnished and worn thin. Therefore, the have reconstructed narratives they were taught about the importance of education and restructured them in ways they hope will be true and helpful for the next generation.

Many participants described new narratives in which future generations will be encouraged to follow passions, giftedness, and individuality, instead of a traditional education path. Jerry (White, male, 25) is more concerned about the next generation uncovering their life passions than getting a degree and finding a job. He discovered his passion for ministry during his college years, and encourages future generations to find a way to figure out what their passions might be and follow those, instead of seeking for fulfillment and satisfaction in a job:

It's great when you're passionate about your job and are able to make money that way, but that's not always going to happen. Your passion doesn't necessarily have to be in your job, but what you do outside of your job. Your job equips you to be able to do that. Finding out what your passion is and what you're going to make a
priority in your life of how you're going to serve the church and then building your decision around that. If going to a Christian School is the answer, great. If going to college somewhere at a state school and getting a degree in business (or something like that) ... If you're going to start your own business right out of high school ... Whatever fits into what you've been called to and what you're gifted in.

Elizabeth (White, female, 21) also just wants those in younger generations to feel freedom to discover what life path will make them happy. She believes that job satisfaction and doing what you love equals success:

I want them to believe in themselves no matter what they decide to pursue; if it's not like a drug dealer or something; obviously, I'm not going to support that. If it's something respectable that may or may not make a ton of money, I want to put trust in them that they'll figure out how to get along while they're also doing something that they love. I think the worst thing is to watch someone meandering along life doing something they hate just because that's what pays the bills.

Maria (Latina, female, 22) described wishing she had been given an option of a gap year after college, because she might have made different life decisions if she had been allowed to wander a bit. Maria feels that her mother did not possess the cultural capital necessary to successfully navigate the US education system, and offered many correctives in retrospect:

I think if I were ever to have children, I would encourage that gap year; whereas, the generation before me wouldn't; now that I have a deeper understanding of the system and of college, I can pass that information on to my offspring. For me, it wasn't all that I hoped for because I didn't have those initial resources. I always
think that I could have done better had I been given those opportunities from a young age. Because my mom was always working, she didn't have the resources, she didn't know what to expect, and she did not let me advance. She was scared about what that would do to me—that I wouldn't be able to handle it. Maybe that's true because I didn't have that parent at home with me and to do homework with me; and have lunch ready, etc. I hate that—hindsight 20/20. Right?

Several students felt that traditional college stifled their creativity. Patrick (White, male, 25) is an artist who left a four-year school to attend a private art school. Manny (Latino, male, 21) is a dancer and a minister who was in college for a short time while he figured out what was next. College served as a site of discovery for Manny, where he tried what other people were doing and found it did not work for him:

I went to college for a year. That's what I felt like the Lord calling. I was called to creating. I wanted to create so bad. I created many ideas that ended up being Brave Movement, the company it is today. I went to school because I didn't know how to do anything.

The idea of college or even graduate school as a place-holder while the student figures out what comes next seems to be a familiar idea but one without much traction among the participants. To them, going to school without a clear objective has a heavy price tag.

Lynne (White, female, 24) has decided that her future students will have a clear understanding of the variety of valid options available to them after they graduate from high school: “Now, I'm going to teach the opposite; not necessarily the opposite, but more focus on that there are other options out there. It's not like you're going to be a complete failure if you don't go to college. I've met so many people from work that didn't
go to college. They're still making a good living - there's nothing wrong with that.” Sam (White, male, 24) states that he would encourage younger people to still explore creative avenues and alternatives to success, even if they choose to go to college:

The stuff you do on your own is essentially the stuff that really matters because it doesn't stick unless you're really invested in it. Find the stuff you're really interested in and follow that. If you're curious about something and you're really invested in it, it will have roots in other things. Because you are interested in this first thing—it will lead to a second thing. Just keep following that and you will find you're in some place reading a book about something random.

Sam discovered his passion for film and music while he was a business major at a private university and has found ways to blend those two worlds together.

The reinterpretations of the education survival narratives focus mostly on increased options for post-high school self-discovery: gap years, international travel, trade school, apprenticeships, or full-time work. The narratives reflect a priority on development of the whole person rather than a specific skill set, anti-conformity and anti-uniformity, and a confrontation of the stigma surrounding those who choose to not attend a traditional four-year university. Even if the participant stated he or she would personally encourage younger generations to attend college, this statement was met with the caveat that, although higher education might be important in their family and community, it is not important or necessary for everyone. It will be interesting to witness what fate awaits the traditional US education system once this generation takes control.
Section 3: Analysis and Conclusion

Introduction

Section three contains conclusions from the study and implications for U.S. religious and educational institutions, as well as potential for further research. Chapter seven will analyze the themes emerging from the data to address implications for religious and educational systems as they attempt to serve Latino/a and white young adults in position of various marginalized identities. Chapter eight will conclude with potential action steps available to these institutions indicated by the findings and goals for future research.

The participants of this study are representative of a demographic of great concern- young adults aged 18-25-years. However, age was not one of the marginalized identities that revealed itself through the results of this study. None of the participants expressed feeling oppressed because of their youth, so the issue of age has gone unmentioned. However, in describing my project, the issue of age has come up regularly as older adults assume the narratives shared by the study participants are just representative of “what every young adult goes through.” The inclination to dismiss these experiences is grounded in old understandings of adolescence that simply have not survived careful cross-cultural examination and historical retrospection identifying and challenging attempts to control adolescent identity in these theories. Historically,
adolescence and young adulthood are considered to be growth periods of rebellion. Much scholarship\textsuperscript{234} has covered the developmental issues of adolescents and young adults, and it might be tempting to assign conclusions from the data to merely a “developmental stage” or a “rebellious season.” Perhaps the words of these participants could be written off as push back against their family systems or their religious upbringing, and maybe it is. But to assume that this is so removes agency from the participants in this study, as though they are too young, idealistic or emotional to really know their own minds, needs, and desires. Before getting into analysis and conclusions, it feels important to examine the context of adolescents and young adults such as the ones in this study, and to rightly posture ourselves against assuming the inerrancy of these stages. These stages, after all, and our assumptions about them, are socially constructed and have been historically reified through adult condescension.

\textsuperscript{234} For example, G. Stanley Hall viewed the teenager as largely unstable, as embodying behaviors which would seem like insanity in an adult but are normal in the adolescent. Hall believed the adolescent required the assistance of the adult, because the “animal, savage, and child-soul can never be studied by introspection.” Because “youth is the age of folly,” young people must be kept under the monitoring and managing adult gaze in every way, at all times. (G. Stanley Hall, \textit{Adolescence - Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, and Religion}, (New York: D. Appleton and Co,) 1931. Erik Erikson offered the field of youth psychology and development the idea of “identity” and “identity crisis.” The crisis, for Erikson, means “a necessary turning point, a crucial moment when development must move one way or another.” Interestingly, Erikson himself wondered if the formal establishment of the expectation for an identity crisis merely gave adolescents license to act out, when people have been living through this exact age just fine for centuries without any outward signs of crisis. Erikson declared that each human will go through eight life stages during which a major conflict or challenge is negotiated. How well the individual resolves the conflict determines his or her successful integration into larger society and overall health and well-being. Erikson believed that the crucial, primary task of youth was the establishment of a personal identity. For the subjects in this study, the challenge rests at the end of the fifth stage of development (“Identity vs. Role Confusion”) and the beginning of the sixth stage of development (“Intimacy vs. Isolation.”). Erik H Erikson, \textit{Identity: Youth and Crisis}, (New York City, NY: W. W. Norton & Company,) 1994.
Perhaps most germane to this study is Fowler’s theory of faith development. The nature of the participants responses in this study around matters of faith suggests that the participants are engaged in the kind of questioning and ownership of authority within the self that marks the transition from the synthetic-conventional stage to the individuative-reflective stage. These two stages can be angst-ridden and painful, but transition is not inevitable and is not restricted to specific ages or linear progression. The Individuative-Reflective stage is when an adult takes responsibility for his or her own faith and upon reflection, accepts that there is some conflict and inconsistency. Fowler sought to examine how communities of faith support and assist one another in spiritual growth as they themselves are supported and assisted. Fowler’s purpose is the discovery of vocation, which for him means to uncover the purpose of life in concert with how God is already moving in the world, and not necessarily self-fulfillment. Embracing one’s vocation in community can be transformative for both the individual and the community and is a sign of mature Christianity. Advocacy for the discovery and continued unveiling of vocation is an important theme in this study.

In analyzing the themes and revelations from these interviews with late adolescent and college-aged young adults, it is critical to remember that, “Everything – even teenagers’ bodies – varies with time and place.” There is no universal young adult experience. There isn’t even a universal U.S. college student experience. Everyone

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doesn’t grow up with two parents within a supportive community, go through high school, go to college, get married and have kids. The claims of developmental theory are products of a specific time and place and often point to the experience of a privileged few. Their theories do not always travel smoothly across gender, race, sexuality, class, education and faith lines.

Adopting an ethical hermeneutic as a methodology to approach the data of this study means that committed and consistent agency is given to the voices of these participants, no matter their age or life stage. Each voice deserves space to be heard and is not represented by grand narratives or standardized developmental progress. It is unjust to chalk up the experiences of the participants in this study to mere “rebellion” or to define their realities as a “phase.” I would like to challenge my readers to take the words and experiences of these participants at face value, and to examine our own filters of what is expected of a “college kid” or a “teenager,” awarding weight and agency to their lived experience.
Chapter 7: Analysis

Religion

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

“Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.” Psalm 127:3-5a

The survival narratives offered by the participants in this study offer great insight into the perspective of young adults toward conservative evangelical Christianity. The data suggests that, while they are suspicious of the motives and methods behind institutional belonging and homogenous messaging designed to protect the church, young adults still see value in participating in religious community. Radically distancing from the “same is better” refrain behind so many of the narratives passed down through evangelical networks, the young adults in this study are still spiritually curious and seeking. They have touching anecdotes about their faith communities of origin and spoke kindly of those who raised them. But they cannot abide with moralistic hypocrisy, and they are not interested in protecting an institution to the detriment of their wellbeing.

Sociologist Christian Smith has conducted multiple studies over the religious and spiritual lives of youth and emerging adults, and in 2009 he challenged scholars to “move
beyond simply identifying statistical associations between correlated variables and
toward actually theorizing the real causal social mechanisms at work ‘beneath’ and
giving rise to those associations.” That is the goal of this study. As membership
numbers of protestant religions drop in the U.S., Christian institutions have attempted to
understand why young people are leaving church, and particularly why they waver during
their college years. The evangelical church is fiercely protective of its young and
perceives young adults to be pawns in a culture war. Sociologist Christian Smith found
that an overwhelming majority of evangelicals believe Christian values are under attack
in the United States, and while evangelicals are as a result more religiously exclusive,
they are also more defensive and contentious. While the shrinking numbers of young
adults within evangelical congregations is not the explicit concern of this study, many of
the conclusion drawn from the data of this study answer that question and provide
important insight into the results of messages “beneath the data” that have gone
unexamined.

Without question, the overriding concern of the religious survival narrative
amongst the participants of this study is that of conformity. Young people are taught in
myriad ways that “same is better” and that deviation from these norms carry serious
consequences, not the least of which is social exclusion. In 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, Paul


239 Allison Pond, Gregory Smith, and Scott Clement, “Religion among the Millennials: Introduction and
among-the-millennials/, accessed April 7, 2018.

240 James K. Wellman, Evangelical vs. Liberal: The Clash of Christian Cultures in the Pacific Northwest,

241 Christian Smith, Christian America? What Evangelicals Really Want, (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 2000), 201-203.
teaches the Corinthians to reject all kinds of evil, “to not even associate with anyone who
claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer,
a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.” These verses have been used
to support a type of religious correction for those who wander, and the concerns seen in
the data over “what will people think?” and “keep up with the Joneses” point to real fear
of exclusion from the body, and this fear has informed some of the more marginalizing
messaging that has been transferred to the young people in this study. Fear of exclusion
from both the earthly church and the eternal kingdom drive these narratives of
institutional survival, particularly those clothed as personal survival narratives.

Many studies have been performed on young adults trying to ascertain the cause
for decreased attendance, and generational disgust with the perceived hypocrisy of older
generations is a common finding.\textsuperscript{242} The results of this study reveal this perception of
hypocrisy as a commentary on the unrealistic standards of conformity on evangelical
churches. Participants expressed sadness at observing their parents and older community
members trying to reach the impossible standards of the church. Although the trend of
increasing numbers of young adults identifying as “spiritual but not religious” has been
over-dramatized,\textsuperscript{243} roughly a half of the participants for this study identified themselves

\textsuperscript{242} In addition to findings from Fuller’s \textit{Sticky Faith} and \textit{Growing Young}, David Kinnaman from the Barna
group found hypocrisy to be a common factor (David Kinnaman, \textit{You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are
Leaving the Church}, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), as well as recent analysis from the Pew
Research Center: \url{http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-
behind/}

\textsuperscript{243} Christian Smith, \textit{Soul Searching}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 266. This category is
problematic in itself as it is not a self-identified category but was created by sociologists when study
participants checked two different boxes identifying religious identity. Sociologist of religion Nancy
Ammerman contends that religion and spirituality cannot be separated, and a person tends to either be both
or neither. (Nancy Ammerman, Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes, (New York: Oxford University Press,) 2014.)
as not particularly interested in religious institutions but were still spiritually minded. The participants who identified in this way were consistently ones who were carrying wounds from their faith communities of origin connected to their gender assignments, sexuality, or nationality. None of the participants identified as atheists or agnostic, but instead communicated an internalization of faith expression. They still believe in God, they believe in a strong work ethic, and they hold a moral code prescribing the just treatment of another. They were not deeply concerned with outward expressions of faith, which scholarship suggests points to an extended decline in subjective religious faith.\(^{244}\)

Christian Smith’s research concluded that overt religious expression\(^{245}\) in the lives of young adults over time was connected to the sustenance of strong internally committed faith.\(^{246}\) While this conclusion is perhaps accurate, it is not accurate to infer the opposite: that those who decline in overt expressions of religious commitment do not retain private internal religious faith. It is entirely possible that lack of institutional religious involvement greatly affects a person’s ability to well articulate faith commitments, and it is an overreach to declare that external expressions of faith like church attendance or reading of scripture can be used to accurately assess the sustenance of a person’s privately committed religious life.

All of the participants shared stories of positive associations with the religious community of their youth. Every participant shared an experience pointing to their


\(^{245}\) Ibid., 218. In addition to overt religious expressions such as church attendance, friendships with religious friends, religious activities, and personal prayer, Smith also measured for internal factors such as importance of religious faith, decision making using morality, belief in miracles, possession of religious doubts and religious experiences.

\(^{246}\) Ibid.
feelings of supportive community and inclusion in some way. When it comes to life crises, the evangelical church provides a soft landing and a hopeful perspective for its members. When it’s time to apply for colleges or for jobs, evangelical networks are deployed to pave a path. The Church of Christ is uniquely situated in this arena because it is small enough to have many close connections yet spread out logistically because of mission efforts. This is largely due to the fact that most Church of Christ members attended one of the brotherhood schools at some point, which serves as a touchstone for the community. Anytime two Church of Christ people meet for the first time, they engage in a ritual conversation establishing points of contact in their genealogies, and usually uncover several similar relationships. Obedience to social norming and conformity to standards of morality is highly rewarded. James Wellman was impressed at the amount of human care he witnessed in his research of evangelical churches, although he pointed to a common critique heard among the subjects in this story: Acts of care serve a larger purpose for evangelicals, that of sharing the good news and either recruiting or sustaining membership. But membership has great privileges and offers heightened access to various forms of cultural, spiritual and social capital through tightly bound networks of family and ministry. Evangelical communities offer seamlessly reproduced capital at every level – whether its financial, familial, social or spiritual, the exchange of capital is the tie that binds the community together.


248 Ibid., 278.
Perhaps this network is why so many of the participants in this study indicated a desire for children for which they may one day be responsible to attend a church or to have a faith system of their own. None of the participants stated indifference at the moral code these future children may develop, and almost all of them declared a desire for these future children to experience a positive form of community. Very few participants expressed a desire for these future generations to be committed to the evangelical church, but most of them desire a close network wherein capital is exchanged. For all the painful stories and wounds these participants carry, there remains something good and authentic from their evangelical experiences linked to the presence of a supportive community.

It remains to be seen whether the participants in this study are gone from the evangelical church for good. Longitudinal studies have uncovered conflicting data about determining factors for denominational return. In his research, Bengston identified these returning young adults as Religious Rebels and Prodigals,249 who eventually returned because they had children and because they had supportive, patient parents who did not push.250 Other factors contributing to return to faith as adults include a positive relationship with an invested father, autonomy, influential grandparents, positive and influential friendships with members, and the presence of a supportive community during a personal crisis.251 What this study seeks to add to the scholarship is a discussion on the impact of church messaging on individual marginalized identities possessed by young adults. These are not spiritual doubts or acts of youth rebellion. What has been revealed

250 Ibid., 197.
in this study are deep spiritual and emotional wounds received at the hands of the evangelical church through formal and informal messaging designed to help the evangelical church survive and disguised as narratives designed to help the individual to thrive. The narratives do work – as long as the listener conforms. What room is created in the evangelical church for those who refuse to accommodate these messages of evangelical conformity? Is there any room created at all? These are questions the analysis section below on “Identity” will seek to answer.

**Education**

With the assistance of institutional Christianity in the U.S., normative schools are on the front-lines of patrolling the borders of young adult economy, sexuality, and gender, racial and class identities. As arguably the primary social institution of young people, it would save time if we could agree that educative institutions constantly monitor and police youth “place” and identity. U.S. public educators, who are by a large margin white and upper-middle class, come to the classroom with their own often unexplored and unacknowledged filters and biases regarding who their students should be and how their classroom will function and what their students need to know to be successful. Schools do not exist in a vacuum – educators will impose their own ideologies on curriculum, no matter how uniform that curriculum is. How one teacher teaches the Civil War and how the one next door teaches it will look vastly different. Students in choir who horse around and shove each other off the risers might get yelled at for “acting gay”

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by their evangelical Christian choir director, while a teacher trying to describe a student to an administrator might say he just looks like, you know, “a Mexican kid.”

The survival narratives revealed in this study indicate something that postcolonial scholars have been telling us for decades: The Western educational system is not functioning the way it has promised it would, and rather than providing a failsafe avenue to success and stability, it enforces and rewards conformity and standardization. Turpin describes the colonized classroom, specifically those concerned with Christian formation, as a location of Imperialist tendency:

The desire to declare a better way that the next generation should live into, gets played out on children and youth, who also tend to be imagined by their adult teachers as unknowing, unable to be intelligent, and primarily people to be formed by habit or totalizing environments.

Those subject to the U.S. classroom ache to experience and express, and maybe even make a living at, alternative knowledges. The subjects of this study desire to be known as experts of their own minds and desires, independent masters of their own futures, and talented expressionists of a variety of valuable skills and passions.

The participants in this study are not equating their educational history with that of citizens of colonized countries, and it would be insulting to draw that parallel. The participants in this study, however, do describe their educational histories as the intentional transmission of homogenous and standardized markers of success. The successful student works hard, is obedient and compliant, and is good at math, reading,

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writing, and memorization. The exemplary student recognizes, models, and reinforces social expectations and norms:

Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission of the school…The school helps to form a general, transposable disposition towards legitimate culture, which is first acquired with respect to scholastically recognized knowledge and practices but tends to be applied beyond the bounds of curriculum.\textsuperscript{255}

Being a good student leads to being a good citizen which leads to being a successful adult. This is the narrative behind the survival narratives shared by the participants in this study, and they are suspicious of it. Several participants shared stories of frustration with their academic ability, with their desire to pursue a gift or a passion that parents or community members did not appreciate, because it would not lead to a stable career. Patrick is an artist and wants to be able to paint and draw professionally. Yet he has agreed to pursue a business degree because his father is concerned he cannot support himself as an artist. Camille is also an artist, but felt she needed to add a teaching credential to her art history major so she can take care of herself. Sam was an accounting major and was suffering under the crush of numbers until he transferred schools, broke away from his family and began pursuing screen writing. Several participants suggested they would be willing to commit to a career they were not passionate about in order to pay bills and do what they truly love as a hobby in their free time. But many participants expressed frustration over the perception of the job market and their ability to find work regardless of what they studied in school. They doubt the narratives from the older generations that a degree equals a well-paying career. Therefore, why not pursue something they love, if it will be hard to find work no matter what they choose?

In their reinterpretations of survival narratives, the participants in this study advocate for a unified acceptance and promotion of alternative knowledges, rather than enduring 16-20 years of an education designed to create “knowledge workers.” They would like to hear narratives beyond the unified chant from their older communities and families pushing them into four-year colleges, narratives that encourage pursuits beyond college or the military, which seems to be the only acceptable alternative to a four-year program. They have become suspicious that a college degree is the key to a successful future, unless you agree to submit to a few specific fields of study. Carlos is pre-law, one of the few participants who is fortunate to be majoring in his field of passion, but even he is wary of the job market upon his graduation, having heard tales of lawyers flooding the field. When I asked Carlos what he would do if he couldn’t be a lawyer, he had no idea. He’s never thought about anything else.

Many of the participants mentioned their time after high school as a liberative period where they discovered gifts and passions that had been buried – travel, science fiction, water colors, car maintenance, animal rescue and skin care are just a few examples. Very few of them were actively pursuing these gifts and passions in school, however. There appeared to be a lack of institutional empowerment for alternative knowledges beyond those the education system values and rewards. Norma Gonzalez calls these “funds of knowledge,” which refers to caches of knowledge that people carry with them from their families, cultures, and communities: “There are people living, working, thinking, worrying, and caring. During their lives, as individuals and as a group, they constitute households that have generated and accumulated a variety of funds of

knowledge that are the intellectual residues of their activities.”\textsuperscript{257} Gonzalez proposes that these funds offer schools a whole new world of pedagogical possibilities for creating a more level playing field for students, particularly those who have traditionally been marginalized. If educators could find ways to uncover and tap into the funds of knowledge, or pre-existing knowledge of their students, and were willing and allowed by the district to recreate the curriculum around these funds of knowledge, the learning process would be greatly enhanced. Additionally, through this recreation and incorporation, “student experience is legitimated as valid” and spaces are opened “for the construction of new fields wherein students are not locked into an assumed unilineal heritage.”\textsuperscript{258} Gonzalez holds that these funds of knowledge are not only helpful for the student but are also useful and necessary assets for the classroom. Furthermore, honoring and mobilizing student’s funds of knowledge models a future turn toward honoring and celebrating what they choose to learn. A shift toward greater valuing of localized funds of knowledge would change the narrative around what “successful” means and might eventually provide greater freedom for young people to explore alternative careers less dependent on the western education system. For now, the participants in this study would settle for narratives of encouragement and support from their communities and families to pursue work more aligned with their passions and gifts that are not directly aligned with a four-year degree, rather than disappointing and betraying overt expectations to leave home and immediately attend college.

\textsuperscript{257} Norma Gonzalez, Anne Browning-Aiken and Deborah Neff, eds. \textit{Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms}, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), x.

\textsuperscript{258} Ibid., 43.
Identities

One common thread among all of the identities discussed in this dissertation is the awareness that although U.S. religious and educative institutions are becoming more diverse, they are not necessarily becoming more inclusive, and diversity without inclusion results in assimilation. Assimilation speaks to the overriding theme from the data that “same is better.” In the case of the U.S. evangelical church, in the understanding of the participants of this study, “same” means white, heterosexual, and male Christian. Anything that deviates from this norm stands to be corrected or feared.

While each of the identities will be separated into sections that correlate with the sections in the findings portion of the dissertation, I recognize that separation of this nature is part of the problem and fails to honor the intersectionality of the participants. McClintock argues (in an echo of Bhabha), that:

race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they simply be yoked together retrospectively…. They come into existence in and through relation to each other – if in conflicting and contradictory ways. In this sense, gender, race and class can be called articulated categories.259

The web of identities articulated by the participants are all interconnected and cannot be closely examined without disturbing other strands. While it feels necessary to ask for indulgence in the name of clarity and the need for organization to separate analysis of identities in this way, I recognize that each of the identities of the study participants is complex and unique, and no one represents the universal experience of gender, financial, ethnicity or sexuality-based oppression in the evangelical church. Regardless, there are certain commonalities in their religious and educational experiences, and these

259 Gonzalez, Funds of Knowledge, 5.
commonalities gleaned from the data around identity can be tied best to current scholarly theory by being stood in isolated relief, one strand at a time.

**Finance**

The conversation with the participants in this study that led to reflections on class identity were all encapsulated within memories of community financial literacy awareness and the reality of familial debt and class performance. Study participants who came from both families that were financially savvy and families that were surviving on debt and multiple jobs pointed to an element of performing certain class-based identities expected by their communities. Several participants mentioned familial fear of “appearing” as though they were both financially secure and living beneath their means. A delicate balance was required – the family needed to appear as though they were not living paycheck to paycheck and were excellent stewards of their resources, but the family also needed to be sure that they were projecting humility and not living extravagantly. It is telling that different communities understood financial solvency and extravagance differently, but those two standards remained consistent.

Class performance is a complex entity within evangelical churches and is intimately tied with religious commitments. Class performance is connected to spiritual identity and maturity, as well as community and personal witness about one’s relationship with God. Although most of the participants in this study had yet to hold sole responsibility for their livelihoods, the ones who discussed finances portrayed a very clear picture of what “success” and financial agility looked like. Sometimes it was what their families had modeled for them, but often it was the opposite of what their families had done.
For this study as in most fields, it is difficult to examine class performance in isolation of intersectional identities. Class performance is intricately tied up with gender, nationality, sexuality and in this case, religious expectations as well. Julie Bettie was interested in exploring the relationship between class symbolism and identity formation in an effort to understand “the complex and contradictory ways” in which class subjectivity is constructed. Bettie proposes that class categories join adolescent identity formation as performative within race and gender. Class as performance enables border crossing and does not inevitably determine class futures via the transference of cultural capital. But class performance is still established along race and gender which does help determine class futures. Class is an historical imposed structure, but a fluid one. Perhaps this is why class is often overlooked as a category of identity in popular culture or is subsumed under other categories such as race or gender. Bettie intends to leave this tangled; class is routinely articulated through other categories of difference. The categories of identity are not clear cut and universal.

Within the Churches of Christ, the balance between financial stability and extravagance is a very fine line. Because the fellowship began as a very poor post-Civil War offshoot of the Stone-Campbell movement, members are historically very sensitive about overt displays of wealth. Wealth is to be portrayed through tithing and charity, not through cars or labels. Although if one insists on wearing labels or driving nice cars,

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261 Ibid., 194.

262 This is one of the reasons behind the a cappella priority of Church of Christ worship – instruments were too expensive for the early members.
they need not be flashy, and it is important that it be well known one is still living beneath one’s means. This fine balance points to an enlightening echo revealed in several of the survival narratives. The study participants very clearly conveyed an understanding between financial literacy and spiritual health – debt, spending and saving are moral issues. I am very carefully explaining the delicate balance at work here because the survival narratives shared by the study participants shadowed language associated with the prosperity gospel, but all involved would be shocked and offended by that connection.

When Adrian shared that his mother taught them that faith in Jesus would save them from debt, and Lynne overtly connected her father’s understanding that money management was a sign of the faithful Christian, and Elizabeth and Camille both spoke of their family’s blessings, they were echoing shadows of the prosperity gospel. Simply put, the prosperity gospel believes that God grants health and wealth to those with the right kind of faith. According to Kate Bowler, the prosperity gospel (also known as Word of Faith, Health and Wealth, and Name It and Claim It) centers on four themes: faith, wealth, health, and victory. Faith is an activator, a supernatural power that unleashes spiritual forces and turns spoken word into a reality. Therefore, faith is demonstrated in wealth and health – one’s body and material reality portray successful immaterial faith. This alignment between the spiritual, material and physical is expressed as victory. Evangelical churches share many celebrated ancestors with the prosperity gospel, and

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264 Ibid., 7.
prosperity language is freely shared and exchanged between the movements. Regardless, Churches of Christ would be deeply offended at comparison with health and wealth gospel. Health and wealth are not always matters of faith and correct thinking and divine blessing, as the prosperity gospel teaches. It is the result of hard work, discipline, and careful management. Regardless, lessons about spiritual reward for financial generosity and management are common and expected. Evangelicals understand that God can only release gifts to humans when they are fully submitted to God’s will, even when the demanded course of action seems illogical.\textsuperscript{265} Roughly once a year, Churches of Christ participate in a money message of some sort. During the scheduled Sunday morning gathering, the sermon will address the church’s financial position. Sometimes this comes at the end of the year with a report on where the church spent tithes and offerings, and these messages invite members to offer resources to make up for deficits in the budget. Sometimes it is at the beginning of the year as the leadership sets the vision for the year, and these messages will often introduce some sort of a capital campaign for the church to undertake. The scripture used in these messages is familiar:

”Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” Luke 6:38

“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” Psalm 37:4

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7

\textsuperscript{265} Kathleen Hladky, “I Double-Dog Dare You in Jesus’s Name! Claiming Christian Wealth and the American Prosperity Gospel,” in Religion Compass 6/1, 82-96 (2012): 83.
The willing giving of resources to one’s community of faith is an act of membership, and participation is rewarded. In order to be sure congregants are not hearing health and wealth from the pulpit, clergy have carefully tried to correct any possible misunderstandings about any possible connection that might be drawn between these messages and prosperity gospel. Giving of resources is an expression of faith and is a private decision. Each person may feel free to give as he or she is able. This priority of attempting to distance from health and wealth creates a tricky challenge when the church determines the need for some sort of capital campaign. Regardless of these commitments, the language of health and wealth exists in the informal narratives of evangelical communities, shared through the survival narratives through the understanding of “blessing.” Evangelicals are quick to name blessings, which, as Bowling points out, is a double-edged sword carrying two messages. “Blessing” blurs the distinctions between gift (“Thank you, God. I could not have secured this for myself”) and reward (“Thank you, me. For being the kind of person who gets it right.”) This distinction between unearned gift and deserved reward seems to be the defining factor in the survival narratives offered in this study that point to shame in financial struggle. If the family is experiencing trouble affording basic necessities, despite holding multiple jobs and spending wisely, there must be another issue. Perhaps the issue is a spiritual one, and the family is simply not being good stewards of resources. The prosperity gospel attempts to solve the problem of human suffering, to explain evil. After all, if Jesus died that we may have abundant lives, if that is God’s will for God’s people, then the problem for lack

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of abundance must lie with us. Perhaps they are not working hard enough, or living beneath their means, or budgeting money wisely. The problem is, the illusion of financial stability is easily performed, at least for a while. Understanding financial difficulty as a moral issue creates troubling expectations for those struggling to survive, and the language of “blessing” communicates some sort of divine favor that seems fickle and biased.

**Ethnicity**

The original focus of this study centered on the liminal experience of the descendants of Latin American immigrants living in the physical borderland along the Southwestern states between Mexico and the United States, and how Latinx and white young adults were experiencing different educative and religious spaces than their white counterparts. The survival narratives gathered from the Latinx participants of this study portray the borderland experience of many Latino/a, Hispanic, and Chicano/a immigrants who came before them. Along the United States-Mexico border, the Latinx community has for the last century perched on the thresholds of both a developing nation and an empire. More than merely separating countries, this border has served to divide and trap, fence in and push out, confine and exclude. The Mexico-US border is the longest border shared by a developing country and an empire on the planet. For U.S. residents, the US/Mexico border is a physical location, an area of the country, a material space one can point to on a map. Many U.S. Americans who have visited the physical border or who have seen films set along the border may have formed some ideas about what the border must be like: hot summers, Southwestern decorating, variations on Mexican food, and small, dusty towns where there are mustachioed sheriffs, horses in the streets, and ice
cold beers. But for the Latin American immigrant, the US/Mexico border is a different experience entirely. The border represents a unique space of otherness, difference, hybridity; it is a contested space of power where multiple systems of cultural, social, linguistic, academic, and religious identity must constantly be negotiated. The border gives rise to “a new consciousness of the mestiza.” The lived experience of the Latin American immigrant is often one of exile and wilderness, and parallels the narratives of the participants in this study who describe not completely fitting in one place or another.

In describing the different survival narratives necessary in order to “pass” in U.S. culture, the participants of this study describe a position of liminality that constructs a space unique to the descendants of Latin American immigrants. The border is the site of a blending of two independent and self-sustaining cultures – the US and the Latin American: “In these cultural sites of re-formation, the creation of third, interstitial, and border spaces is most evident.” It is also a liminal space because it is the physical location of a spiritual, emotional, mental, and cultural transition, a “constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings.” Latinx living in this amorphous borderland must live in the constant tension of grasping the past and reaching toward the future while trying to survive the present. In the reinterpreted survival narratives of this study, the Latinx participants describe the necessity of being

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269 Ibid., 128.

270 David A. Sanchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio: Subverting Imperial Myths*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2008), 125.


fluent in at least two cultures, the culture of their families and home communities and the
culture of their North American peers. These fluencies are compounded when these
young people enter academic and religious spaces, as they often serve as translator or
host for their family, or as educator and token for their peers. These young adults are
constantly, daily, hourly transgressing physical, psychological, emotional and intellectual
borders. They are exhausted.

Dr. Gloria Anzaldúa calls the Mexico-U.S. border “una herida abierta,” or, an
“open wound”, where “the third world grates up against the first and bleeds… the
lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country -- a border culture.” 273 This close
proximity creates a unique culture filled with great injustice but also great potential:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us
from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A
borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of
an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and
forbidden are its inhabitants. 274

Generations of scholars have poetically and methodically defined the borderland, both
literally and metaphorically. Dr. Miguel De La Torre declares that the borderland is
where “two or more worlds come together and forge oppressive, violent, and divisive
relationships between those who are defined as ‘us/insiders’ and ‘them/outsiders.’ But
borderlands are also a place where intense creativity, fluidity, and empowerment can
flourish.”275 All of these definitions push against the idea of the American “melting

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274 Ibid., 25.

275 Miguel A. De La Torre, “Borderlands,” in *Hispanic American Religious Cultures*, vol. 1, ed. Miguel A.
De La Torre (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO,LLC, 2009), 83.
pot,”276 where individual identities and cultural histories blend seamlessly with that of the majority culture. In fact, the borderland is less of a “soup” and more of a “stew” or a “salad” in which “ethnic communities are not fused but coexist within one society, adapting to one another, accepting common superordinate values, but maintaining their respective identities…”277 Several study participants mentioned alliances they formed at school with other students from Latin or Central American countries. As Matt described it, “You just need someone to watch your back, who understands what it’s like.” Matt claims Argentina as his ancestry, but in California, he is “Mexican.” He seeks out others who are seen as “Mexican” so he can breathe and laugh it off. The experience they are sharing is that of the threshold. The borderland is inhabited by individuals who may or may not share common history and experience but who share the same space and are struggling to maintain their own unique identity and culture.

The communities represented by the Latinx participants in this study experience a tension between what once was and what is yet to be. They carry membership and loyalty to a homeland in the form of extended family as well as cultural practices and identities related to the homeland. Life along the border is life on a threshold, where a group or an individual is neither inside nor outside a mainstream culture, but rests in a doorway. If a community is suspended in a doorway for long enough, eventually that threshold will expand into a whole other space, a room between rooms, a threshold

276 Sanchez, From Patmos to the Barrio, 112.

community. The US-Mexico border has become such a place where one location ends but another begins.

In the case of borderland Latinx communities, their location within the United States constantly reminds them of their identity as outsider and other. Through the narratives shared in this study, these communities seem very aware of their communal identity in contrast to the identity of the dominant culture, and their experience along the US/Mexico border is that a form of exile. Several study participants shared stories of not quite belonging in one place or another, particularly those who were the first of their families to attend college. Advanced education had created a new level of difference, even within the communities who sacrificed and saved to create the opportunity. Latinx scholars embrace an understanding of a shared experience of “otherness” among immigrants and their descendants. This “otherness” is especially poignant for Latin American immigrants, and particularly for Mexican immigrants, as their immigration experience is largely the responsibility of the American Empire in which they now live. Fernando Segovia describes this “otherness” as living as permanent aliens or strangers, both where they come from and where they live now: “otherness implies a biculturalism with no home, no voice, and no face: as the ones who left, we are not accepted in our present home; similarly, within our present home, we find a script for us to play and a mask for us to wear.”278 As the “other,” immigrant communities find themselves “silenced and speechless,”279 unable to find a place to belong. Upon return to the

278 Fernando F. Segovia, “Toward Intercultural Criticism: A Reading Strategy from the Diaspora,” in Reading from this Place, ed. Mary Ann Tolbert, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 322.

homeland, even temporarily, they are known as “the ones who left,” but in the receiving country, they have no place that feels like home:

Now one who is exiled has also become a stranger to the familiar world and its inhabitants one has left behind. In time, this once familiar world turns into a world of memories and dreams. Soon, this sense of “otherness” encompasses both one’s world of birth and one’s adopted world; living between worlds, one is never totally part of either… It is in this new, strange, and often oppressive reality that the identity of an alienating otherness of the exile becomes forged. This otherness overwhelms and overrides one, depriving a person not only of a past, present, and future but also of self-definition, self-appropriation, and self-direction. Thus the exile is living in two worlds and no world at the same time, stripped of a voice and left to languish in deadening silence.280

Exile is not only a physical uprooting from a homeland but also brings a pointed sense of separation from one’s place of comfort, belonging, identity, and community. When Bethany (Latina, female, 20) describes a feeling of invisibility of Latinx members of her community, she is speaking of this exilic experience. Exile represents the loss of “home,” literally and psychologically. Cuellar explains: “Even when it is long past, the experience of exile continues to affect the self-understanding of the people involved.”281 This exilic experience affects not only those who experienced migration first-hand, but it also affects the descendants of immigrants for generations. The deeply felt pain of exile, either voluntary or forced, may be ameliorated by return, but it can never be erased. A return to the homeland may bring healing to the emigrant, but it cannot undo the exilic wound. Cuellar also notes that: “The people’s adverse experience will continue to haunt their historical consciousness and shape their own selfhood throughout their generations no

280 Cuellar, *Voices of Marginality*, 14.

281 Ibid, 5.
matter how long they may exist.”

Once experienced, exile creates a permanent shift in the self-perception, community relationship, and very identity of the emigrant. The Latinx young adults in this study dwell in a literal borderland but are themselves amorphous borderlands in constant movement, adjusting and adapting to systems of stratification that challenge their dignity and basic rights. Also at risk is a sense of the culture of their parents and their grandparents. Mary (Latina, female, 21) and Carlos (Latino, male, 20) both spoke their Catholic extended family, and the tension created because they are evangelicals. The loss of Catholicism is a loss of a cultural marker. Older generations are forced to struggle with the questions: How do we maintain our heritage but still give hope for a new life and a future for our children? If I can provide my children with new possibilities, full bellies, relative safety and the potential for a great future aligned with the American Dream, is it worth the risk of potentially losing contact with our foundational identity that is our homeland? Will this new land steal my children from me?

As a teacher along the Southwestern border, I encountered many Mexican and Guatemalan adolescents who were the second or third generation to live in the United States. Many of them did not speak Spanish, or what Spanish they had was a hybrid between Americanized Spanish and English. They had their own slang that neither their white teachers nor their Latin American parents understood. For many of these youth, they were “taught” (rather, it was “communicated to them”) that their “cultural heritage

282 Cuellar, *Voices of Marginality*, 5.

and language served as a hindrance to their success.”284 Native Spanish-speaking students were reprimanded for speaking Spanish in class or in the hallways, and if they used Spanish in formal essays points were removed. A little bit of Spanish was “allowed,” because it showed diversity and “flavor.” But if more than 10% of the paper was in Spanish, especially if it wasn’t translated, students were flagged for special intervention or were sent to remedial classes.

These students were faced with an unenviable choice: choosing between “full assimilation into the dominant culture…. Or a perpetual state of otherness built on maintaining cultural loyalties.”285 These Latinx young people learned to walk a fine line between two cultures: They would wear rosaries or bracelets displaying the Virgin of Guadalupe286 alongside plastic pink bracelets saying “I love boobies” to raise awareness for breast cancer. They would listen to Selena, Romeo Sanchez, Lil Wayne, Drake, Kumbia Kings, and Taylor Swift. These children formed a hybrid community vaguely familiar but still unknown to their families. The laughed at George Lopez and Amy Schumer, ate Acirrico and Lucas hot powder after a lunch of fish sticks and tater tots, and sported jerseys celebrating Lebron James and Filo Loco, the Mexican wrestler. While many of these children missed school to go to the bank with their parents and translate for them, they could not write in Spanish and would have to ask neighbors in Spanish for the correct English translation of a specific word so they could write it down in English. Many of them still clung to their Mexican and Guatemalan history, and maintained

284 Sanchez, From Patmos to the Barrio, 96.

285 Ibid., 111-112.

286 Ibid., 111.
contact with family and friends “back home” through bi- or tri-annual visits, they kept in constant contact with friends in the States via Facebook, Snapchat, or “What’s App?”

These adolescents were never fully in one place or the other, but created a unique hybrid space within the physical Southwestern borderland that was uniquely theirs:

> From the perspective of the periphery, hybridity reflects those processes in which the colonized absorb the cultural attributes of their colonizers and combine them with their own indigenous cultural attributes to create a new identity, a new cultural distinctiveness. The resultant hybrid agents, therefore, do not occupy a cultural location that completely reflects the colonizers’ culture, nor is it recognizable as the originary indigenous cultural subjectivity.²⁸⁷

These children consciously or subconsciously recognize that assimilation comes with the comfort of privilege, but at what cost? What power do they lose when they mimic the colonizer? Anzaldua describes her concern about the loss of culture among Chicano kids:

> I want Chicano kids to hear stuff about la Llorona, about the border, etc. as early as possible. I don’t want them to wait until they are eighteen or nineteen to get that information. I think it is very important that they get to know their culture already as children.²⁸⁸

The Latinx community must be empowered as the agents of this cultural exchange, and not the U.S. school system or the evangelical church. Educative and religious institutions must learn how to become fully inclusive in order to empower marginizationalized communities to educate both their young and the dominant system. In short, dominant churches and dominant classrooms must secede authority to the immigrant community, welcoming Spanish-speaking voices into the pulpit and behind the podium. The school system and the white church should not be in charge of informing Latinx children of their culture. These institutions will discourage children from speaking Spanish while at the

²⁸⁷ Sanchez, *From Patmos to the Barrio*, 116.

same time believing they are being “culturally diverse” by hosting “diversity nights” from time to time and offering Gary Soto and Sandra Cisneros stories in class. If dominant systems are allowed to communicate “culture” to youth through the occasional story with Spanish phrases and “taco nights,” these children will understand themselves through the lens of sombreros and mariachi music. The order should be reversed, and the families and children of borderland communities should be invited to educate the school and religious systems of their own cultural histories and wounds, music and art.

**Gender**

More so than any other identity mentioned in this study, gender identity has the most performative aspect. Within evangelical churches, gender identity is solidly binary, and is closely tied to sexuality. Study participants were all very clear on the expectations of women in their evangelical churches: get married, have children, be busy about the home, support your husband, be active in the church community, be quiet and gentle, be pure, and be faithful to your husband. Maria (Latina, female, 22) in particular clearly described her understanding of these expectations, and what it cost her to push against them and create her own identity as an independent woman. Several of the women in this study describe the evangelical messages around gender as very damaging to them. Working outside the home isn’t preferred but has become more acceptable but above all, be submissive: “Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.” Titus 2:4-5

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Submission is one of the reasons why single women make evangelical churches nervous. If she has left her father’s home, and she has no husband, to whom is she submissive?

The Church of Christ in particular, because of its heritage and primary locations, has further absorbed some gender expectations that are distinctly southern. As Camille astutely observed, “Being a good Christian woman is like being a good waitress.” She must intuit needs, be friendly and attentive, and serve others. Appearance, manner and engagement are very closely taught and monitored. In fact, several of the well-meaning survival narratives described by the participants point to the feeling that their gendered performances were always being observed, and their success was closely monitored by older members of the community, especially by the older women. The narratives delivered from the mothers and grandmothers of the participants of this study included warnings that “eyes are always on you” and fear over “what will people think?” The panoptic male gaze of patriarchy in evangelical churches has functioned exactly as Foucault described that it could as the perfect mechanism for discipline:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed space, in which the slightest movements are recorded….in which power is exercised without division, according to a hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed…

The visibility of these young women is a trap; they are held in the ever-seeing male gaze that sees constantly and recognizes instantly, empowered by the word of God and the magisterium of the Christian church to shame, correct, and engage in the physical expression of young female bodies.

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The Panoptic disciplinary mechanism has successfully fulfilled its mission when the patriarchal male gaze is internalized by the women themselves. For the young women in this study, “Inspections functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere.” One of Noelle’s (White, female, 25) most consistent messages from her mother was that “eyes are always on you.” Young women’s sexuality is closely, and publicly, policed, and unrelated grown adults think nothing of pulling young women aside to correct some error in dress. The length of the young women’s skirts, the tightness of their clothing, the width of their shoulder straps is constantly measured and observed, and a young woman’s dating habits and extracurricular interests are of great concern to the adults in her faith community and even in her public-school classroom in places like Texas where evangelical Christian culture permeates public schools. Multiple classes on modesty and purity coincide with rites of passage, and much thought goes into how the presentation of female bodies portrays the faith priorities of the group when out in public. These rules are in obedience to the Apostle Paul’s entreaty for Christians to not place “stumbling blocks” in the way of a brother or sister, but also to express “true beauty,” which is that of the “inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” The sexuality aligned with the evangelical male body was not just heterosexual, it was a rabid beast barely held at bay, subject to unleashed

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293 Special “purity” classes for girls entering the sixth and eighth grade particularly.

294 Please see an example of appropriate dress for a Church of Christ event in “Godly Gertrude” on Appendix M.

295 Romans 14:13

296 1 Peter 3:3–4
rampage by the mere sight of a shoulder or midriff. Eventually, these young women begin to police themselves and each other, turning the panoptic gaze on themselves. This communal enforcement of unbridled public visual consumption of young female bodies has led to some troublesome outcomes. One of the participants in this study was date raped by another member of the community and was questioned by her mother regarding her dress and behavior. Another participant of this study was so used to having her body publicly assessed and observed and being reprimanded for not “being nice” to people when she was uncomfortable, that she admitted to learning personal physical boundaries “the hard way” in college. Despite the foundation of the entire Christian church resting on the belief that a young woman was speaking the truth about her sexual history, the evangelical church in particular is quick to question and shame young women about their experiences with sexuality and objectification, often misplacing rightfully owned blame and responsibility on the young woman’s physical appearance and expression. It is deeply troubling that the women in this study experienced the development and display of their physically gendered bodies as a public performance that was closely and intimately monitored, and that the enforcers of this public observation were so often the very people who had experienced this themselves and stood in the best position to defend and protect the younger women.

None of the women who discussed these markers of gender performances found them liberative, although a few could share specific messages of support from their families. Historically, women have found ways to exercise personal agency in
evangelical churches through community involvement and particularly mission work, and debates between the biblically endorsed roles of women in Christian service in complementarian and evangelical churches rage on. Regardless, none of the women in this study found evangelical churches to be particularly empowering of their gendered identities. Lisa Sowle Cahill calls Christians to move beyond simple permission or tolerance and recognize the Biblical mandate of concern over and action toward one another’s flourishing. This is the heart of moral action. Moreover, Cahill proposes that “ideologies which maintain that women should not have full access to social, educational, political or economic opportunities” because of perceived restraints due to their function as mothers and wives is a transparent effort to maintain a status quo that hurts women and men. Such sharply divided gender lines deprive men of the rewards of family, parenthood and domestic life just as it deprives women of exercising gifts of public service and leadership. Creating space for women to experience affirmed flourishing within and without the church serves everyone’s best interest. Removing constraints of expectations regarding specific gendered performances allows the church and our communities to enjoy the unique gifts and talents of each individual and relieves us from the work of having to constantly monitor each other’s bodies for conformity.


298 Lisa Sowle Cahill, Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 110, 163.

299 Cahill, Sex, Gender and Christian Ethics,120.
Sexuality

The most striking finding around sexuality from the data accumulated from the interviews in this study is the deafening silence regarding sex and sexuality in the evangelical church. The participants in this study heard a great deal from the evangelical church about purity and about the sinfulness of gay and lesbian sex, but conversations were extremely limited when it came to sexuality. Positive sexual experiences outside of marriage weren’t even a consideration. Evangelical sexuality is binary and heterosexual, aligning directly with one’s standardized gendered/sex assignment at birth. This assumption is understood as literally biblical, as God created one man and one women to be together in covenant relationship in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1, and this binary humanity was later commanded to “go forth and multiply,” to populate the earth through procreative sex in Genesis 9, the rare command humanity successfully obeyed and executed to extreme.

In the evangelical church, the nature of the sexuality of young men has been assumed, that it is a rabid beast unleashed by the mere sight of shoulders or midriff, and the nature of female sexuality is dormant and innocent, lying completely beneath the awareness of the young lady, only to be properly awakened on her wedding night by her husband. This narrative that persists today has been the catalyst for fearful purity culture\textsuperscript{300} of promise rings and kissing dating goodbye, as well as a variety of abstinence curricula,\textsuperscript{301} which seems to form the bulk of available teaching from evangelical


\textsuperscript{301} There are many options to choose from, among the most popular are the \textit{True Love Waits} series from Lifeway called \textit{Authentic Love} (guys: D.A. Horton, 2017/ for girls: Amy-Jo Girardier, 2017).
publishers for youth. Since evangelical sexuality is reserved for heterosexual marriage alone, there is some sexual education priority placed on talking with young children about sexual development,\textsuperscript{302} and then the curriculum for adolescents’ shifts to purity and princesses for girls,\textsuperscript{303} and lust, pornography and warriors for boys.\textsuperscript{304} This narrative of the brave warrior protecting the innocent damsel from sexual impurity has created a lot of confusion and fear. Young people growing up in the evangelical church know a lot about purity, lust, pornography, STDs and “hookups.” What they are not hearing about, at least according to the participants in this study, is sex. They are being told to avoid it, to fight against any desires or urges, and to not do or say anything to create a sexually charged situation. The young women are responsible for not creating “stumbling blocks”\textsuperscript{305} for the young men in their dress and behavior, and the young men are constantly being told to quit thinking about sex, to guard themselves against temptation, to get into accountability groups with other men to confess sexual downfall. Young women are therefore shocked and ashamed to discover they have sexualities, and the young men feel weak and helpless against their raging hormones. There is a lot of nervous and fearful conversation surrounding youth purity and temptation, and very little helpful guidance or open conversation about sex and sexuality. They know they are considered sexually charged beings, they know they must hold the line on sexual activity until they are


\textsuperscript{305} Romans 14:13
married to an opposite-sex assigned person. The participants in this study, the few who bravely spoke about it since they have been trained to not discuss it, mentioned their frustration at arriving to college with almost no information, or flawed or exaggerated information gleaned from friends, older siblings and the internet. Mary (Latina, female, 22) was particularly grateful to have sisters and college friends who could speak openly with her about sex, as she felt she had arrived on campus completely ignorant. The evangelical church is strangely obsessed with the sexuality of its youth, yet there is so little conversation about sex.

Sociologist and psychologist Janice Irvine sought to challenge the prevailing notion that adolescent sexuality is a “manifestation of an essential nature” but is in fact a social construction shaped by various cultural factors. Irvine constructed a collection of essays determined to challenge the common residual assumptions, from the work of Freud and Erikson particularly, that “sexuality is a natural, biological response; that adolescence entails a standard set of developmental tasks; that puberty is a predictable and consistent event; and that adolescent sexuality unfolds in a universal and monolithic fashion.” The essays in Irvine’s collection expose the monolithic history of the study of adolescent sexual development, and propose that most of the conclusions of that history were designed to control, manage and often to voyeuristically gaze upon adolescent sexuality. Largely due to Hall’s “raging hormones” theory, in our culture, adolescent sexuality is considered a problem and prevention of both sexual activity and


307 Ibid., vii.
consequences is the central goal. Because cultures infuse sexuality with so much meaning, adolescent sexuality is formed by a variety of factors including gender, race, class and sexual identity. Adolescents will attach meaning to sexuality informed by their multiple social worlds, and so a much more nuanced and complicated vision of adolescent sexuality is required.

The recommendation here is simple. The evangelical church, and perhaps U.S. culture at large, must do better discussing sex with our young adults. Margaret Farley proposes a helpful sexual ethic to frame Christian conversation around sex, advocating for “Just Love” that “accords with the concrete reality of what is loved, the one loving, and the nature of the relationship between them.” Farley is concerned with relationships and sexualities that prioritizes their “actuality and positive potentiality for development, for human and individual flourishing.” A sexual ethic concerned with human flourishing moves beyond sexuality as dangerous, past sexuality as harmless and straight to sexuality that is good and does good things. How do we teach our youth that their sexuality is not a dangerous fire that could destroy them and those close to them, but a good and God blessed gift that goes beyond procreation?

For evangelical conversations to shift beyond physical and mental purity to celebration of sexuality and concern for individual and communal flourishing would require a massive shift in theological and biblical interpretation. However, a federally funded study in 2007 revealed that abstinence-only education programs are not effective

308 Irvine, Sexual Cultures, 5.
310 Ibid., 211.
at delaying the initiation of sexual activity or in reducing teen pregnancy.\textsuperscript{311} Other studies have revealed that although purity pledges may delay sexual activity by up to 18 months,\textsuperscript{312} those who took the pledge were 1/3 less likely to use contraception or protection during initial intercourse.\textsuperscript{313} The participants in this study along with recent scholarship are advocating for accurate, balanced, autonomy-granting and agency-awarding sex education from academic institutions, churches, but most importantly, parents.\textsuperscript{314} What the evangelical church has been doing is not working. Simply avoiding the conversation has not worked, and in some case has silenced voices and stunted sexual awareness and self-advocacy. There does not seem to be any special curriculum or training required beyond the willingness to talk openly about sex and find out answers if they are unknown. One thing is for sure. The young adults who mentioned sexuality were not happy to have walked that journey to discovery alone, and experienced shame and damaged relationships as a result.

**LGBTQIA Evangelical Youth**

It is no secret that adolescents who identify as gay, lesbian, queer, transgender or transsexual experience an entirely different level of oppression than heterosexual teenagers. Sam (White male, 24) clearly understood that his identity as a gay man was


\textsuperscript{312} P.S. Bearman and H. Brückner, “Promising the future: virginity pledges and the transition to first intercourse.” *American Journal of Sociology;* 2001; 106: 859-912.


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completely and unquestionably unwelcome and pathogized within the evangelical church in particular. Of the six or so texts used to vilify LGBTQIA persons, evangelicals can quickly cite the “unnatural, shameful acts” mentioned by Paul in Romans 1:24-27 or the “sins of Sodom and Gomorrah” in Genesis 19. Historically, the term “abomination” from Leviticus 18:33 and Leviticus 20:13 has been wielded with authority. For the evangelical mind, the Bible is literally quite clear on this issue. The literal condemnatory words of the text serve all the purposes for which they are required. One striking realization about the evangelical church literalists is that, since they are reading the Bible as an inerrant God-breathed document that is without flaw, they believe they are reading the text without an interpretive lens of any kind. It is heresy, at least in the Churches of Christ, to suggest that these translations, indeed even the original authors, may have had a human agenda to uphold, and that the weaponization of these texts are serving a human agenda now. The only people who may stand a chance at convincing textual literalists otherwise are inter-evangelical biblical scholars, and there are a few. But there are not many who have the cache and the job security to risk it, even if they are convinced of their scholarship.

Only one member of this study identified as gay, lesbian or bi-sexual. Sam was the sole voice in this study for the LGBTQIA evangelical population, but he believes his experience is not unusual for a gay man coming out in the evangelical church. Like his gay and lesbian peers who also grew up in the Church of Christ, Sam says they haven’t just left church, they have largely left God behind. The God they learned about and the

315 Genesis 1-2 and 19, Leviticus 18:22 and 20, Judges 19, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10

316 Dr. Ron Tyler, retired from Pepperdine University, Dr. Ken Cukrowski at Abilene Christian University, and Dr. Leonard Allen at Lipscomb stand among these scholars.
community who taught them about God have no place for Sam. Linked closely with sexuality is controlled gender identity, sometimes formally from the pulpit, but more often informally through language. Insults about “man cards” and “pussies” are still common in evangelical churches, and among the young men, annoying or feminized behavior is corrected by the deployment of “fag” or “homo.” C.J. Pascoe produced a fascinating study of this “fag discourse” as social discipline in the U.S. high school system. Pascoe’s book examines,

> The relationship between gender and sexuality as embedded in a major socializing institution of modern youth: high school. I ask how heteronormative and homophobic discourses, practices, and interactions in an American high school produce masculine identities.

Pascoe discovered that masculinities are constructed and understood as a form of dominance expressed through sexualized discourse that can be applied to both boys and girls. In the high school Pascoe visited, lesbians were considered more socially acceptable because of their role in male heterosexual fantasies. In this context, the greatest insult to a boy was to be called a “fag.” The term “gay” is an adjective denoting something “stupid.” The word “fag” is a noun to describe a boy who is exhibiting “unmasculine” behavior, stupidity or incompetence, too much emotion or too much

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317 Ironically, just today news has emerged from one of the Church of Christ brotherhood schools about a university chaplain position that has fallen through because evidence of the candidate’s previous affiliation with an LGBTQ church came to light. The candidate’s name was withdrawn, the search is reopened, and a group of alumni have started a petition requesting that the university prepare a statement affirming “traditional marriage” that faculty and staff must sign every year they are employed by the school. Currently several high school students who were looking into attending this university have issued public messages on Facebook stating they will reconsider their choices if this university takes such a stand.


319 Ibid. 56.
interest of any kind in another guy. The term “fag” is used to patrol and control images of masculinity and to demonstrate and maintain dominance.

This language, accompanied by direct and passionate teaching about sexuality and the abomination of gay and lesbian sex, is rampant and unapologetic. For some reason, gay and lesbian relationships appear to be the final line in the sand. The Church of Christ has capitulated on instrumental music, to some degree on women in leadership in the church, and they are even willing to admit to some degree that the lack of racial and ethnic diversity is an issue, even if they will not recognize racialized systems of oppression undergirding the problem. According to Smith, evangelicals are more opposed to “homosexuals” than to atheists. Regardless, evangelicals will insist that they are acting out of love for gay, lesbian or bi-sexual people, that they only want what is best for them: a “normal” (heterosexual, God-ordained) marriage. Evangelicals have historically enforced the notion that an LGBTQIA person is either choosing their sexuality or has endured some sort of trauma or neglect. For many years, LGBTQIA people from the evangelical church were sent into conversion therapy, although this practice has been proven deeply destructive and ineffective for LGBTQIA people and has thankfully not only fallen out of favor but stands at risk of legal action. Knowing how

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320 Pascoe, *Dude, You’re a Fag*, 57.


322 I recognize the term “homosexual” is contested and loaded, yet it is the term used most often by evangelicals to specify LGBTQIA people, followed closely by “gay.”


damaging it is to try and “love someone” out of their LGBTQIA “orientation” has not lessened or weakened the evangelical position on the absolute primacy of heterosexual marriage at all. The biggest concession the evangelical church seems to be able to make is to accept celibate LGBTQIA people into fellowship, and even that is a stretch. When David Gushee agreed that he could make room in a Christian sexual ethic for inclusion of LGBTQIA Christians in a covenantal-marital ethic, where LGBTQIA persons could enjoy the fellowship of Christians in community either as celibate singles or monogamous married couples, he received the full weight of the condemnation of the evangelical church and has since parted ways with the evangelical church. As Wellman confirms, “It is hard to exaggerate the depth of negative feelings about homosexuality coming from evangelicals.” There is no equivocation on this issue. Although evangelicals believe that “homosexuality” is a sin just like any other sin, no one is being asked to leave church because of gluttony or materialism or gossip. For some reason, LGBTQIA sexuality is the final hill upon which evangelicals have chosen to take a stand. Wellman believes that this stand is because LGBTQIA relationships appear to threaten “moral culture,” which means “one that supports and nurtures heterosexual, intact families.” This attack on the family is seen as spiritual warfare and defending the

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327 Wellman, Jr., *Evangelical vs. Liberal*, 252.

328 Ibid., 283.
church from LGBTQIA liaisons is a defense of one’s family. The defense of the nuclear family helps to explain the evangelical position on abortion, divorce, extra-marital sex, education, and gender roles.  

Once again, we are back to sex as merely procreative, and any sex that is not procreative is pathologized. The family is the highest priority in the evangelical church, and the future of moral society rests on its survival.

Scholars suggest that “the church’s gay problem” may be the problem that creates a rift in evangelical Protestants in the next generation, and may cost them their youth. Often, it seems that ecclesial polity shifts more easily the lower membership falls, so perhaps that will be the catalysts for change, as it was for women in leadership. But so far, the evangelical church cannot seem to come to a biblical understanding that would enable them to embrace LGBTQIA people. At a bare minimum, it cannot be too much to ask that evangelicals at least recognize the psychological, spiritual and emotional damage the “solo hetero” position has caused, and perhaps that they listen to their children, who are trying to send a clear message about how they perceive the anti-LGBTQIA church.

Conclusion

The participants in this study make it very clear that their experiences within the evangelical church have not led to liberation and flourishing in the ways that they were


perhaps intended. The church of Christ believes and teaches that in Christ, there is freedom and abundant living, and that life lived under Jesus Christ is the good life. However, these participants have learned through these survival narratives passed down from their families and communities of faith that “good life” comes from being a “good Christian,” from conforming to a narrow and ideal Christian form. One of the greatest revelations arising from this study is the assumption that if the church message does not work for you, the fault lies with you, and not with the message, and certainly not with the church system. Therefore, one major conclusion from this study is that the true survival narrative is the narrative the participants have reconstructed in response to the evangelical message, rather than the message from the evangelical church to these young adults. This resolution establishes the context for the concluding thoughts provided in the final chapter.

332 John 10:10, Luke 6:38, James 1:17,
Chapter 8 - Conclusions

Intent does not equal impact.

Throughout the literature presented in this study, the evangelical church has continued to state its priority of love, for reconciling relationships, and in its sincere belief that the rest of the world desperately need what they have, and that they desire to share it. Yet, for the youth interviewed for this dissertation, love, reconciliation, and met needs are not what they carry forward from the evangelical church. While the participants from this study continued to insist they assign no ill will to their families or faith communities, what they have carried from their evangelical communities is instead psychological trauma and a sense of not having their authentic identities and gifts recognized and celebrated.

When Sam relayed a common theme permeating the interviews, that “same is better,” he spoke for many participants that the evangelical church was not a site for flourishing and success but one of oppression and performance. The majority of these participants expressed personally experiencing the feeling of not being accepted for who they actually are, as a religious doubter, as a person with gifts outside institutional education, as a woman, as a Latinx, and as sexual beings. Regardless this group of

participants has evidenced their resilience in not carrying forward the messaging from the evangelical churches as they were received. This group of participants has instead shaped their own survival narratives in response.

In discussions about success and survival, these participants describe an understanding that there is an ideal Christian form. This Christian identity is not experienced as authentic identity, but conformity. The overriding unexamined belief undergirding this study is that survival narrative work the same way for everyone, and when it does not work, there is something wrong with that individual, not with the narrative. In fact, the phrase I used in my guiding questions, “how to make it here” could easily be replaced with “how to be good Christians.” Therefore, one major contribution from this study is that the actual survival narrative is not the message from the evangelical church to these young adults.

The true survival narrative, the one that provides flourishing and wide cultural capital, is the narrative the participants have reconstructed in response to the evangelical message. Based on the themes running through the four types of survival narratives discussed in the findings from the data, we can summarize the hearts of both the evangelical message presented as survival narrative and the enduring and revised survival narratives gleaned by the participants into essential statements.

The first statement is the survival narrative these participants were taught to “make it here,” that they discovered was not working as hoped if they stepped outside of the evangelical church. The second statement is an essential statement describing how the participants of the study reinterpreted the messages from the church into a message that
provided a liberative, helpful means of success outside, but sometimes within, the evangelical church.

**Religion:**

Evangelical Message: You will make it here as long as you go to church, follow the rules, and fit in.

Survival Narrative: You will make it here as long as you invest in community, believe in something bigger than yourself and pursue authentic relationships.

The study participants do not want to do away with church all together. They are seeking a church that is more inclusive, that welcomes, empowers and celebrates a greater variety of humanity, and is not as focused on correct behavior and conformity as it is on authentic personal and God-centered relationships.

**Education:**

Evangelical Message: You will make it here if you go to college and earn a four-year degree, preferably from a Christian school.

Survival Narrative: You will make it here if you continue to improve yourself and develop and exercise a strong work ethic.

The focus on work ethic as an avenue to future success is distinct within Latinx and white communities. For the white participants, “hard work” has to do with responsibility, showing up and earning what you get. For the Latinx participants, “hard work” is the path to honoring one’s family, to overcoming injustice and prejudice, and to living the American Dream. The value of “hard work” has been instilled in them and modeled for them their entire lives and is an ethic come to fruition as the Latinx young adults construct their own futures. For the Mexican participants, it is *echale ganas*. It is a
guiding attribute delivered down through generations that believes working hard is a character issue and is the only hope families from immigration have at being prepared to seize opportunities when they arrive and fulfilling the dreams not just of one’s self but of one’s family as well. It is the belief that no one is going to hand you a chance to “make it,” you create your own opportunity to “make it” when you work hard.

Finance:

Evangelical Message: You will make it here as long as you are not in debt, or no one knows you are in debt.

Survival Narrative: You will make it here if you are independent, work hard, and are responsible for your own decisions.

The participants all understand that being good stewards of resources is a Christian virtue, and extend that stewardship beyond money to relationships, the environment and community. Participants who spoke about finances desired to disconnect financial literacy from morality, understanding that sometimes the only way their families ate or had clothes to wear was because their parents went into debt, and that the only way the majority of them could attend a college was because they went into debt, and they resent feeling any shame about that. Beyond wealth, they desired the space as adults to not be consumed with worry over money, over where food or rent would come from, and to have enough breathing room in their finances to enjoy the lives they were working so hard to create for themselves.

Ethnicity:

Evangelical Message: You will make it here as Latinx as long as you stay with your own, learn English, remain unobtrusive, act grateful, imitate dominant culture,
understand that you are Other, and remember that we are constantly aware of and observing your invisible presence.

Survival Narrative: You will make it here as long as you recognize and plan for the obstacles in your way, avoid trouble, grasp opportunity when it comes, take care of your family and work harder than everyone else.

The Latinx participants of this study were under no illusion that the U.S. culture they inhabited would become a space of equity and inclusion any time soon. They understood that their true survival narrative was awareness of the reality of their minority status, possession of tools and strategies to survive that context, and that hard work serves as a subversive action for them. They deeply believe hard work is rewarded, and that reward is The American Dream.

**Gender:**

Evangelical Message: You will make it here as a woman as long as you marry a man and submit to his authority, have children, be pure and modest and keep the home running.

Survival Narrative: You will make it here as a woman if you can recognize many potential futures for yourself, if you know what you want, and you pursue it.

The women in this study understand success as autonomy and agency. They would appreciate the church’s affirmation of their independence and individuality, but they are not waiting for it, and they are not bound by it.

**Sexuality:**

Evangelical Message: You will make it here as a person with a sexuality if you only have sex after you marry a person of the opposite gender binary, if you never talk
about it, if we do not know you have one, and if you do not ignite anyone else’s sexuality.

Survival Narrative: You will make it here if you learn about, accept and celebrate your sexuality.

The very few participants in this study who discussed sexuality at all simply desire that space be created for open, honest, non-judgmental conversation. They would appreciate open acceptance of their possession of sexualities, and ideally, they desire that revelations and discussions of sexuality not be met with shaming or fear.

The discoveries from this study state that useful, true cultural capital is not coming from evangelical churches. According to these participants, true, useful cultural capital is found in rising up against the evangelical church. The evangelical church wants to be “counter cultural”334 and may not be at all troubled or surprised by these findings. Yet, when the young people continue to evacuate the pews, the church may want to be aware of these discrepancies. While it is not a primary concern of this dissertation to explain why young adults are leaving evangelical churches, and the Church of Christ in particular, one outcome of this study may be some answers to that question. Therefore, I offer a few suggestions regarding potentially helpful responses institutions implicated in this study might consider.

**Recommendations Derived by Survey Participants**

Following are a few very simple ideas I imagine may be useful to the evangelical communities represented by the participants in this study.

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Recognize the interpretive lens/ Willingness to hear differently:

Evangelical churches still approach different communities missionally and colonially. The concern appears to be the assimilation of difference into the norm, and this is accomplished by teaching and modelling expected behaviors. Eric Law proposes an inversion of this tradition. Recognitions of the Day of Pentecost often celebrate the gift of tongues only as a miracle of speech, but it would prove helpful for evangelical churches to realize that it also represents a miracle of hearing. In the early days of the Christian church, the Holy Spirit gave the disciples the power to speak in different languages to communicate the word of God.

“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.”

Acts 2.1–6

This gift of speaking is action-oriented; it consists of imparting words and information in other tongues. However, at the same time, the Holy Spirit is also granting the gift of hearing. This gift is more passive, and involves listening, receiving, and understanding information. In essence, to practice the gift of hearing rather than speaking is an act of laying down the privilege of being heard and choosing instead to listen. It is a voluntary act of sharing power.

Traditionally, those in power have used the gift of tongues and the poor, oppressed, and marginalized, the gift of the ear. Law proposes that white, upper/middle class (the powerful, and in this case, evangelicals) particularly need the gift of the ear as
this is against the instinct of the powerful who prefer to act, control, and command. They should attempt to merely be, listening and learning, instead of doing: “If the church is to move toward supporting the communities of people of color to come forth and exercise the miracle of the tongue and speak of the mighty works of God,” those who have been oppressed and voiceless should now be heard. “It is essential that the two approaches be taken together so that those in power and the powerless can meet in the middle where they can interact on equal ground.”

For the evangelical church to make this shift, they would need to understand that when they are reading the Bible and using the literal words of the text to form their doctrine and create community standards, they are employing an interpretive lens, even when they are reading and implementing the “literal word of God.” As human beings, it is impossible to consume anything without some sort of lens or filer that guides our understanding of it. As Christians who desire true relationships and desire to be faithful to God and God’s inspired word, in good conscience we could first examine our own positionality and ask what we are hoping or expecting to hear and see. Those who seek to hear and understand truly exercise a humble, vulnerable relationship when they approach a story or a text seeking truth born from compassion and empathy and are not simply seeking to reaffirm a position they already hold that benefits their station. The willingness to set aside the assumption of persecution and victimhood, and sincerely try to understand a different perspective, is a spiritual gift sorely underused in current U.S. conservative Christian communities.

335 Eric Law, The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1993), 49.
The conclusions of this dissertation challenge the U.S. evangelical church to first examine themselves, to lay themselves aside in the spirit of neighbor love and seek out the voices of the communities around them. Those of us who have traditionally exercised the gift of the tongue must exercise the gift of the ear, so that those who have been silenced may speak, and those who have ears may hear differently.

**Hospitality:**

As this study explained earlier, evangelical communities pride themselves on being community-oriented and welcoming to new people. Evangelicals embrace hospitality as a spiritual gift, actively seeking new and creative ways to attract new members. But increased membership, and well-attended community events does not actually reflect hospitality. This study has shown that evangelical hospitality is conditional and requires certain conforming behaviors. Jacques Derrida created the term “hostipitality” to explain why we will never be able to really understand true hospitality, that true unconditional hospitality impossible. He suggests that the opposite of hospitality is hostility, and while it is the right of a stranger to not be greeted with hostility when he arrives in someone else’s territory, that is often what occurs. In the traditional sense, the very act of hospitality requires that those who offer hospitality feel ownership of “the house.” In order to offer hospitality, we must have the power to host. Those we are inviting in are not owners or masters and are present in a lower position of


power. This dynamic gives the host a measure of control over the guests and gives the “master of the house” the power to control the behavior of the guests or attempt to control the behavior of the guests. Even to the degree of refusing admission to the house or closing the doors to certain guests who are incapable of or unwilling to conform to the host’s demands and expectations for certain behaviors.

Derrida argues that our version of hospitality is not actually hospitable, but it borders on hostility. Hospitality always includes limits and boundaries where the guest may not wander (the master bedroom door is closed, the offices are locked), where the guest is not welcome. In the way we traditionally think about and practice it, hospitality is rather inhospitable, or hostile. When a guest trespasses into the master bedroom or does not speak the dominant language of the community, they experience the inhospitable side of hospitality—hostility. If we accept that hospitality in a sense means a welcoming of whoever comes, in whatever state and need of our hospitality, the host must accept a measure of loss of power and an abandoning of claims to ownership of “the house.”

Evangelicals represented in this study seem to have forgotten that they are not the owners of the house. The house of worship is not theirs—it is God’s. They are just as much guests in the house as anyone else. In John 2:13-16, Jesus clears the temple courts with a whip after discovering a misuse of God’s house. Jesus clearly has some ideas for the correct use of God’s house, and the selling of livestock and the exchange of money do not seem to be among them. God also has very clear ideas on ownership of the house—it is God’s house. If God is the master of the house, what are God’s concerns for the proper use of the house? How do evangelicals join in God’s plan for the use of the master’s house? Do evangelicals like the fact that “they” might not feel welcome here because the
evangelical church intentionally/unintentionally creates an inhospitable environment? True hospitality is the widening of our circle of affection. True hospitality demands a shift in evangelical demands of membership and inclusion. Like so many potential reforms for youth culture, it will require a lot of effort on the part of peripheral adults. Based on the results from this study, one very simple first step in creating a welcoming and inclusive space could be as easy as sincerely attempting to master another language. Welcoming another in their greatest language of comfort is a profound act of neighbor love and speaks volumes toward the posture of your community toward those outside the walls.

**Vocation:**

Instead of teaching young Christians behaviors and rules that conform to an ideal Christian form, perhaps our youth ministries and educative institutions could shift to the revelation and celebration of individual vocation. James Fowler sought to examine how communities of faith support and assist one another in spiritual growth as they themselves are supported and assisted.\(^{338}\) Fowler’s purpose is the discovery of vocation, which for him means to uncover the purpose of life in concert with how God is already moving in the world, and not necessarily self-fulfillment. Embracing one’s vocation in community can be transformative for both the individual and the community and is a sign of mature Christianity.

Michael Nakkula and Eric Toshalis have a very high view of educators as a source of hope for equality and identity development among adolescents. Nakkula and Toshalis endorse a constructionist perspective, which emphasizes development shaped around lived experience, especially shared ones, rather than objective psychological, biological, or cognitive markers of development. Education through care creates a reciprocal developmental alliance with students, and positions educators to truly be the agents of change they dreamed of being when they were in school. Nakkula and Toshalis’s premise is based around the understanding that adolescence is a social construction, an idea which opens wide the field of development. If there are no universal markers and goals we should be working toward as individuals, we are free to know the individual and note potential, thus enabling us to better set a “next step.” The mentor who walks alongside an adolescent seeking and finding a “true self” helps the adolescent to uncover “an authentic way to live with meaning and purpose that informs their developing worldview,” or as Katherine Turpin and Anne Carter Walker would call it, a vocation.

Turpin and Walker propose that those who choose to work with adolescents recognize that “a primary goal of work with adolescents should be helping them to discern their vocation and to develop the agency and community support that enable


340 Ibid. x.

341 Nakkula and Toshalis, 98.

342 Ibid. 205.
living into it.” A vocational development is “an engagement with the passions and interests of the self as one interacts with the social world, expressed as the human spirit is enlivened to partner with God in changing the world.” In particular, adults who are working with students across “lines of difference” possess social resources and cultural knowledge that are not available to adolescents. It is the responsibility of these adults to “work across lines of difference in light of the potential for power-sharing and relational transformation possible through such encounters.” While it is perhaps unrealistic or unfair to expect a young adult to “uncover” their vocation, this posture toward youth development assists the young adult in beginning to discern how their particular gifts can make a contribution to the world that is valued by their community, and may be renegotiated over a lifetime given different contexts.

Respecting the Moral Agency of Youth

For a church to understand and respect the moral agency of young adults requires a shift in community understanding of “teenager” and “college student.” We have created life stages where we expect poor decisions, we are watching for risk-taking behavior, and we are assuming non-critical thinking and reckless, emotionally driven acts. We assume they will be immature and irresponsible, belligerent and reactionary, and they pay us back in kind. Assumptions and stereotypes stifle the exercise of individual agency. Respecting the moral agency of a young adult is nothing less than a shifting of the lens through which we view adolescence. John Wall proposes a circular theory of moral


345 Ibid. 3.
agency that allows human beings to fully express their fundamental capability for creating meaning. This means that human beings are both “passively created by and actively creative of its constituting worlds of meaning.” Wall advocates for a young person’s ability and willingness to participate on their own behalf in society, that they be given space and a serious ear to exercise their social voice.

Many of the participants expressed their understanding that the narratives handed down through their communities and families were born of fear. Investing in the moral agency of youth further requires an act of courage from the adults surrounding these youth, that they be given space for excellence, and that the adults hold themselves accountable for the fears they are projecting on the youth. Evelyn Parker advocates for an “emancipatory hope” as a paradigm for adolescent spirituality and a congregational theological framework. Emancipatory hope is a posture toward the world at the door of the church, an expectation of “transformation of hegemonic relations of race, class, and gender and to act as God’s agent ushering in God’s vision of human equality.” Parker deeply believes in the power of adolescent moral agency to affect change in the world, and illustrates how emancipatory hope provides vocation to adolescents as well as positive, powerful social impact to our communities. Holding an “emancipatory hope” resists spiritual formation from a place of fear, but rather from a place of great anticipation, of trust in children, and in the relief of breaking free from the belief that God’s church requires defense or compromise.


Future Research

The survival narrative provides a useful tool to name informal messages of success and survival within family systems and institutions regarding specific identities. Future research merely requires a specific context and identity in which to examine survival narratives, and the meaning they carry for individuals. This study points to the need for a more focused study into Latinx youth identities and U.S. culture within a more specific context. Based on the data from this study, it appears urgent to gather survival narratives from young adults who self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual who have a history in the evangelical church. Outside the evangelical church, a specific examination of different survival narratives between racial minorities and the police seems timely and crucial. Finally, I would be interested in gaining deeper insight into “echale ganas” and the Mexican Work ethic as path to the American Dream, but the deeper meaning behind this phrase might be beyond a non-Mexican.

Evangelical survival narratives are at best restrictive and enforce social norming, and at worst they do violence to people and create spiritual and psychological scarring. The true survival narratives, in which the hearer survives evangelical church and succeeds in larger culture, come from the revised survival narratives created in response to church messaging. In their essence, evangelical messages about success are not liberating. Jesus claimed in his mission statement\(^\text{348}\) to be about the business of liberating the oppressed. This dissertation may serve as a mirror, inviting all Christians to examine the ways in which we have failed and succeeded in modeling our leader.

\(^{348}\) Luke 4:18-21
Bibliography


O’Keefe, D.J. “Message properties, mediating states, and manipulation checks: Claims, evidence and data analysis in experimental persuasive message effects research.” *Communication Theory* 13, no. 3 (2003), 251-274.


Appendices
Appendix A: Demographics, Church Attendance, and Education

<table>
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<th>CO</th>
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<th>23</th>
<th>M</th>
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<td>Grad</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dad grad</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Grad</td>
<td>English/Irish?</td>
<td>Seeking</td>
<td>Dad grad</td>
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<td>F</td>
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<td>Jr (M)</td>
<td>Canadian/Swedish/English</td>
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<td>Both</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CO= 4 (25%)
White= 8 (50%)
F =7 (44%)
Fr = 2 (12.5%)

TX= 6 (37.5%)
Latinx= 8 (50%)
M= 9 (56%)
Soph= 4 (25%)

CA= 6 (37.5%)
Average age: 22

Sr = 4 (25%)
Grad = 4 (25%)
B (break in college ed) = 5 (31%)
M (Mlry) = 2 (12.5%)

Remained with church of youth = 1 (6%)
Left only attend when visiting family = 7 (44%)
Struggle finding church after HS grad = 10 (63%)

White unsure = 5 (63%)

1st gen college: 7 (44%)
Both grad: 3 (19%)
Moms grad: 2 (12.5%)
Dad grad: 4 (25%)
Appendix B: The Survival Narrative at the Intersection of Fields of Inquiry

**PERSONAL NARRATIVE**

**SURVIVAL NARRATIVE**

as cultural capital

**INSTITUTIONAL NARRATIVE:**

Evangelical church

**GENERATIONAL WISDOM**

Enduring Survival Narrative

Revised Survival Narrative

**FAMILY SYSTEMS**

Survival Narrative Proper

Well-meaning Narrative

**PARENTAL ADVICE**

**YOUTH MINISTRY**
Appendix C: Dissertation Timeline

**Fall 2017/ Winter 2018**
- Write dissertation

**Spring 2017**
- Dissertation Interviews in Los Angeles

**Summer 2016**
- Dissertation Interviews in Denver and Ft. Worth

**Winter 2015**
- Complete Pilot Study

**Winter 2014**
- Begin Pilot Study

**Spring 2014**
- Hispanic Ethics Class
- Dissertation Proposal Class

**Fall 2015**
- Continuing Review to DU IRB

**Summer 2015**
- Move to Los Angeles
- Complete Dual IRB for DU and Pepperdine

**Spring 2016**
- Dissertation Proposal Defense
- Amendment to IRB for Dissertation Research

**Fall 2016**
- Complete Dual IRB for DU and Pepperdine

**Summer 2017**
- Submit Continuing Review to DU
- Transcription of Interviews Complete
- Coding and Analysis of Data

**Fall 2017**
- Dissertation Interviews in Los Angeles

**Spring 2017**
- Complete Pilot Study
- Amendment to IRB for Dissertation Research

**Summer 2018**
- Write dissertation

**May 2018**
- Defend dissertation

**Fall 2017/ Winter 2018**
- Write dissertation
Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer
Pepperdine University in conjunction with the University of Denver
Is Conducting a Research Study on

Survival Narratives  
Among Latino/a and  
White Evangelical Communities

If you are either Latino, Latina, or white, and  
If you grew up in an evangelical religious community  
Then you probably qualify for a research study examining  
stories you received about how to survive and succeed in  
the US!  
Eligible subjects will sit down with an interview for a 1-2  
hour long interview, and will then receive a $20 gift card as  
thanks for participating.  
Principal investigator: Cari Myers  
For more information, please email Cari at  
cari.myers@pepperdine.edu or cmyers@iliff.edu
Appendix E: Recruitment Letter/ Email

Dear [insert name],
My name is Cari Myers and I am a Faculty Fellow at Pepperdine University and a PhD student the University of Denver. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about survival narratives in Latino/a and white Evangelical communities. You’re eligible to be in this study because you fall between the ages of 18-25, you belong to an evangelical church, and you self-identify as either Latino/a or white. I obtained your contact information from our mutual friend, [name].

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be sitting down with me in a location of your choosing for a private, one-on-one interview that will last from 1-2 hours. I have attached the questions that will be guiding our interview to this email so you can see what we will be discussing. I would like to audio record your interview and then I will use the information to write my dissertation. I would like for you to choose a pseudonym for all the materials for the interview so your identity will be protected in all materials pertaining to the interview. I’ve also included the consent form with this email as well, so you can see how your identity will be protected. At the conclusion of the interview, you will be invited to choose a $20 gift card to either Target or Starbucks.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you’d like to participate or have any questions, please email, text or call me.

Thank you very much,
Cari Myers
cmyers@iliff.edu
817-614-3601

Attachments: Guiding interview questions, consent form
Appendix F: Guiding Questions
Guiding Interview Questions for the Study:
“How to Make It Here”
A Qualitative Study on Generational Narratives of Survival and Success
Among Latino/a and White Evangelical Communities
Researcher: Cari Myers

1. Growing up, what was your family like?
   - Probe: How many people were in your family?
   - Probe: Where did you live?
   - Probe: Were you close to your extended family?

2. Where is your family from? What is the story behind that journey?

3. What are the ways your family and community highlighted your transition from child to adult?

4. When you had difficulty, what messages did you receive about how to survive or negotiate?

5. What conversations did you have with your family about “how to make it here, “ or how to succeed?
   - Probe: Did your family talk to you about homework?
   - Probe: Did your family talk to you about going to college? What did they say?
   - Probe: Did you work during school?

6. What did your family tell you about faith and religion?
   - Probe: Were you connected to a religious tradition or community?
   - Probe: Have you ever felt excluded from a religious community?

7. What did they tell you about dealing with authority figures?
   - Probe: Did you ever have any experiences with an authority figure where you needed this advice?

8. You’re looking back from the end of your life and reflecting on your life in its entirety. What last piece of advice would you give to the person you love the most?

9. What was the most significant advice you received and who gave it to you?

10. What were your thoughts about this advice or wisdom you were given? Did you implement them or discard them? Why? What narratives will you carry forward?
Appendix G: DU Informed Consent Form

DU IRB Approval Date: 08/19/2014 Expiration Date: 08/27/2018
Project Title: “How to Make It Here:” A Qualitative Study on Generational Narratives of Survival and Success Among Latino/a and White Evangelical Communities
Principal Investigator: Cari Myers
Faculty Sponsor: Debora Ortega
DU IRB Project #: 622875-5

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The researcher will explain this document to you and answer any questions you may have. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don’t understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

Invitation to participate in a research study
You are invited to participate in a research study about survival narratives (stories, wisdom, and advice handed down from one generation to the next) surrounding education, religion, authority figures, and relationships. This study will examine survival narratives from Latino/a families and white families, and will look for differences in narratives and what those differences may signify.

Description of subject involvement
If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to complete an approximately 1-2 hour interview that will be audio recorded. By signing this form, you are also giving permission for the researcher to contact you after the interview with follow-up questions or to request another interview if necessary. A second interview is optional but will provide you the opportunity to review and approve (via signature) the interview transcript. Should you request any changes, I will email a copy of the revised transcript to you at a later date. Furthermore, a copy of the final product will be made available to you at the conclusion of the project.

Possible risks and discomforts
The researcher has taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, you may still experience some risks related to your participation, even when the researchers are careful to avoid them. These risks include a sense of discomfort in discussing sensitive topics like family, relationships and religion, or that troubling memories may surface. If you experience discomfort, you may stop the interview at any time, and you may choose to not answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. There is also the risk of a breach of confidentiality in the unlikely event that this consent form is stolen or the researcher’s computer or computer password is stolen or hacked. In those circumstances, it is possible that your name could be associated with the information you choose to provide in this interview (for example, personal stories from
your family). The “Confidentiality” section below explains how the researcher plans to handle your information in order to keep it confidential.

**Possible benefits of the study**

This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about survival narratives and to examine similarities and differences between familial narratives. I would hope that my pilot study subjects find the exploration of their survival narratives very valuable and affirming. Ideally, the narratives from these subjects will raise awareness in the discrepancies between “minority” culture and dominant culture, and will cause questioning surrounding the inequality of what is required for different groups of people to “make it” in the United States.

**Study compensation**

At the conclusion of the initial interview, you will receive for a $20 gift card for being in the study as thanks for your participation, even if you only complete part of the interview or choose to withdraw.

**Study cost**

You are responsible for any costs associated with traveling to the interview location.

**Confidentiality, Storage and future use of data**

To keep your information safe, the researcher will identify your interview responses by code number or pseudonym of your choosing only. The audio recording will be transcribed and will then be kept in a private, locked location to which only the researcher has access. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of the study will use paraphrased wording, and de-identified details to protect your confidentiality. All interview data will be secured on a password-protected computer, and your choice to participate will be held in confidence by the researcher. All recorded responses will be deleted on completion of the study, as will all e-mail and online correspondence between you and the researcher.

Your interviews will not be made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research study and will not contain information that could identify you.

The results from the research may be shared at conferences or in published articles. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published.

**Who will see my research information?**

Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others, including federal agencies that monitor human subject research and the University of Denver Human Research Protection Program.

All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.
Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed we may report that information to the appropriate agencies. In addition, if you give the researcher any information about child abuse or neglect, it must be reported to the authorities in the state where the abuse occurred (in accordance with Colorado Statute 19-3-304). Also, if we get a court order to turn over your study records, we will have to do that.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, you may ask that the information or data you provided be destroyed.

**Contact Information**

The researcher carrying out this study is Cari Myers. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call her at 817-614-3601 or contact her via email at cmyers@iliff.edu. You may also contact Cari Myers’s faculty sponsor for the pilot study, Dr. Deb Ortega, by phone at 303-871-3359 or via email at debora.ortega@du.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Denver Human Research Protection Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling 303-871-2121.

**Agreement to be in this study**

If you agree to being audio recorded and to having the researcher contact you with follow-up questions if necessary, please sign the form below to indicate your consent to participate in this research study.

Optional: Please initial here and provide a valid email (or postal) address if you would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to you.

_______________________________________
Signature: ______________________________ Date: ___________

Print Name: ______________________________
Appendix H: Pepperdine Informed Consent Form

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY
In cooperative agreement with the University of Denver

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Project Title: “How To Make It Here:” A Qualitative Study on Generational Narratives of Survival and Success Among Latino/a and White Evangelical Communities

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Cari Myers, Faculty Fellow at Pepperdine University and PhD candidate at the University of Denver, because you are ages 18-25, Latino/a or white, and come from an Evangelical background. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
You are invited to participate in a research study about survival narratives (stories, wisdom, and advice handed down from one generation to the next) surrounding education, religion, authority figures, and relationships. This study will examine survival narratives from Latino/a families and white families, and will look for differences in narratives and what those differences may signify.

STUDY PROCEDURES
If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to complete an approximately 1-2 hour interview that will be audio recorded. By signing this form, you are also giving permission for the researcher to contact you after the interview with follow-up questions or to request another interview if necessary. A second interview is optional but will provide you the opportunity to review and approve (via signature) the interview transcript. Should you request any changes, I will email a copy of the revised transcript to you at a later date. Furthermore, a copy of the final product will be made available to you at the conclusion of the project.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS
The principal investigator has taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, you may still experience some risks related to your participation, even when the researchers are careful to avoid them. These risks include a sense of discomfort in discussing sensitive topics like family, relationships and religion, or that troubling memories may surface. If you experience discomfort, you may stop the interview at any time, and you may choose to not answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable.

There is also the risk of a breach of confidentiality in the unlikely event that this consent form is stolen or the researcher’s computer or computer password is stolen or hacked. In those circumstances, it is possible that your name could be associated with the
information you choose to provide in this interview (for example, personal stories from your family). The “Confidentiality” section below explains how the researcher plans to handle your information in order to keep it confidential.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**
This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about survival narratives and to examine similarities and differences between familial narratives. I would hope that my pilot study subjects find the exploration of their survival narratives very valuable and affirming. Ideally, the narratives from these subjects will raise awareness in the discrepancies between “minority” culture and dominant culture, and will cause questioning surrounding the inequality of what is required for different groups of people to “make it” in the United States.

**PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**
At the conclusion of the initial interview, you will receive for a $20 gift card for being in the study as thanks for your participation, even if you only complete part of the interview or choose to withdraw. You are responsible for any costs associated with traveling to the interview location.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
To keep your information safe, the researcher will identify your interview responses by code number or pseudonym of your choosing only. The audio recording will be transcribed and will then be kept in a private, locked location to which only the researcher has access. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of the study will use paraphrased wording, and de-identified details to protect your confidentiality. All interview data will be secured on a password-protected computer, and your choice to participate will be held in confidence by the researcher. All recorded responses will be deleted on completion of the study, as will all e-mail and online correspondence between you and the researcher.

Your interviews will not be made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research study and will not contain information that could identify you.

The results from the research may be shared at conferences or in published articles. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published. Data may be used in future studies, and you may be contacted by the principal investigator again to clarify or follow up on your interview materials.

Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others, including federal agencies that monitor human subject research and the University of Denver Human Research Protection Program.

All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed we may report that information to the appropriate agencies.
In addition, if you give the researcher any information about child abuse or neglect, it must be reported to the authorities in the state where the abuse occurred (in accordance with Colorado Statute 19-3-304). Also, if we get a court order to turn over your study records, we will have to do that.

**Suspected Neglect or Abuse of Children**
Under California law, the researcher(s) who may also be a mandated reporter will not maintain as confidential, information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, he or she is required to report this abuse to the proper authorities.

**Participation and Withdrawal**
Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

**Alternatives to Full Participation**
The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or only completing the items for which you feel comfortable.

**Emergency Care and Compensation for Injury**
If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

**Investigator's Contact Information**
The researcher carrying out this study is Cari Myers. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may call her at 817-614-3601 or contact her via email at cmyers@iliff.edu. You may also contact Cari Myers’s DU faculty sponsor for the pilot study, Dr. Deb Ortega, by phone at 303-871-3359 or via email at debora.ortega@du.edu.
If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Denver Human Research Protection Program by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu or calling 303-871-2121.

**Rights of Research Participant – IRB Contact Information**
If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.
AGREEMENT TO BE IN THIS STUDY

If you agree to being audio recorded and to having the researcher contact you with follow-up questions if necessary, please sign the form below to indicate your consent to participate in this research study.

Optional: Please initial here and provide a valid email (or postal) address if you would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to you.

_______________________________________
Signature: __________________________________ Date: __________

Print Name: ____________________________________________
Appendix I: Conceptual Framework
“How to Make It Here”
A Qualitative Study on Generational Narratives of Survival and Success
Among Latino/a and White Evangelical Communities
Researcher: Cari Myers

Good quotes [Good quote]

Military [Military]

Rites of Passage [RoP]
- Baptism [RoP1]
- Graduation [RoP2]
- Birthdays [RoP3]

Education: [Ed]
- Felt they had a choice to go to college [Ed1]
- Purpose of education [Ed2]
- Held a job during school [Ed5]

Religion: [Rel]
- Felt they had a choice to attend [Rel1]
- Felt connected to a religious tradition or community [Rel2]
- Felt excluded from a religious community [Rel3]
- Still attend in/after college [Rel4]
- Function of Religion [Rel5]

Authority figures: [AF]
- Respect [AF1]
- Mentors [AF2]

Survival Narrative generic [SN]
- Negative SN [SN-]
- Education SN [SNEd]
- Religion [SNRel]
- Family [SNFamily]
Pay SN forward: [PF]

- Positive [PF+]
- Negative [PF-]
- Education [PFEd]
- Religion [PFRel]

Identities:
- Gender ![Gen]
  - Example ![Gen-Example]
  - Commentary ![Gen-Commentary]
  - Interpretation ![Gen-Interp]
- Sexuality [=Sex]
  - Example [=Sex-Example]
  - Interpretation [=Sex-Interp]
- Race [+Race]
  - Example [+Race-Example]
  - Interpretation [+Race-Interp]
- Nationality [#Nat]
  - Example [#Nat-Example]
  - Interpretation [#Nat-Interp]
- Class [$Class]
  - Example [$Class-Example]
  - Interpretation [$Class-Interp]
- Morality[^Mor]
  - Example[^Mor-Example]
  - Interpretation[^Mor-Interp]
- Money/Finance [$$]
Appendix J: Participant religious demographics and current church attendance

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<td>Fr</td>
<td>Attend w/ family (H)</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Attend w/ family</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<td>Jr</td>
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</table>

White= 8 (50%)  
Latinx= 8 (50%)  
F = 7 (44%)  
M= 9 (56%)  
Fr = 2 (12.5%)  
Soph= 4 (25%)  
Jr = 2 (12.5%)  
Sr = 4 (25%)  
Grad = 4 (25%)  
B (break in college ed) = 5 (33%)  
M (Mlty)= 2 (12.5%)  
Remained with church of youth = 1 (6%)  
Left/ only attend when visiting family= 7 (44%)  
Struggle finding church after HS grad= 10 (63%)  
Average age: 22
### Appendix K: Frequency of Participant Responses

<table>
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<th>Names of Study Participants</th>
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<th>Education</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
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### Appendix L: Demographics and Education

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<td>Fr</td>
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<td>Soph</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Soph</td>
<td>(B)</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Soph</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Jr</td>
<td>(M)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- **White**= 8 (50%)  
  - F = 7 (44%)  
  - Fr = 2 (12.5%)  
  - 1st gen college: 7 (44%)  
- **Latinx**= 8 (50%)  
  - M= 9 (56%)  
  - Soph= 4 (25%)  
  - Both grad: 3 (19%)  
  - Jr = 2 (12.5%)  
  - Moms grad: 2 (12.5%)  
  - Sr = 4 (25%)  
  - Dad grad: 4 (25%)  
  - Grad = 4 (25%)  
  - B (break in college ed) = 5 (31%)  
  - M (Mltry) =2 (12.5%)  

Average age: 22
Appendix M: Godly Gertrude

Godly Gertrude

Dress Code

No Cleavage

Shoulder Straps 2 INCHES

Leggings and Tights do NOT count for anything! They are considered skin.

Dresses and Skirts TO THE KNEE

Thigh

Why should you abide by these rules?

- Help out your brothers in Christ - Don’t be their stumbling block
- Be a good example for others
- Represent God and Harding University in an appropriate manner
- Respect yourself
- It's the rules

MID-THIGH

Shorts MUST be to Mid-Thigh or longer