Critical Consciousness Involving Worldview Inequities Among Undergraduate Students

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CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS INVOLVING WORLDVIEW INEQUITIES AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Amanda Rae Armstrong

November 2019
CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS INVOLVING WORLDVIEW INEQUITIES
AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation and its future impacts to the fifteen students who offered to share their stories with me and who trusted me enough to relay them to others.
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ABSTRACT

College students’ worldviews and (non)religious beliefs continue to evolve and become more nuanced. Thus, it is crucial that college students make meaning of diverse worldview perspectives and recognize the accompanying inequitable experiences that others encounter because of their worldviews. In promoting research on critical consciousness in their 2018 call for proposals, the Association for the Study of Higher Education invited educators to consider, not only how students engage across differences, but how they recognize, make meaning of, and act upon social inequities. To expand topics of pluralism and interworldview dialogue in higher education, it is important to investigate the phenomenon of critical consciousness in relation to worldview inequities. The purpose of this study was to explore how critical consciousness involving worldview inequities took shape for 15 undergraduate college students (aged 18-24) at one institution, William & Mary. Though some scholars have offered findings regarding students’ and administrators’ development of critical consciousness, there is not much research focused on how critical consciousness takes shape (i.e., “how it is produced in time and space”) for students regarding worldview inequities (Vagle, 2018, p. 150). In this study, I used a theoretical borderlands perspective, tenets of intersectionality theory, and a qualitative, post-intentional phenomenological (PIP) methodology. Data sources included two semi-structured interviews with each student participant, student-generated reflections over a two-week period, and my own post-reflexive journaling. Findings from this study are depicted through a primary tentative manifestation (momentarily recognizable aspects of phenomena), which I named emotionality, and two figurations that elucidate how critical consciousness took shape for students in this study.
CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS INVOLVING WORLDVIEW INEQUITIES
AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
Chapter 1: Introduction

For decades, leading educational organizations in the U.S. have pushed for colleges and universities to offer opportunities through which students can develop specific skills, including intercultural knowledge and the capacity to think critically (see Association of American Colleges & Universities [AAC&U], 2007; Lumina Foundation, 2014). Yet, critical thinking does not necessarily address the capacity required for students to recognize, make meaning of, and act upon the social inequities they encounter both within and outside of college. Critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (1970) conceptualized skills of recognition and action toward inequities through his notion of critical consciousness from the perspective of classism—that of “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). Building upon the foundational work of Freire (1970, 1973), Taylor (2017) explored this phenomenon among 21st-century undergraduate college students enrolled in a service-learning course. She defined critical consciousness as a non-linear, fluid aspect of development representative of:

- a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world that is demonstrated through behaviors such as exploring diverse perspectives on social inequities here as when one person, group, or groups of people who identify with a certain identity, or are assumed to identify with a certain identity, have less access to resources or opportunities than others who identify differently from them.

1
social issues, analyzing root causes of societal inequities, and taking responsibility for helping address social problems. (p. 26)

According to Taylor (2017), critical consciousness is a particular type of meaning-making, which I detail more in Chapter 2, that is essential for students living within and among groups of individuals who are socially divided.

Specifically, college students’ worldviews and (non)religious beliefs continue to evolve and become more nuanced. With the U.S. (non)religious landscape continuing to shift, students live in a society often polarized by religious and nonreligious groups (Putnam & Campbell, 2010); thus, making meaning of diverse perspectives regarding worldview social inequities is crucial. Notably, between 2007 and 2014, the percentage of the U.S. population who identified with a Christian faith fell 7.8%, to 70.6%, while the religiously unaffiliated rose 6.7%, to 22.8% (Pew Research Center, 2015). Similar identification percentages are found among the college-going population. From a sample of 137,456 first-year undergraduate college students in 2016 (Eagan et al., 2017), almost 31% identified as either agnostic, atheist, or none, and the remaining percentage of students identified with either a religious majoritized group (~62%), denoted by Christian sects, or a religious minoritized group (~7%), denoted by sects including Muslim, Buddhist, and Jewish (see Bryant, 2006, and Mayhew, Bowman, & Rockenbach, 2014, for grouping rationale).

Pertinent to exploring diverse (non)religious and other worldview perspectives, is one’s willingness and abilities to engage pluralistically with those who hold and practice

\footnote{I defined \textit{worldview} from a philosophical perspective that may be based upon an individuals’ “religious tradition, spiritual orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these” (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Correia, et al., 2016, p. 2), and may also include one’s existential beliefs, or “one’s basic construction and purpose of reality” (Gutierrez & Park, 2015, p. 85).}
different beliefs than their own—pluralism being defined as “the degree to which students are accepting of and committed to engaging with people of other religions and worldviews” (Mayhew, Rockenbach, & Bowman, 2016, p. 367). National non-profit organizations (e.g., The Interfaith Youth Core and the Secular Student Alliance) and higher education and student affairs (HESA) scholars have directed their practical and scholarly efforts toward understanding and promoting college students’ pluralistic orientations and interfaith and interworldview engagement (e.g., see Bryant, 2006; Correia, Rockenbach, & Mayhew, 2016; Edwards, 2014; Kocet & Stewart, 2011; Nash, 2007; Patel, 2013). Though practical initiatives from this research are rising on college campuses, extant stigmatized perceptions, marginalizing and unappreciative attitudes, and covert discriminatory practices regarding differing worldviews remain significant and influential on students’ experiences (Armstrong, 2017; K. M. Goodman & Mueller, 2009a; Mayhew, Rockenbach, & Bowman, 2016; Nash, 2003; Rockenbach, Mayhew, & Bowman, 2015; Rockenbach et al., 2017; Smith, 2011). For example, a 2017 global report noted that almost one-third of polled Americans believed it was very important for someone to be a Christian to be considered truly American (Stokes, 2017). Among first-time, first-year entering college students in the fall of 2015, atheist students reported lower levels of appreciation toward evangelical Christians in comparison to other students, and less than half of the entire sample (n = 1,518) expressed appreciative attitudes toward atheists, Hindus, Muslims, and Latter-day Saints/Mormons (Crandall et al., 2017). These attitudes toward groups based on worldview beliefs exist in a culture of dichotomization between religious and nonreligious, rather than one of a worldview
constellation, leading to “a dualistic binary that makes understanding and appreciating differences of perspective very difficult” (Fried, 2007, p. 2).

Research Needs

As evolving adults, college students aged 18-24 are not only developing requisite skills for fostering pluralistic relations with others (i.e., interpersonal development), but they are also developing the capacity to define themselves (i.e., intrapersonal development) and think critically and make meaning of information and experiences as a function of their cognitive development. Recognizing and exploring diverse perspectives on social issues related to individuals’ worldview identifications and acting upon social inequities between and among people of different worldview identities is necessary in a society where the national portrait of individuals who identify as religious, nonreligious, spiritual, faithful, not religious but spiritual, and nontheistic (among others), is becoming increasingly diverse and complex. Thus, it is crucial that college students make meaning of diverse worldview perspectives and recognize the accompanying inequitable experiences that others encounter because of their worldviews.

Developing outcomes such as pluralism and intercultural knowledge requires more than dialogue and engagement. For, “in order to understand the meaning of dialogical practice, we have to put aside the simplistic understanding of dialogue as a mere technique” (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 379). This argument was similarly supported by Mohn (2013), the Vice-Chair of the Bertelsmann Foundation that releases the Religion Monitor Survey, when she wrote, “in my experience, dialogue can surmount even differences that appear to leave little common ground. Openness and tolerance, however, are crucial prerequisites for dialogue” (p. 6). Though I believe acceptance over tolerance
is a more admirable goal, these ideas address the need for more critical methods of understanding not only differences among groups, but also of recognizing, making meaning of, and acting upon the social inequities that exist for those groups. There is a need for further exploration of critical consciousness, a phenomenon that specifically requires dialogue alongside reflection and action, for better understanding the factors that contribute to its functioning among college students.

Goals related to promoting critical consciousness as a developmental outcome in college stem from the work of Paulo Freire. Freire (1970) argued that coming to conscientização, or critical consciousness, requires “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). The process of critical consciousness is a praxis, one defined by both reflection and action where critical reflection can also be action (Freire, 1970, 1973).

Within the context that Freire conducted his research, alongside illiterate individuals from poor, rural Brazil, he argued that only the oppressed (i.e., marginalized) could free themselves and their oppressors (i.e., majoritized). Though scholars continue to grapple with the application of Freire’s work with both majoritized and minoritized individuals, others, like Allen and Rossatto (2009), have argued that “students should understand that they can be simultaneously the oppressor within one totality and the oppressed within another, and they should be concerned about both their own oppression and their oppression of others” (p. 171). Given the statistics mentioned earlier, it appears that historically minoritized groups in the U.S. (i.e., those of non-Christian faiths and the nonreligious) are increasing, while historically majoritized groups (i.e., Christian groups) are decreasing. However, the U.S. society and college campuses remain steeped with
systemic religious hegemony and Christian normativity (see Armstrong, 2017, 2019; Blumenfeld, 2006; Bowman, Rockenbach, Mayhew, Riggers-Piehl, & Hudson, 2017; Fairchild, 2009; Fried, 2007; Seifert, 2007; Singer, 2017). Given this discrepancy, more research is needed to explore factors that contribute to interworldview engagement and pluralism. Though dialogue and pluralistic engagement are influenced by students’ interpersonal development, students are also simultaneously developing intrapersonally and cognitively, all of which perhaps influence the functioning of critical consciousness (I discuss student development in more detail in Chapter 2).

Critical consciousness, a type of mental complexity or way of meaning-making, “is necessary for meeting the demands of today’s diverse democracy and [it] underlies the ability to demonstrate social responsibility” (Taylor, 2017, p. ii). As Landreman, King, Rasmussen, and Jiang (2007) noted in their phenomenological exploration of university educators’ critical consciousness, “few studies have examined how individuals develop the skills, commitment, and habits of mind necessary to confront issues of oppression effectively and to create positive social change” (p. 275). Though higher education research that focuses on particular forms of social inequities from the perspectives of certain student populations is increasing, such as Ortiz and Rhoads’s (2000) framework for promoting White racial consciousness, Dutko’s (2016) dissertation study on critical consciousness among doctoral students in a classroom setting, and Taylor’s (2017) application of Critical Race Theory to explore critical consciousness, I have yet to find research examining how students experience social inequities from a critical consciousness perspective between or among individuals of different worldview identities and beliefs. Examining students’ experiences involving social inequities among
people of different worldviews is one method for understanding how context and
students’ intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive development might contribute to the
workings of critical consciousness.

Purpose

During my doctoral career, my research has focused mostly on the experiences of
and lived negotiations by undergraduate college students who identify as nontheistic and
nonreligious. Through my dissertation, I wanted to broaden my research endeavors to
better understand the complexities involved when college students—who identify with a
variety of religious and secular worldviews—are exposed to, engage with, and reflect
upon social inequities toward theirs and others’ personal worldview identities and/or
beliefs. Just as others have examined the processes of critical consciousness regarding
certain social issues and inequities, I was interested in how critical consciousness might
function among college students from a worldview perspective. Through this study, I
sought to better understand the complexities of critical consciousness, as a phenomenon,
for college students encountering social inequities between people of different
(non)religious worldview identities and beliefs in college.

Worldview is a messy, multidimensional, yet holistic construct (Koltko-Rivera,
2004). Though Mayhew, Rockenbach, and Bowman (2016) defined worldview from a
philosophical perspective based upon individuals’ “religious tradition, spiritual
orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these” (p. 2), others
broadened the concept of worldview to include existential beliefs. Gutierrez and Park
(2015) defined worldview as individuals’ “philosophical and religious beliefs about
social and physical reality,” and existential beliefs being those defined by one’s “basic
construction and purpose of reality” (p. 85). From these definitions, one’s worldview (whether religious or secular) and existential beliefs share a common thread around one’s beliefs regarding reality. In further complicating my understandings of worldview constructs, as a nonreligious and nontheistic person, I acknowledge the roles of my own experiences in viewing secular populations from a marginalized position and religious populations from a majoritized position. I mentioned this briefly here because, the qualitative methodological design (Vagle, 2014) that I adopted in this study encourages researchers to use post-reflexivity as a form of researcher positionality, a process understood differently than some forms of reflexivity in that it allows researchers to move beyond a practice of bracketing, setting aside, or suspending knowledge of phenomena. Instead, post-reflexion is a process by which researchers unhinge, question, and critique, not only their knowledge of phenomena, but also their assumptions of that knowledge. Thus, as detailed more in Chapter 3, my own background regarding the topic of this study directly informed the questions I asked and how I interpreted and made meaning of the data I gathered.

**Research Questions and Overview of Design**

Though HESA scholars have begun to examine critical consciousness from the perspectives of various forms of social inequities, I was specifically interested in how traditionally-aged (18–24) undergraduate college students experience, shape, and enact critical consciousness from the perspective of worldview social inequities. Further, in specifying critical consciousness from the perspective of one area of inequity, and by utilizing a qualitative approach, I could more closely examine the contextual, cognitive-structural, and psychosocial factors involved in the functioning of critical consciousness.
The primary research question that guided this study is: How might critical consciousness take shape for undergraduate college students (aged 18–24) whose (non)religious and existential worldview beliefs are an important part of their social identities? The question format of, “How might [a phenomenon or phenomena] take shape for [individual(s)] in a particular context?” reflects how, in the methodology I have adopted, phenomena “are de-centered as multiple, partial, and endlessly deferred” (Vagle, 2014, p. 31) rather than centered, steady, and necessarily discoverable. Additionally, there were several questions I asked while developing this study that served to further hone how I examined my primary question and influenced the literature and theories I examined and the data gathering and analysis methods I adopted. Those informative questions were:

- What kinds of social inequities between or among people of different worldview identities and beliefs do students recognize in their daily lives?
- How might students make meaning of those worldview social inequities?
- What is the role of context in how students make meaning of worldview social inequities?

Because I sought to better understand a complex, unstable phenomenon as experienced by students and influenced by context, I adopted a qualitative, post-intentional phenomenological (PIP) approach to explore my research question and informative questions (Vagle, 2010, 2014). The language reflected in my primary research question, *take shape*, is particularly significant to my research design. Vagle (2018) wrote that, in using PIP, researchers are “exploring how the phenomenon might take shape, how it is produced in time and space, and how it is entangled and provoked” (p. 150). Whereas some forms of phenomenology (e.g., transcendental and hermeneutic) view phenomena
as manifestations that appear and, thus, can be somewhat isolated as essential experiences, PIP draws upon poststructural assumptions of reality and knowledge creation, viewing phenomena as experiences moved through as opposed to experiential essences discovered. This throughness shows up in the form of tentative manifestations that momentarily represent recognizable aspects of phenomena within particular contexts. In PIP, manifestations are always tentative; thus, tentative manifestations reflect momentarily recognizable aspects of phenomena. Tentative in this context does not signify hesitancy regarding understandings of phenomena; instead, the term tentative acknowledges the role of context, time, and circumstance in individuals’ experiences. Because of the importance of these factors in shaping phenomena, I situated this research, and its subsequent findings, from the location of one institution, William & Mary (W&M). Not only did my methodological design influence the outcomes of this research, but so did the theoretical perspectives that I drew upon.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014) defined theoretical perspectives as “philosophical assumptions that guide methodology” (p. 10) and ultimately influence all aspects of the research process including the formation of research questions and forms of data collection and analysis. I placed a discussion of my theoretical perspectives here in Chapter 1, because it provides a glimpse into the ways that I see the world and make meaning from it, as well as highlights the variety of perspectives utilized by scholars cited throughout Chapter 2 in my review of literature. Though the use of theory in phenomenology is a contested topic, Vagle (2014) argued that, in PIP, “theories are interrogated so they do not dominate or determine what is possible to see during data
gathering and analysis, but this interrogation does not mean that theories are not always already running through data gathering and analysis” (p. 75). Thus, though I used theory to inform this study, I preferred to use the term theoretical *perspectives* rather than *frameworks* as a way to inform, not guide, this research. Also, because there are multiple theoretical perspectives in social science research, there are multiple ways to view reality, knowledge creation, and individual experiences; therefore, I utilized a *theoretical borderlands* approach to combine multiple paradigmatic perspectives and theoretical underpinnings. Abes (2009) used the term *borderlands* to describe the possibilities that fall in-between perspectives, “bringing together multiple and even seemingly conflicting theoretical perspectives to uncover new ways of understanding the data” (p. 141). This study was informed by the following paradigmatic and epistemological groundings: interpretivism, poststructuralism, and critical theory.

Several texts about the philosophical tenets of social research (e.g., Crotty, 1998; Glesne, 2011) have offered distinctions between four *paradigms*, each of which reflect a specific set of interconnected assumptions: positivism, interpretivism, postmodernism/poststructuralism, and critical theory. Though some scholars may use post-modernism and -structuralism interchangeably, because I understand postmodernism as a philosophical movement against modernity, rather than a paradigm alongside poststructuralism, I used poststructuralism throughout the remainder of this document. Scholars operating within each paradigm often hold certain epistemological and ontological beliefs, or ways they view and understand knowledge and the nature of reality respectively (Jones et al., 2014). Further, various theoretical perspectives, as described previously, may be categorized into these various paradigms depending upon the
assumptions that drive the perspective. Scholars working from a positivist paradigm may hold objectivist epistemologies in which true knowledge can be discovered and that “meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from the operation of any consciousness” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). Conversely, scholars working from the latter three of these paradigms typically resonate with constructivist and/or constructionist epistemologies in which there are “no objective truths waiting for us to discover—truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (p. 8). Further distinguishing between constructivism and constructionism (both which are considered perspectives within an interpretivist paradigm), Gergen (2009) noted that “constructivists tend to place meaning within the mind of the individual, while social constructionists locate the origin of meaning in relationships” (p. 26). In sum, the positivist paradigm reflects objective assumptions regarding knowledge and reality, while the interpretivist, poststructural, and critical paradigms reflect subjective, co-constructed assumptions of reality. More specifically, these latter three paradigms reflect similar epistemological assumptions in that the concept of truth or objectivity only exists within the context of what is socially constructed (Sipe & Constable, 1996).

In distinguishing across these three subjectively-oriented paradigms, Crotty (1998) noted that, “interpretivism is an uncritical form of study” (p. 112); thus, what distinguishes critical research is its critique of “historical and structural conditions of oppression” where researchers seek “transformation of those conditions” (Glesne, 2011, p. 9). Not only do many poststructuralists similarly aim to critique, but they also aim “to deconstruct social conditions,” since “truth is always partial, plural, and contextual” (Taylor, 2017, pp. 84–85). Therefore, though these paradigms may reflect a variety of
assumptions, they also share some of the same. Next, I discuss how I intend to blend paradigms and theoretical perspectives.

**Blending Perspectives**

Blending multiple paradigmatic assumptions and perspectives can be both challenging and beneficial for participants and researchers alike. Not only is it difficult to ensure all aspects of a study reflect the assumptions behind a given theoretical perspective (e.g., the research question, methodological design, choice of methods, and data collection and analysis), it is perhaps even more difficult to maintain some level of consistency when combining perspectives. However, I argue that a streamlined approach to viewing all aspects of a study’s design as a logical fit from one to the next reflects just one kind of paradigmatic assumption, a positivist presumption that there is one, best way to design a study. Though I expected that blending perspectives in this study would be difficult, I was comfortable knowing that the questions I asked, the methodology I used, and the methods I employed would require multiple ways of seeing, interpreting, and questioning the data.

Some educational scholars (e.g., Abes, 2009, Abes & Kasch, 2007; Lather, 2006; Taylor, 2017; Tierney, 1993; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993) have begun to blend perspectives and found that multiple perspectives offer differing and unique ways of understanding data. For example, in combining constructivism and queer theory (a type of critical theory), Abes (2009) discovered that constructivism was “appropriate to explore how participants made meaning of their identities, whereas queer theory challenge[d] the very notion of identity” (p. 144). Though much of my own research has been conducted under interpretivist assumptions, I have been gradually incorporating more critical perspectives
to challenge normative assumptions of knowledge creation and notions of reality within
the U.S. higher education context.

In continuing this endeavor, I moved between various assumptions of knowledge,
reading data “both within and against interpretivism” through this research (Jackson &
Mazzei, 2012, p. vi). In doing so, I used a combination of perspectives from
interpretivism, poststructuralism, critical theory, and intersectionality theory, a type of
critical, poststructural perspective. Within the interpretivist paradigm, I find both
constructionist and constructivist perspectives equally important in examining and
interpreting the complexities of students’ experiences and understanding how they make
meaning within their socially constructed realities. Given students’ realities, which are
oftentimes embedded within contexts driven by systemic norms and oppression,
students—particularly those with marginalized identities—do not always recognize the
marginalizing roles of majoritized norms on their personally-interpreted experiences
(Abes, 2009). Therefore, I worked to be forthcoming with participants in my intentions to
not only interpret their experiences as perceived by them, but to also make interpretations
given my own background and my perceptions of factors such as the campus climate or
demographic make-up of the institution—a practice supported by scholars who encourage
the use of poststructural and critical perspectives. By blending perspectives, I worked to
“question power structures and deconstruct what is known or accepted” throughout the
research process (Jones et al., 2014, p. 63).

Moreover, using multiple perspectives complements phenomenological research,
particularly from a PIP approach. In discussing poststructuralism as it related to
phenomenology, Finlay (2009) noted that the poststructural paradigm is associated with
the “relativist, deconstructive turn where language is seen as an unstable system of referents, thus making it impossible to adequately capture meanings of social actions or texts leading to messy, critical, reflexive, intertextual representations” (p. 16). Vagle’s (2014) conceptualization of PIP similarly draws upon poststructural assumptions of knowledge, viewing it as “partial and ever changing” (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016, p. 334).

Such poststructural notions are important to acknowledge given the theoretical support that critical consciousness, and other concepts within this research such as social identities and student development, are malleable, fluid phenomena. Specifically, because (non)religious, worldview, and spiritual identities reflect one of students’ multiple and intersecting identities, resulting in a various majoritized and minoritized experiences for students, I turned to some of the tenets of intersectionality theory to further inform this research.

**Intersectionality**

The philosophical assumptions of intersectionality complement my use of a theoretical borderlands approach, as Abes (2016) noted that the tenets of intersectionality “prevents it from being placed within one specific philosophical tradition” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 65). Intersectionality has been described as both a critical and poststructural theory (Abes, 2016), stemming from the work around Critical Race Theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), and is increasingly used as an analytical framework for understanding college students’ development (e.g., Mitchell, Simmons, & Greyerbiehl, 2014; Pope & Reynolds, 2017; Weber, 2010). Crenshaw (1989, 1991), a law professor who is known for her conceptualizations and applications of Critical Race Theory, popularized the term *intersectionality* by describing her understandings of how
individuals are systemically marginalized in intersecting and overlapping ways because of their varied social categorizations (e.g., gender and race in her own research), as identities do not exist independently from one another. In examining the *definitional dilemmas* of intersectionality, Collins (2015) acknowledged that intersectionality has been used by various scholars as a perspective, concept, form of theorizing, methodological approach, paradigm, and type of analysis, and many scholars have applied it to research that emphasizes identity. Given that social identities rarely fit into one singular category, though often measured quantitatively via categories, McCall (2005) wrote about such complexities of intersectional research, particularly “when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis” (p. 1772). Though not intended to be exhaustive, McCall discussed the wide range in which scholars have managed intersectional complexity across a three-category spectrum: anticategorical (a rejection of categories), intracategorical (a strategic use of, though critical stance towards, categories, and an acknowledgment of the stable relationships of categories at any given point in time), and intercategorical (a provisional adoption of categories to explicate their relationships).

I draw upon intersectionality in the context of this research as a theoretical perspective that played a role in my methodological approach, choice of methods, and analytical strategy. In considering McCall’s spectrum, my understandings of social identities most closely aligns with the intracategorical complexity. Though I recognize that categories can be both limiting and limitless (Sullivan, 2003), I also understand that some individuals strategically and purposefully use and identify with certain social identities. Given the nature of my research question and the literature presented in
Chapter 2 about social identities, I believe that individuals are described by and often define themselves by multiple identities, and that certain identities may be more significant or salient than others. Further, social identities rarely operate in isolation; instead, identities often overlap, influence one another, and intersect in ways that have systemic repercussions toward individuals’ lived experiences. It is important to note, therefore, that an intersectional approach is not simply a recognition of an individuals’ multiple social identities; rather, it is an examination and interrogation of the interlocking systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism, ethnocentrism, cisgenderism, colonialism, jingoism, and religious imperialism) that marginalize those with certain identities in a compounding manner. These perspectives are necessary to acknowledge as they offered implications in my recruitment of participants, which I describe in Chapter 3. Next, I offered definitions of key concepts that I used throughout my dissertation, some of which have been mentioned previously.

**Key Concepts**

Though I offered these concepts for operational and clarification purposes, I recognize that the selected definitions are biased, contested, and fixed only by the contexts in which they were written. In using these definitions, I related to D. J. Goodman’s (2011) reservations that our existing language, which divides and promotes dichotomous thinking (e.g., oppressor and oppressed, advantaged and disadvantaged, privileged and marginalized), is not ideal. However, such categories have been socially produced and reconstructed and, therefore, are used with the acknowledgment that others may or may not resonate with one or more of these descriptions.
Cognitive/Epistemological/Epistemic Cognition: These terms are often used interchangeably in the field of HESA, used to reflect one domain of students’ development. This domain has been defined by how students develop conceptions of knowledge and knowing (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Hofer, 2002; King, 2009). It is important to recognize that cognitive development as a field encompasses numerous subareas of study, such as language learning or information processing; however, in the field of HESA it is most often associated with students’ epistemological development, how they view and come to know knowledge. Because I did not intend to examine students’ epistemological beliefs, my conceptualization of the cognitive domain in this study is from a broad perspective in that students make meaning as a function of their cognitive domain of development, detailed further in Chapter 2.

Constructionism: “The view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).

Constructivism: “Epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” and a view “that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58).

Critical Consciousness or Conscientization: Roughly translated from the Portuguese term, conscientização, “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970, p. 35). This process “goes beyond a becoming conscious, since ‘becoming
conscious is not yet conscientization, given that the latter consists of a critical development of becoming conscious” (de Freitas, 2012, p. 70).

**Critical theoretical perspective:** “Suspicious of the constructed meanings that culture bequeaths to us. It emphasizes that particular sets of meanings, because they have come into being in and out of the give-and-take of social existence, exist to serve hegemonic interests” (Crotty, 1998, p. 59).

**Development:** “The evolution of skills (defined broadly to include abilities, capacities, ways of understanding) over time, where early level skills are reorganized into higher-level skills that allow individuals to manage more complex units of information, perspectives, and tasks” (King, 2009, p. 598).

**Domain:** Signifies an aspect of meaning-making, such as in cognitive, intrapersonal, or interpersonal domain (Kegan, 1982).

**Existential beliefs:** Types of worldview beliefs “concerning the nature of what can be known or done in the world” and those that “describe entities thought to exist in the world” (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 5). These are also defined by one’s “basic construction and purpose of reality” (Gutierrez & Park, 2015, p. 85).

**Interpersonal:** This term reflects one domain of human development that relates to individuals’ social relations with others (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda, Abes, & Torres, 2008; Kegan, 1982).

**Interpretivism:** Often referred to as a paradigm in opposition to objectivism that encompasses constructionist and constructivist theoretical perspectives, with interpretivists being “committed to the philosophy of social construction” (Pascale, 2011, p. 22).
**Intersectionality**: A complex theoretical perspective (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) that recognizes that multiple “social identities and forms of oppression simultaneously intersect and interact,” compounding systems of oppression (D. J. Goodman, 2015, p. 3).

**Intrapersonal**: This term reflects one domain of human development that relates to how individuals view themselves. Oftentimes, it is used interchangeably with one’s understanding of the self or their social identities (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda et al., 2009; Kegan, 1982).

**Liberation**: A praxis, “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 79).

**Majoritized**: This term is used “to emphasize the power that dominant groups exercise over nondominant groups, creating both minoritized and majoritized groups” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 21).

**Marginalization**: The prevention or limitation of full participation in society through exclusion from, for example, the job market, health care system, public benefits programs, or community activities (Shlasko, 2015).

**Minoritized**: This term signifies “the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in the U.S. social institutions, including colleges and universities. Persons are not born into a minority status nor are they minoritized in every social context” (Patton, Harper, & Harris, 2015, p. 212).

**Nonreligious**: Not relating to or practicing any religion.

**Nontheistic**: Not holding or practicing a belief in god(s), deities, or supernatural phenomena.
**Oppressed:** Often defined in opposition to the term *oppressor*, both terms reflect two poles of “social relations characterized by antagonism” (da Rosa Oliveira, 2012, p. 261). Freire (1999) referred to both terms as always “an individual and as a class” (pp. 99–100).

**Oppression:** “A system of advantage (privilege) and disadvantage (oppression) based on social group membership” (D. J. Goodman, 2015, p. 2).

**Oppressor:** Often defined in opposition to the term *oppressed* as two poles of “social relations characterized by antagonism” (da Rosa Oliveira, 2012, p. 261). Freire (1999) referred to both terms as always “an individual and as a class” (pp. 99–100).

**Pluralism:** “The degree to which students are accepting of and committed to engaging with people of other religions and worldviews” (Mayhew, Rockenbach, & Bowman, 2016, p. 367).

**Praxis:** Human activity of action and reflection where critical reflection can also be action (Freire, 1970). “Praxis can be understood as the close relationship established between a way of interpreting reality and life and the consequent practice that results from this understanding, leading to a transforming action” (Rossato, 2012, p. 306).

**Privilege:** A system of advantage established through social oppression, which “bestows on people from privileged groups greater access to power, resources, and opportunities that are denied to others and usually gained at their expense” (D. J. Goodman, 2011, p. 18).

**Take shape:** Vagle (2018) described a phenomenon as something that “might take shape,” meaning “how it is produced in time and space, and how it is entangled and provoked” (p. 150).
**Tentative manifestation:** Vagle (2018) wrote that, “when one studies something phenomenologically, one is studying a phenomenon and the intentional relations that manifest and appear” (p. 28). In post-intentional phenomenology, manifestations are always tentative; thus, tentative manifestations reflect momentarily recognizable aspects of phenomena.

**Worldview:** “A guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these” (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Correia, et al., 2016, p. 2).

**Significance**

In a society where people’s worldview identities and beliefs are becoming increasingly diverse and complex, making meaning of various perspectives and social inequities among groups is imperative. Although educational organizations hope that college students will graduate with the ability to think critically, such a skill does not necessarily address the capacities required for students to recognize, make meaning of, and act upon social inequities that impact individuals because of their majoritized and minoritized identities. It is important to simultaneously recognize the reality that the U.S., and most college campuses, are steeped with religious hegemony and Christian normativity, and that all individuals, no matter their worldview identification, function within both privileged and oppressed contexts that complicate questions of responsibility for maintaining or disrupting the status quo.

Many U.S. institutions continually support and foreground religiously majoritized populations through their policies and practices, or those associated with Christianity (see Armstrong, 2017; Blumenfeld, 2006; Bowman et al., 2017; Fairchild, 2009; Fried, 2007;
Singer, 2017). Yet, a Pew Research study (Alper & Sandstrom, 2016) discovered that there were almost equal proportions of individuals in the U.S. aged 18–29 who identified as Evangelical Protestant and as religiously unaffiliated. As mentioned previously, almost 31% of first-year undergraduate college students in 2016 identified as nonreligious, about 62% identified with a majoritized religious group (Christian sects), and about 7% identified with a minoritized religious group (non-Christian sects; Eagan et al., 2017). Additionally, amidst the religious and nonreligious worldview dichotomy are the rising number of college students who identify as spiritual. In their text on the experiences of those who are *spiritual but not religious*, Mercadante (2014) argued that those who identify as nonreligious reflect the world’s third largest religion, or worldview perspective. With 43% of students who responded to the 2016 Cooperative Institutional Research Program survey (Eagan et al., 2017) sharing that integrating spirituality into their life was essential or very important to them, it is crucial that colleges and universities acknowledge and support more variety among students’ worldview identifications in their policies, practices, and campus environments.

While institutions grapple with and navigate these changing demographics, many students continue to live, study, and work within higher education environments that do not reflect their worldview perspectives, or within ones that disproportionately reflect others. Where and how do students see themselves on their campuses? And how do students experience the dissonance of either not seeing themselves on their campuses, or of seeing their own when others are missing? Do students see these inequities and disparities at all? More qualitative inquiry is needed to contextualize the challenges that
arise when students recognize, grapple with, and respond to social inequities between and among people of different worldview identities and beliefs in college.

**Summary**

In this first chapter, I introduced the role of critical consciousness in the expected outcomes of U.S. college graduates, such as the ability to think critically. Then, I discussed the importance of these outcomes in relation to the changing demographics among undergraduate college students’ worldview identifications. Upon highlighting some of the research on worldview diversity in higher education, I addressed the need for and importance of my research and particular design. Finally, prior to offering key concepts, I provided a thorough discussion of the theoretical perspectives that informed this study. In the next chapter, I offer a review through which I connect and critique several areas of literature related to my topic.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

When establishing the review of literature for this chapter, I was attuned to Vagle’s (2014) reminder that, when using post-intentional phenomenology (PIP) as a methodological process, “it is important to remember that the primary goal...is to capture tentative manifestations of the phenomenon that is lived—not to use existing theories to explain or predict what might take place” (p. 124). In PIP, manifestations are always tentative; thus, tentative manifestations reflect momentarily recognizable aspects of phenomena. Vagle (2014) encouraged researchers to situate the phenomenon under investigation via pertinent perspectives and literature in their review, and then to connect literature as necessary when crafting the text. Thus, my goal in reviewing this literature was to provide a review of the topics I believed were relevant and important to my research questions, while offering critique when necessary to address the contribution of my study.

Because I used several areas of literature to make sense of the phenomenon under investigation—critical consciousness—I created a diagram of how I envisioned the relationships between the areas of literature presented in this chapter. Though presenting this diagram may seem counterintuitive given Vagle’s (2014) suggestions on application of theory, I believed it was important for me to acknowledge how I made sense of the literature and functioning of critical consciousness before gathering data for the study. This diagram, depicted in Figure 1, served as a visual from which I organized and
connected areas of my literature review. This diagram was not intended to serve as an a priori hypothesis or theoretical or conceptual framework for this study; instead, it served as a way of organizing concepts and reflected my perspectives regarding the literature prior to conducting this research. The following areas of literature are depicted in Figure 1: college students’ developmental domains (e.g., cognitive-structural, intrapersonal, and interpersonal); concepts within each developmental domain such as meaning-making, social identities, and dialogue and pluralism; critical consciousness as a function of multiple developmental domains; and the role of various and layered contexts in development.

Figure 1. A visual depiction of the organization of and connections between areas of literature I reviewed in this study.
Pre-Study Perspectives

The relationships denoted in Figure 1 were informed by previous scholarship as well as my own assumptions regarding needs in the literature. As outlined in my primary research question, I sought to better understand the functioning of critical consciousness among a group of students, those who whose worldview identities and beliefs are an important part of their identity. Moreover, I believe that understanding the processes involved with the functioning of critical consciousness necessitates recognizing the roles of cognitive-structural and psychosocial theories of student development. Other higher education and student development scholars have similarly argued for integrative conceptualizations of human development that span multiple domains, recognizing both the individual and concurrent functioning of domains in students’ developmental journeys (e.g., Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2008; Jones & Abes, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994; Taylor, 2008, 2017).

As outlined throughout this chapter, there are numerous models and theories of student development in the literature, some that focus solely on specific domains of development and others that integrate multiple domains. Such models were developed either theoretically, empirically, or through a mixture of both, and reflect various paradigmatic assumptions. Figure 1 was an attempt to recognize my assumptions of student development theory in the context of this study, prior to conducting the research. King (2009) noted that models stemming from a constructivist-developmental perspective (e.g., Baxter Magolda’s theory of self-authorship) consider development as a measure of students’ reorganization of early-level skills to higher-level ones—skills being defined broadly to include abilities, capacities, or ways of understanding. In the
context of this study, I did not intend to measure, gauge, or assess students’ critical consciousness or levels of development across different domains (i.e., cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) over time. Instead, I was curious about what factors might shape and influence—contribute to the functioning of—critical consciousness.

Given previous findings from the literature as outlined in this chapter, I determined that one approach to using student development theory for this purpose was to consider the ways students’ domains of development might intersect with, relate to, and influence one another, and how those domains might play a role in critical consciousness.

Though I believe that students make meaning (which I describe in detail later) across these three domains of development, I placed meaning-making as a function within the cognitive domain for a physiological reason, in that individuals utilize aspects of their consciousness when thinking through their meaning-making. I also recognize that some scholars (e.g., Taylor, 2017) understand critical consciousness as a particular form of meaning making. Thus, I was tempted to envision meaning-making alongside critical consciousness. However, to leave the phenomenon of critical consciousness in the context of this study as open as possible prior to the study, I maintained meaning-making as a function of cognition while understanding it as a process that spans developmental domains.

I begin this chapter by reviewing some scholars’ conceptualizations of student development over time, specifically models often deemed holistic or integrative. Such models are defined this way because they consider the roles of students’ cognitive-structural and psychosocial (i.e., intrapersonal and interpersonal) domains of development. Sometimes, these models also include other concepts such as students’
meaning-making capacities and the role of context. Then, in contextualizing the population within this study, I review the place of (non)religious, spiritual, and (non)theistic college students in the HESA literature, including the expansion of research on worldview identities and the role of campus climate and contexts on students’ Interworldview experiences and engagement. Addressing the gaps in some of this research, I discuss the importance of, not only students’ interpersonal domain (engagement with diverse others), but also the roles of students’ psychosocial development, meaning-making proclivities, and context in the functioning of critical consciousness.

**Evolution of College Student Development Theories**

Over time, scholars of HESA have turned to theory, both formal and informal, to attempt to explain things that happen in the social world. More specifically, *student development theory* is “a collection of theories related to college students that explain how they grow and develop holistically, with increased complexity, while enrolled in a postsecondary educational environment” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 6). As a philosophy, student development guides the profession of student affairs in higher education and often informs practical applications, such as program and curriculum development, and drives some institutional policies. Definitions of *student development* and conceptualizations of *theory* continue to evolve. Jones and Stewart (2016) reviewed the evolution of student development theory, organizing theories in three *waves* that reflected “the shifts in the kinds of questions and concerns addressed by student development theories over time” (p. 17). In this section, I similarly organized a review of theory by the
three waves Jones and Stewart described and added discussion throughout as it pertained to my topic of my study.

**First Wave**

Early college student development theories spanned from the 1930s to the late 1970s (Jones & Stewart, 2016; Patton et al., 2016). Curiosities regarding how college students develop and what environmental, psychosocial, and academic factors influence development were introduced clearly through questions posed by early researchers, Knefelkamp, Widick, and Parker (1978):

1. Who is the college student in developmental terms? What changes occur and what do those changes look like?
2. How does development occur? What are the psychological and social processes that cause development?
3. How can the college environment influence student development? What factors in the particular environment of a college/university can either encourage or inhibit growth?
4. Toward what end should development in college be directed? (p. x)

Following the introduction of these questions, alongside the expansion of reports and formal statements released by educational organizations on the role and mission of student affairs (e.g., American Council on Education, Council of Student Personnel Associations, and the American College Personnel Association), student development theories evolved as scholars continually worked to explain how students developed along different dimensions and within various contexts. Jones and Stewart (2016) noted that theories have often been grouped into *families* that represent a variety of psychosocial
(i.e., intrapersonal and interpersonal development), cognitive-structural, and environmental perspectives. In general, psychosocial theories focus on both the inter- and intra-personal domains, or how individuals make meaning of their identities and social relations, whereas cognitive-structural theories focus on individuals’ ways of knowing, how they view knowledge, and how they make meaning of that knowledge.

Within the first wave, research on college student’s psychosocial development generally evolved from a focus on age-related, stage-like, developmental tasks often influenced by crisis situations (e.g., Erikson, 1959/1994), to fluid models of identity statuses among men (e.g., Marcia, 1966) and women (e.g., Josselson, 1987, 1996), and, finally, to identity in relation to other developmental themes, or vectors, regarding the sense of self (e.g., Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Among the cognitive-structural research, most of HESA research (and the scholars who conducted such research) defined the cognitive-structural domain from an epistemic perspective, or cognition related to notions of knowledge and knowing. Though the HESA literature offers an abundance of terms describing theories related to cognitive development, including personal epistemology (Hofer & Pintrich, 2002), epistemological reflection (Baxter Magolda, 1992), ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), and epistemic or epistemological beliefs (Schommer-Aikins, 2002), they all generally describe how students understand knowledge and knowing—a type of epistemic cognition. As an umbrella term to describe the previous language, Hofer (2016) defined epistemic cognition as “a set of mental processes that involve the development and employment of one’s conceptions of knowledge and knowing” (p. 20). In outlining how these multiple terms have developed over time, Hofer (2016) also articulated three waves of scholarship.
surrounding cognitive development and suggested that, during the first wave, most researchers explored developmental, growth-oriented, models of knowledge and knowing (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; Kegan, 1982; King & Kitchener, 1994; Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1952; Perry, 1968, 1981).

Formative contributions to theories of cognitive development were often advanced from the perspectives of White, Western, Christian male students, from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, and presumed a progressive—ideal—movement toward complex mental schemas. This continuum approach to cognitive development presented an assertion that students generally transitioned from viewing knowledge as objective and absolute, to subjective and relative, and, finally, to evaluative where students worked within these two dichotomous perspectives (Hofer, 2016). Overall, most of these theories “tended to address singular developmental domains (for example, psychosocial or cognitive) as discrete units of analysis and presumed that development was mostly the same for all students” (Jones & Stewart, 2016, p. 19). Given the increasingly diverse student populations entering colleges and universities throughout the 1970s and 1980s, these foundational models were limiting in their applicability to students from various cultures, races, ethnicities, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds, among other areas of identity and social relations.

**Second Wave**

Two distinct features of student development theory evolved through the second wave of research: a more explicit focus on the intrapersonal domain of development, or how students understand and come to identify themselves, and the role of *meaning-making* in development, or how students make sense of their experiences. The growing
diversity of students and their experiences on college campuses spurred research and theories addressing the nuanced and layered characteristics of students’ developmental journeys. Scholars began examining theories related to race (Cross, 1978; Helms, 1993), ethnicity (Phinney, 1990), and sexuality (Cass, 1979). This focus on the role of social identities expanded the conversation around the socially constructed nature of identities, which represented a move away from foundational development theories. Jones and Stewart (2016) noted that this shift led to the incorporation of interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g., women’s and gender studies, ethnic studies, and Black studies), in addition to the psychological focus from earlier theories, on understanding the factors that shaped students’ experiences. These perspectives gave recognition to “the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality as systems of oppression…that pattern all individuals’ lives and opportunities” (p. 20). From these perspectives stemmed models incorporating students’ social identities (e.g., Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). I will return to these latter models shortly, but I first detail the role of meaning-making, a complex phenomenon described differently among HESA scholars because it was central to many models of social identity development.

**Meaning-Making**

Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994) life-span developmental-psychological model traversed both the first and second waves described here. Kegan’s model, a theory of the evolution of consciousness, is one of the most well-known, earliest documented, integrative approaches to student development theory. Though most theories up to the time of his publications had focused on a singular domain of development, Kegan’s theory offered a conceptualization of how development was influenced by the affective,
interpersonal, and cognitive domains. From this work, evolved research about meaning-making within the student development literature. Through two works, Kegan (1982, 1994) described how individuals used meaning-making structures to make sense of the world around them. These structures remained in use until they no longer made sense given an individual’s experiences, and new ways of making meaning were required. Kegan’s theory on meaning-making is known as *orders of consciousness*, in which individuals moved through five, increasingly complex orders. Kegan believed that individuals reached what he termed *self-authorship* at order four.

Described as “one of the most prolific scholars” in the second wave is Marcia Baxter Magolda “who developed, through a rigorous longitudinal design, a theory of self-authorship that is considered a holistic theory of student development because of the integration of the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains of development” (Jones & Stewart, 2016, p. 20). Baxter Magolda (2001, 2009) and Baxter Magolda and King (2012) built upon the work of Kegan, specifically his fourth order of consciousness regarding self-authorship. Baxter Magolda expanded the work of self-authorship from the perspective of college students aged 18–24 and has continued to follow many participants from her original research for over 30 years. Baxter Magolda described development, from a self-authoring perspective, as a movement from an externally defined meaning-making system to one that is internally-defined across all three domains of development. Self-authorship, therefore, was described as “the internal capacity to define one’s beliefs [cognitive domain], identity [intrapersonal domain], and social relations [interpersonal domain]” (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 269).
Though scholars began exploring self-authorship among diverse student populations (e.g., Abes & Jones, 2004; Pizzolato, 2003; Torres & Hernández, 2007), and self-authorship is often utilized as a framework in HESA practice (e.g., Baxter Magolda & King, 2004; Taylor & Haynes, 2008), it is important to note that self-authorship reflects just one kind of meaning-making process—one that views development as a movement from an externally- to internally-defined meaning making system, with self-authorship being a more complex, developed habit of mind. As a constructivist-developmental theory, it measures individuals’ capacities for meaning-making by their abilities to internally define themselves. Upon examining the strengths of self-authorship, Abes and Hernández (2016) discussed the importance of utilizing critical and poststructural perspectives, in addition to interpretivist ones, to understand self-authorship’s applicability among diverse populations and contexts, especially contexts bound by systemic oppression. For example, in two studies (Abes & Jones, 2004; Torres & Hernández, 2007), scholars applied self-authorship to different student populations, lesbian and Latino/a students respectively. In using a constructivist-developmental approach in both studies, scholars explored students’ meaning-making of their identities within heterosexual and racist contexts. Abes and Hernández (2016) posited that, as a result of using a constructivist perspective, these scholars tended to focus solely on describing the individual’s development “in a racist [or heterosexual] reality,” rather than challenging the roles of oppression in students’ meaning-making and development (p. 99). In the case of Torres and Hernández’s (2007) study, students were sometimes described as less developed given their tendencies to make meaning of their identities as influenced by external factors. Some marginalized students must work to resist the
hegemonic realities in which they operate, requiring additional developmental tasks when compared to some majoritized students. Thus, it is necessary to re-consider the exclusively constructivist role of self-authorship in students’ developmental capacities. More specifically, I believe that re-considering the nature of *meaning-making* is equally important in understanding how it functions in critically conscious ways across the cognitive, intra-, and inter-personal domains. Because a critically conscious “way of making meaning, though related to critical thinking…involves being able to reflect on and critique not only one’s own assumptions but also societal assumptions” (Taylor, 2017, p. 28), it is essential to consider multiple theoretical perspectives (e.g., constructivist, poststructural, and critical) regarding students’ meaning-making capacities and the functioning of developmental domains. Some of the scholars mentioned earlier, those who developed models incorporating students’ social identities, took such critiques into consideration.

*Integrating Social Identities*

Within the past few decades, the use of the term *social identities* has become increasingly popular in the student development literature. Jones and Abes (2013) acknowledged common themes persistent across perspectives on social identities: identities are socially constructed (often as categories); privilege and oppression intersect as mutually reinforcing phenomena toward social identities; and individuals differ in the saliency, or importance and prominence, of their self-perceived identities. In building upon the work of Reynolds and Pope’s (1991) Multidimensional Identity Model, which focused primarily on multiple oppressions, as well as McEwen’s (1996) model regarding
students’ development of multiple identities, Jones and McEwen (2000) conceptualized the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI; Figure 2).


Jones and McEwen (2000) noted that,

the [MMDI] does not portray a developmental process [emphasis added],

although it incorporates the importance of the interaction and interface among one’s multiple identities and hints at factors that contribute to the development of identity (e.g., contextual influences). (p. 412)

Though these models, including self-authorship, the MMDI, and the Multidimensional Identity Model, were more inclusive by incorporating the pathways of marginalized students than those that came before them, and they considered the role of both micro-
and macro-level contexts in students’ holistic development, Jones and Stewart (2016) argued that majoritized and dominant identities went un-scrutinized, so “most did not analyze privileged identities” (p. 21). Further, because so much attention was being given to underrepresented populations through research, some have critiqued the overemphasis on giving voice to marginalized populations, which inadvertently perpetuates the other—not only between majoritized and minoritized populations, but also between minoritized student populations and privileged researchers (Jones & Stewart, 2016).

Third Wave

Many of the models stemming from the third wave of student development theories were developed from critical and poststructural perspectives, with some including interpretivist perspectives. Jones and Stewart (2016) noted that these models tended to foreground the hegemonic realities within many contexts (i.e., “those norms and values that reflect dominant groups in the United States” [p. 21]). Thus, scholars began adopting critical and poststructural perspectives including critical race theories, queer theory, queer crit, and crip theory to reconsider the definitions of development, particularly those from a constructivist-developmental frame, and the role of context and use of intersectional perspectives, theories, and approaches in conceptualizing future theories. Given my focus on social identities and interdependent perspective toward students’ multiple domains of development in this dissertation, I wanted to outline in detail the evolution of the MMDI across this third wave.

Upon acknowledging the scholarship stemming from Baxter Magolda’s (2001, 2008) work on self-authorship and the influence of critical and postmodern theories, Abes et al. (2007) offered a reconceptualized model of the MMDI (R-MMDI; Figure 3).
These scholars continued to believe that social identities could not be fully understood in isolation, and that scholars and educators must consider “the influence of changing contexts on the relative salience of multiple identity dimensions, such as race, sexual orientation, culture, and social class” (p. 3). In the R-MMDI, social identities and context were conceptualized similarly as in the MMDI (i.e., identity dimensions as circulating and intersecting around a core sense of self bounded by context).


In reflecting upon their R-MMDI, Jones and Abes (2013) believed that in their earlier model (MMDI), which was still rooted in constructivist notions of meaning-
making, the role of context was not filtered through a particular meaning-making
structure; rather, individuals served as their own context. However, through this new
model, Abes et al. (2007) depicted students meaning-making capacities as a filter
between context and social identities through which students interpreted contextual
influences (e.g., peers, family, stereotypes, sociopolitical conditions) in making sense of
their multiple social identities. This filter served as a form of meaning-making, much like
it was defined by Kegan (1982, 1994) and Baxter-Magolda (2001, 2008, 2009), where the
permeability of the filter demonstrated students’ meaning-making complexities. Jones
and Abes (2013) acknowledged a limitation of the R-MMDI in that it did not necessarily
acknowledge the roles of systemic oppression in students’ meaning-making of their
social identities. Scholars have continued to adapt the R-MMDI by applying various
theoretical perspectives, which ultimately influences how factors are defined and placed
in integrative models of development.

Expanding the R-MMDI

Jones and Abes (2013) noted that, although there is an increasing amount of
research in higher education that incorporates holistic models of development among
minoritized student populations, there is less scholarship addressing the need to dismantle
the structural inequalities that influence students’ conceptualizations of their identities
and, arguably, their meaning-making capacities. In addressing their own critique about
the lack of acknowledgment through the R-MMDI on the roles of systemic oppression,
Jones and Abes (2013) devoted a chapter in their text on the tenets of intersectionality
(Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), its place in student development literature, and its possibilities
within the R-MMDI.
In using intersectionality as an analytic framework to understand identity, Jones and Abes (2013) theorized the Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (IMMDI; Figure 4). In this model, context was understood from both a micro- and macro-level perspective and scholars questioned how systems of inequality influence students’ self-perceived understandings of themselves. They also presumed that the role of saliency would also be influenced by context in that students’ various identities may be more prominent, exposed, or hidden across various situations. The role of students’ core sense of self was also complicated within the IMMDI as boundaries were blurred “between personal identity (in the core) and social identities that complicate the process of self-definition” (p. 159). This perspective led to questions regarding the authenticity of one’s core identity. Though the IMMDI acknowledged the reality of students’ multiple and intersecting social identities, it also worked to clarify and verify those “sites of intersections [emphasis added]” (p. 159) between identities. Finally, the role of the meaning-making filter within the IMMDI was less explicit and was more complicated to theorize. The authors shared that, “an intersectional perspective may hold potential for explaining why some individuals make meaning of structural systems of inequality more readily than others” (p. 160), because not only might context be filtered through students’ meaning-making capacities, but context may also frame the filter itself, influencing students’ abilities to even recognize certain contexts for filtering.

Most recently, Johnson and Quaye (2017) built upon notions of the R-MMDI and the Critical Race Theory Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identities (Jones, Abes, & Quaye, 2013) by using queer theory to conceptualize a queered model of Black racial identity development (Q-MBRID; Figure 5). Due to the number of social identities with which individuals identify, these scholars limited the scope of their work to one racially minoritized identity, Black/African American, and combined tenets of queer theory (i.e., becoming, performativity, heteronormativity, and desire) and Critical Race Theory in making sense of Black racial identity development. Further, it is important to recognize how the notions of core, social identities, filter, and context were differentiated in this model when compared to the R-MMDI described previously. Through the Q-MBRID, Johnson and Quaye (2017) described a person’s core as something that is constantly
being and becoming, rather than stable or fixed. This core sense of self “is still composed of race as central to the person…but the awareness and meaning that the person is constructing about their identity are constantly evolving and developing over time” (pp. 1143–1144). Utilizing Butler’s (1990) notion of *performativity*, in which gender is understood as a created and shifting social identity dependent upon contextual and societal factors, Johnson and Quaye (2017) imagined that, in addition to race, all aspects of identity have levels of performance. Thus, this model illustrated that all social identities are performatives, which flow over and around a person’s sense of becoming.

Further, as the filter in the R-MMDI served as a regulation mechanism through which students made meaning of external forces or context on their social identities, in the Q-MBRID, the notion of *desire* was similarly used as a linking element among other parts of the model. Where the two differ is in how *meaning-making* functioned. The R-MMDI filter worked as a constructivst phenomenon, in which students were presumed to make meaning of their social identities in relation to the influence of external authorities (e.g., people and systems). In the queered model, “desire transforms the meaning-making filter by influencing how the individual makes meaning and how others around them are able to make meaning” (Jones, Abes, & Kasch, 2013, p. 205). Thus, *desire* served as both an outward (social identity performatives) and inward (becoming core) force, while the R-MMDI filter served as solely an inward force. Finally, Johnson and Quaye (2017) described context as encompassing multiple forms of structural oppression that surround and play a role in students’ social identity performatives, desire, and core sense of becoming. Specific to this model were contextual structural oppressions of racism and heteronormativity. However, depending upon students’ varied and intersecting social
identities, and the context within which they are performing those identities, other oppressive systems may be at play, such as religious normativity in the case of students whose worldview identities are salient and prominent.


**Summary**

In sum, this section provided distinctions regarding how theoretical perspectives can influence assumptions toward cognitive complexity and development among college students. Psychosocial research has evolved from a focus on rigid, age-related, stage-like developmental models, to fluid models of multiple social identities, and, most recently, to poststructural and critical approaches that consider, for example, students’ core sense of becoming, their performative identities, and various forms of systemic oppression.
From the cognitive domain, Hofer (2016) and other scholars in the field of educational psychology (e.g., Chinn, Buckland, & Samarapungavan, 2011; Greene & Yu, 2014; Hammer & Elby, 2002) have moved to investigating the socially-nuanced, culturally-sensitive, and context-specific nature of epistemic cognition. Similarly, the focus on cognitive research within the field of HESA has transitioned from growth-oriented models of knowledge and knowing, to ones that consider the role of multiple dimensions and context on cognitive development. Still, some of the extant HESA theories on cognitive development remain limited in their application to contemporary higher education contexts given that they did not account for critical examinations of “normative assumptions” surrounding students’ cognitive development (Taylor, 2016, p. 33). Thus, Taylor (2016) speculated that there is a need for scholars to explore cognitive patterns among diverse populations to consider the “intersections of individual and societal factors” (p. 38) because foundational conceptualizations of cognitive development, including assumptions of cognitive complexity, did not necessarily consider the experiences and perspectives of students who experience marginalization and stigmatization.

Though some scholars have adapted integrative models, including psychosocial and cognitive domains of development, to reflect the nuanced developmental journeys among students across certain social identity categories, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and sexuality, there has been minimal exploration of the developmental experiences or meaning-making processes of students whose core sense of becoming (Johnson & Quaye, 2017) revolves around their worldview, religious, nonreligious,
spiritual, or other existentially-related identities. Next, I turn to a review of student development literature focused specifically on this aspect of students’ identity.

(Non)religious, Spiritual, and (Non)theistic College Students

Scholarly research on the developmental experiences of students who identify themselves through (non)religious, spiritual, and worldview beliefs and practices continues to evolve. There is much literature on college students’ individualized understandings of Christian faith (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Parks, 2011; Watt, Fairchild, & Goodman, 2009) and spirituality (e.g., Astin, 2004; Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Mayhew, 2004; Rockenbach, Walker, & Luzader, 2012; Small, 2008, 2011, 2014). Other scholars have explored the experiences among students who identify with other, often more minoritized, Abrahamic faith identities like Judaism and Islam (e.g., Bowman & Smedley, 2013; Bryant, 2006; Small, 2014; Snarey, 1991) as well as those who are nonreligious, nontheistic, and/or secular (e.g., Armstrong, 2017; Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006; K. M. Goodman & Mueller, 2009a, 2009b; Liddell & Stedman, 2011; Mueller, 2012; Nash, 2003; Smith, 2011). Though much of this research was focused on students’ experiences from solely a developmental perspective (including psychosocial and cognitive perspectives), more recently, scholars have begun examining the relationships between and engagement among students who identify with a variety of religious and nonreligious groups. As many of the existing developmental studies cited tended to isolate the unique experiences of students based on their religious, nonreligious, and/or spiritual identities, a more intentional examination of students’ interpersonal relations across students’ identities emerged in the literature. Given this inclusive approach to understanding all students’ experiences, some HESA scholars turned to the
term *worldview* to describe students’ beliefs and practices across religious and nonreligious identities. Scholars in other fields have defined worldview as both a social identity and habit of mind, or way of making meaning of the world. Next, I review various scholars’ use of *worldview*, followed by literature about interworldview and interfaith dialogue and engagement as ways to promote pluralism among college students.

**Defining Worldview**

In utilizing worldview to recognize the diversity in students’ guiding life philosophies across religious and nonreligious belief systems, higher education scholars Mayhew, Rockenbach, and Bowman (2016) defined worldview as “a guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these” (p. 363). Outside of HESA, Koltko-Rivera (2004) provided an historical overview of and critiqued major approaches to worldview as a construct throughout the 20th century. He defined worldview as “a set of assumptions about physical and social reality that may have powerful effects on cognition and behavior” (p. 3). In describing the differences between worldview beliefs, other beliefs, and values, he argued that “beliefs regarding the underlying nature of reality, ‘proper’ social relations or guidelines for living, or the existence or nonexistence of important entities are worldview beliefs. Others are not” (p. 5). In addition to those worldview beliefs that are informed or guided by an individuals’ religion or lack thereof, existential worldview beliefs also include those “concerning the nature of what can be known or done in the world,” or those that “describe entities thought to exist in the world” (Koltko-Rivera, 2004, p. 5). Thus, in the context of this study, worldview beliefs
can include one’s religious or nonreligious beliefs as well as their beliefs regarding theism, agnosticism, or atheism (i.e., beliefs regarding the [non]existence of deities).

In using Koltko-Rivera’s (2004) conceptualization of worldview, psychology scholars Gutierrez and Park (2015) utilized a longitudinal analysis to examine the relationships between college students’ (aged 18–29 in the U.S.) worldviews and positive and negative life events over the course of one semester. These scholars examined three types of worldview beliefs: religious belief, views of suffering, and world assumptions (nontheistic beliefs about the self, the world, and others), and measured them via pre- and post-tests inclusive of Likert-scale agree-disagree items. Though I did not explore these specific worldview beliefs through this study, I share this research to acknowledge the multi-dimensional, complex, and shifting nature of worldview beliefs. For example, Gutierrez and Park discovered that almost 77% of students in their sample ($n = 177$) reliably changed at least one of these three worldview beliefs over the course of the study (i.e., one semester). As one example, there was a reliable increase in 21% of student respondents regarding their belief in God’s limited knowledge, which was one item measuring the views of suffering belief construct. Also, about 30% of students changed their belief about God (one item being, “I am sure that God really exists and that He is active in my life”), and almost 45% changed their belief about the afterlife (one item being, “I don’t believe in any kind of life after death”), which were some items measuring the religious belief and world assumptions belief constructs. Thus, these scholars encouraged researchers to acknowledge the types of worldview beliefs under consideration and the role of context when conducting worldview research.
Interworldview Diversity, Dialogue, and Pluralistic Engagement

Researchers have shown that religious and nonreligious college student populations perceive different campus climates and have encountered a variety of stigmatizing and marginalizing experiences. For example, Mayhew et al. (2014) discovered that some students who identified with the religious majoritized (i.e., Christian sects) perceived less positive campus climates than their religious minoritized and nonreligious peers. Additionally, upon examining the attitudes held by non-atheist students toward their atheist peers using data from the Campus Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey, Bowman et al. (2017) discovered that students who identified with certain religious denominations (e.g., Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Evangelical Christian, and mainline Protestant) exhibited less appreciative attitudes toward atheists compared to their minority religious, agnostic, nonreligious, and secular humanist peers. Overall, atheist students have historically reported lower college satisfaction in comparison to religiously majoritized students (Bowman et al., 2017).

Given the variety of religious and nonreligious perspectives with which college students identify, and the array of experiences across groups, scholars have increasingly begun to examine how students value and engage with one another (or lack thereof) across different belief systems, as well as the role of such engagement on campus climates. Diana Eck (1993), a scholar of religious studies, first described her understandings of the concept of pluralism as a practice or habit of mind in which individuals move beyond a mere tolerance of differences to one where individuals respect others’ beliefs and actively seek to understand those differences. Building on the work of Eck, HESA scholars Mayhew, Rockenbach, and Bowman (2016) defined pluralistic
orientations among college students as “the degree to which students are accepting of and committed to engaging with people of other religions and worldviews” (p. 367). In researching efforts to promote pluralism, some HESA scholars applied literature on intergroup contact theory and intergroup dialogue (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) to support the role of dialogue in productive change across group differences. Some research and literature supports the roles of intergroup and interfaith dialogue on students’ pluralistic orientations (e.g., Bryant, 2006; Correia et al., 2016; Huang, 1995; Zúñiga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker, 2007).

Other scholars, however, argued that this type of pluralism, in which dialogue is a way to promote acceptance of (non)religious diversity, is insufficient for promoting worldview equity and dismantling inequities. Through her dissertation research on addressing Christian privilege and religious oppression in the U.S. higher education context, Edwards (2014) described multiple conceptualizations of the term pluralism. She noted that some scholars (e.g., Heim, 1992; Prothero, 2010) have argued that religious traditions hold their own unique realities and truths and that there are multiple truths, not necessarily multiple paths to the same truth. Others (Coleman, 2008; Wagoner, 2010) argued that pluralism “is simply the willingness to listen to and tolerate opposing points of view for the sake of peaceful co-existence” (Edwards, 2014, p. 30). Edwards further argued that Massoudi (2006) would assert that “authentic pluralism requires a belief that others’ perspectives are equally as valid as your own [emphasis added]” (Edwards, 2014, p. 30). Edwards’s discussion led me to wonder about the kinds of pluralistic orientations that are promoted through various interworldview efforts on college campuses. I continue to find it difficult to imagine a pluralism in which everyone’s perspectives are equally
valid, particularly within contexts where some beliefs are minoritized, othered, and discriminated against.

More recently, several scholars have expressed opinions that question the inherent difficulties of building a (non)religiously diverse democracy, one where there are numerous “irreconcilable views on ultimate concerns” across belief systems (i.e., abortion, existence of deities; Patel, 2018a, para. 4). When such concerns are so distinct between groups of people or two individuals, Patel (2018b) asked, “What happens when people draw their ‘walk away’ lines closer and closer, and do in fact exit crucial collective endeavors because they decide they cannot work with someone who insults their identity?” (para. 16). Phrasing this question around religious differences, he continued, “What happens if a Jew and a Muslim, because of their differences on the Middle East, decide they can no longer perform heart surgeries together?” (para. 16). These kinds of issues are difficult to address from a pluralist perspective that considers all (non)religious beliefs and practices (as well as other forms of beliefs and practices) equally valid in all contexts. In considering some of the historical research from student development literature, and the varied meanings of pluralism across fields of study, I next review some of the research on campus climate and context in relation to students’ pluralistic orientations and interworldview engagement.

**Campus Climate and Context**

Some HESA scholars (whom I cite shortly), in partnership with the Interfaith Youth Core, a national nonprofit organization (https://www.ifyc.org/), are conducting ongoing research through which they examine the nuanced factors that influence students’ pluralistic orientations using survey questions related to campus climate and
institutional contexts. The Interfaith Youth Core has worked with hundreds of higher education institutions across the U.S. in helping to administer assessment surveys to gauge interfaith engagement and students’ perceptions of worldview diversity on campuses. Various researchers working with the Interfaith Youth Core have developed three instruments: The Collegiate Religious and Spiritual Climate Survey (CRSCS) in 2009 (a campus-climate assessment); the Values, Interfaith Engagement and Worldview Survey in 2017 (a revised campus-climate assessment); and the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey, which began in 2015 (a nation-wide, four-year, pre-post survey project at 122 campuses). Next, I share a few findings from these assessments pertinent to my research.

Using the CRSCS data, Rockenbach and Mayhew (2013) examined the relationships between campus climate factors across the psychological (e.g., space for spiritual support and expression) and behavioral dimension (e.g., challenging curricular experiences and provocative experiences with worldview diversity) and students’ ecumenical orientations. Data \( n = 1,017 \) were collected from two four-year, secular, research institutions in the U.S., one southeastern public and one northeastern private. Students’ ecumenical orientations was a construct defined similarly to pluralism, as “students’ openness to people who identify with religions and/or worldviews other than their own” (p. 462). These scholars found that students’ ecumenical orientations differed by religious identification, with religious majority students reflecting significantly lower scores than the religious minority and nonreligious.

When examining the data further, researchers found that the extent of the relationships between aspects of campus climate and ecumenical orientations differed by
students’ religious identifications. For example, while space for spiritual support and expression was positively associated with students’ ecumenical orientations among atheist and agnostic students, it was not significantly associated among religious majority and minority students. The only consistently positive construct that was associated with ecumenical orientation for all three groups of religious identifications was provocative encounters with worldview diversity. This construct was measured by items such as, “Class discussions challenged me to rethink my assumptions about another religious, spiritual, or ideological worldview” and “When I hear critical comments from others about my religious, spiritual, or ideological worldview, I tend to question my worldview.” These findings suggest that perceived experiences on campus differ by religious identification, and that provocative encounters, those that challenge students’ assumptions and awareness of others’ worldviews, positively influence students’ pluralistic and ecumenical orientations (i.e., their level of openness to people who hold differing worldviews than their own).

Some researchers from the team who developed the CRSCS also work with the Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey project, which was first distributed to 122 U.S. institutions in fall 2015. Through this study, researchers can examine the input (e.g., demographic information and pre-college experiences) and institutional environmental variables (e.g., campus environment and curricular and co-curricular experiences) that play a role in students’ worldview pluralism. Because the survey is following a cohort through 2019, there was one preliminary report on findings across participating institutions at the time of this study (Rockenbach et al., 2017). The report provides insights into how first-year students ($n = 7,194$) approached religious
difference and interfaith engagement in their first year of college (2015–2016 academic year). Upon entering college, 85% of students expected that campuses would be welcoming toward diverse (non)religious perspectives. Overall, students perceived minimal conflict or divisiveness among people of different (non)religious backgrounds during their first year; however, more than half of students had, at some point, felt pressured to change their worldview, listen to others’ perspectives when they did not want to, and keep their worldview to themselves. Such perceptions varied by worldview with religious minority students (i.e., faith traditions other than Christianity) perceiving greater coercion and “more divisiveness and insensitivity on campus than either worldview majority or nonreligious students” (p. 7). Thus, although overt forms of coercion or indicators of (non)religious prejudice were not commonly reported by students, researchers wondered how “insidious discriminatory practices…may reinforce students’ inclinations in their first year on campus to interact primarily with people of the same worldview” (p. 6). Although these preliminary findings suggest that students are experiencing both overt and covert discriminatory practices on campus because of their worldview identifications, there is minimal research about how students make sense of and response to those experiences.

**Summary**

In sum, this section provided an overview of the literature regarding the developmental and campus climate experiences among college students who identify as religious, nonreligious, and/or spiritual, among many other identifications. Most of this research focused on students’ experiences from a psychosocial perspective, whether it was more focused on the intrapersonal domain and students’ development of identity or
the interpersonal domain and students’ inter-faith and worldview engagement with one another on campus. Though such research highlights the diverse realities that exist across (non)religious students’ individualized experiences, it is important to remember the role of context—particularly from a systematic perspective of privilege and oppression as cited previously in this chapter on psychosocial development—on students’ perceived realities. Some scholars have acknowledged the significance in acknowledging religious normativity and Christian hegemony embedded on many U.S. higher education campuses and how those influence the marginalizing practices, both overt and covert, toward those who identify as non-Christian or nonreligious (Bowman et al., 2017; Fairchild, 2009; Fried, 2007).

Also, because of the complex nature of worldview and pluralism as constructs, Koltko-Rivera (2004) believed that qualitative approaches, particularly phenomenological ones, would be especially helpful in investigating how worldview beliefs relate to other aspects of human development. In this dissertation, I explored the roles of students’ worldview identifications with other aspects of development (e.g., interpersonal relations and cognitive meaning making) and contextual factors. Although some scholars have examined the influence of intergroup dialogue (i.e., interpersonal domain) on students’ capacities to engage in conversations around social inequities, such efforts do not necessarily promote students’ efforts to recognize and act upon such inequities. Thus, to “shift from uncritically adopting societal norms to analyzing the assumptions that give rise to those societal norms,” specifically from a (non)religious worldview dynamic, students must make meaning of social inequities (Taylor, 2017, p. 8). Examining societal ills or inequitable systems, understanding how such systems
impact individuals, and taking action upon inequities has been described as components of critical consciousness, a particular form of meaning making, which I discuss in the following section.

**Critical Consciousness**

As first presented in Chapter 1, individuals who apply a *critical theoretical perspective* are often “suspicious of the constructed meanings that culture bequeaths to us” (Crotty, 1998, p. 59). This form of suspicion is inherent in critical pedagogy, an educational philosophy that comprises tenets of critical theory. Scholars differ in their beliefs of what constitutes a critical conscience, or what processes are involved with critical consciousness. Through his foundational work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) first discussed the processes of coming to a state of conscientização, roughly translated from Portuguese to English as *critical consciousness*, defined as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (p. 35). By *contradictions*, Freire (1970) referred to a dialectical conflict or opposition between opposing social forces. As a potential solution for critically engaging with these contradictions, Freire described an emancipatory praxis of liberation as “the action and reflection of [individuals] upon their world in order to transform it” (p. 79).

From Freire’s (1973) perspective, individuals progress through five forms of consciousness: (a) a semi-transitive state, focused solely on survival needs; (b) a transitive state, in which they are in dialogue with the self and others; (c) a naïve transitive state, where individuals over-simplify problems and lack an interest in investigation; (d) a critical transitive state, where individuals practice dialogue, test
findings, and are agentic in their behaviors; and (e) a conscientização state, which “represents the development of the awakening of critical awareness” (p. 19). In Freire’s (1970, 1973) work, critical consciousness can be understood as a process, not necessarily an outcome to be reached and sustained. Freire described thinking and behaving within conscientização as an *awakening* from which individuals then problematize the realities in which they are immersed. Further, it was Freire’s opinion that true liberation was primarily the responsibility of the oppressed since “the oppressor, who is himself dehumanized because he dehumanizes others, is unable to lead this struggle” (p. 47) and “it is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors” (p. 58).

Some scholars, however, have questioned the sole or necessary responsibility of the oppressed in dismantling social inequities by wondering, also, about the role of the oppressors.

Allen and Rossatto (2009) argued that, “students should understand that they can be simultaneously the oppressor within one totality and the oppressed within another, and they should be concerned about both their own oppression and their oppression of others” (p. 171). Similarly, Zúñiga et al. (2007) stated that students “need to grapple with understanding their own social identity group’s history, involvement in patterns of privilege or oppression, and the impact of this history on themselves and others” (p. 9). In re-envisioning a pedagogy for the oppressor, Bacon (2015) urged scholars to remember that individuals are simultaneously oppressed and oppressive (p. 230), and that in considering an ideology of *humanized oppressors*, educators should give “recognition to [all] students’ personal journeys toward critical consciousness” (p. 232). Still, an application of Freire’s conceptualization of critical consciousness and critical pedagogy...
within the U.S. educational context is a challenging endeavor, as suggested by Allen and Rossatto (2009) when they wrote,

> Thinking about critical pedagogy, part of the problem in applying it to the U.S. context is that its major founder, Paulo Freire, wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/1993) as a means of empowering oppressed Brazilians. But even though oppression is an overwhelming reality in both countries, the U.S. reality is different from that of Brazil. In the U.S., most live a relatively privileged life. It seems to us that many U.S. educators working in higher education may be choosing to apply critical pedagogy without fully considering the specificities of the U.S. social context. (p. 165)

Further, Kumashiro (2002) critiqued the “rationalist approach to consciousness-raising,” which “assumes that reason and reason alone is what leads to understanding” (p. 49). Therefore, an increased understanding and acknowledgment of the complexities of privilege and oppression “do not necessarily lead to action and transformation” (p. 48)—the latter (i.e., action) reflecting a primary goal in Freire’s notion of coming to conscientização. Thus, for some scholars, critical consciousness is a complex phenomenon, skill, or habit of mind to hone for recognizing and taking actions against social inequities. In seeking to understand the applicability of Freire’s and others’ notions of critical consciousness across populations, some HESA scholars have begun examining this phenomenon within 21st-century, U.S. higher education contexts.

**Critical Consciousness in 21st-Century U.S. Higher Education**

Here, I share two studies regarding critical consciousness from the perspective of HESA practitioners and undergraduate college students. Landreman et al. (2007)
conducted a phenomenological study through which they examined university educators’ process of coming to critical consciousness to inform facilitation practices for students. These scholars discovered that participants experienced two overlapping phases on their journeys toward critical consciousness. It is crucial to note that participants in this study were multicultural educators who (a) identified themselves as committed to social justice issues and (b) were recommended as participants by individuals who deemed participants to demonstrate a depth of critical consciousness in their teaching or practice.

The first phase of Landreman et al.’s (2007) model of developing critical consciousness (Figure 6), awareness raising, was described as an exposure to people from different cultural backgrounds, a critical incident, self-reflection on the meaning of the incident, and an aha moment or realization resulting from that reflection. Critical incidents were defined as “the significant events, interactions, and experiences that served as catalysts for self-reflection and subsequent meaning-making” (Landreman et al., 2007, p. 283). The second phase, moving to critical consciousness, was described as sustained involvement in phase one processes, engagement in social justice action and coalition building, and establishing significant intergroup relations. Notably, Landreman et al. found that a common theme among participants included the idea that individuals did not permanently arrive at a state of critical consciousness; rather, it was an ongoing process. There are similar implications from this research and the work of Freire (1970) decades prior: developing critical consciousness requires encounters with critical incidents (i.e., an awakening) and sustained dialogue and action.

In building upon the work of Freire (1970, 1973) and Landreman et al. (2007), Taylor (2017) more recently examined undergraduate students’ journeys toward critical consciousness through the lens of developmental ecology using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory on the ecology of human development. More specifically, she examined how interactions between students and their learning environments influenced their development toward critical consciousness from the context of one critical service-learning course. As a reminder from Chapter 1, Taylor (2017) defined critical consciousness as,
a complex way of making meaning of one’s self in relation to one’s social world that is demonstrated through behaviors such as exploring diverse perspectives on social issues, analyzing root causes of societal inequities, and taking responsibility for helping address social problems. (p. 26)

Upon examining critical consciousness from this perspective, Taylor (2017) discovered five ways by which students developed toward critical consciousness: (a) bringing in background beliefs regarding the scope of the world’s injustice, (b) connecting with others in real-world contexts, (c) dispelling the illusion of unity among racially and ethnically diverse peers, (d) moving from debating to dialoguing about social inequities, and (e) focusing on individual efforts rather than collective action (p. 159).

Particularly relevant to my dissertation is Taylor’s (2017) first finding, which focused on how students made meaning of societal inequities, most often regarding racism. Taylor discovered that White students differed in how they developed levels of awareness regarding racism and racial inequality in comparison to their non-White peers. Whereas some of the Students of Color entered the course with a somewhat abstract understanding of systemic racism, as “cultivated through their parents’ messages” (p. 166), most of the White students were socialized that racism stemmed from isolated incidents of prejudice rather than viewing racism as a systemic issue. These differences in students’ experiences across racial identities influenced how they viewed racial inequities on campus and in society at large. Taylor attributed some of these latter findings to some scholars’ (e.g., Jones & Abes, 2013; Landreman et al., 2007) argument that students’ awareness of their privileged and oppressed, socially-constructed identities influences their development in various ways, leading Taylor (2017) to note that, “while privilege
works to keep social identities hidden, oppression helps make social identities visible” (p. 55). Thus, students’ saliency and awareness of their social identities appeared to play a role in their development toward critical consciousness, or abilities to recognize, let alone act upon, social inequities.

**Summary**

In sum, this section examined the evolution of critical consciousness as adapted by HESA scholars. Since Freire’s (1970) contribution to critical pedagogy, scholars have adapted the applicability of critical consciousness among various populations and from the perspective of various social issues. Common factors that contribute to thinking and behaving in critically conscious ways, as reflected in the literature reviewed here, include: recognizing extant social inequities, having awareness of one’s own identities in relation to inequities, and critically reflecting upon inequities via dialogue or action. Thus, previous research supports the influence of social identities, intergroup relations, critical incidents or an awakening, and environmental contexts on individuals’ functioning of critical consciousness. Despite the increased attention of examining critical consciousness in the field of HESA, as highlighted by preparation programs’ increasing insertion of course material on this topic and the theme for the Association for the Study of Higher Education’s 2018 annual conference (“Envisioning the Woke Academy” with one thematic focus on critical consciousness), critical consciousness across forms of social inequities—specifically those among groups of varying worldview identifications—have gone unexplored in the literature.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I first introduced a visual (Figure 2) to show how I organized and connected areas and concepts that I discussed in my literature review. Then, I provided an overview of each of the following topics: (a) evolution of student development theories; (b) (non)religious, spiritual, and worldview diversity including inter-worldview and -faith diversity and dialogue and pluralistic engagement; (c) the influence of campus climate and contexts on students’ experiences and engagement; and (d) critical consciousness as a function of development. Given this review, there is ample room for additional research.

There is a need for examining the functioning of critical consciousness among college students, not just its theoretical understandings or what contributes to its development, but also from an integrative approach to student development. Further, given the role of social identities and context on how students make meaning of their experiences, examining the experiences from a variety of students who identify with historically majoritized and minoritized worldview and religious belief systems, while considering the context in which they are encountering social inequities (or not), is crucial to furthering the field’s understanding of how critical consciousness functions.

Not only are these factors (i.e., social identities, context, developmental domains) important to consider when examining critical consciousness, but so too are the kinds of social inequities under consideration. As supported by the theoretical perspectives described in Chapter 1, including the tenets of intersectionality theory, students hold multiple, intersecting social identities that interplay at various points, creating unique, complex, and compounding oppressed and privileged experiences. Because students’ experiences influence the saliency and awareness of their social identities, the process of
an awakening or encountering a critical incident varies from student to student. Although some students with one worldview identification might recognize a social inequity because it personally impacted them, other students with different identifications or other social identities may not recognize that same inequity; thus, social identities play a role in students’ meaning-making. Continuing to contextualize and specify factors involved when students encounter, recognize, and reflect upon social inequities is necessary for examining a fine-grained, complex phenomenon like critical consciousness. Also, whereas Freire’s (1970) work on critical consciousness stemmed from his observations of class inequities, and Taylor’s (2017) findings elicited insight about students’ development toward critical consciousness regarding racial inequities, in this study I sought to explore how college students shape (i.e., experience) critical consciousness in the context of worldview inequities.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, I situate my study by revisiting the theoretical perspectives that informed this research and detailing the methodological approaches and methods that guided how I examined my questions. Not only did the philosophical tenets of these perspectives influence the research design, including how I collected and analyzed data, but so did my own experiences with and understandings of the topics in this research. I begin by reviewing my research questions and theoretical perspectives from Chapter 1, followed by a detailed description of a methodological process suggested by Vagle (2014) when adopting post-intentional phenomenology.

Research Question and Theoretical Perspectives

To better understand how undergraduate college students shape critical consciousness from the perspective of worldview social inequities, I asked the following research question: How might critical consciousness take shape for undergraduate college students (aged 18–24) whose (non)religious and existential worldview beliefs are an important part of their social identities? The language, take shape, refers to how phenomena are “produced in time and space, and how [they are] entangled and provoked” (Vagle, 2018, p. 150). As I referenced in Chapter 1, theoretical perspectives are philosophical assumptions that influence all aspects of the research process. In crafting this question and the methods for this study, I utilized a theoretical borderlands approach (Abes, 2009) by combining interpretivist, poststructural, and critical
epistemological groundings. Also, I drew upon some of the tenets of intersectionality theory to explore how undergraduate college students—those whose (non)religious and existential worldview beliefs are an important part of their social identities—experience social inequities between people of different worldview identities and beliefs on campus. In doing so, I wanted to inform the functioning of critical consciousness. Whereas an interpretivist perspective is often an uncritical form of study, acknowledging the subjective truth in individuals’ meaning-making, poststructural and critical scholars tend to recognize additional factors, such as systems and structures of power and oppression, that influence individuals’ understandings and interpretations of their experiences (Crotty, 1998; Glesne, 2011). This combination of perspectives allowed me to consider the tenets of knowledge creation from students’ self-perceived, socially-constructed understandings (interpretivism), as well as to critically examine the roles of students’ multiple, intersecting identities—shaped by identity categorization and systemic, oppressive contexts—in their co-constructed realities (intersectionality, critical theory, and poststructuralism). These perspectives also influenced my methodological design as they turned the focus of data gathering and analysis both inward (e.g., students’ experiences and social identities) and outward (e.g., context and researcher positionality).

Post-Intentional Phenomenology

To explore my research question, I adopted a post-intentional phenomenological (PIP) approach (Vagle, 2010, 2014). In conducting PIP, Vagle (2014) suggested a five-component process, which I used to organize the remainder of this chapter:

1. Identify a phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts.
2. Devise a clear, yet flexible process for gathering data appropriate for the phenomenon under investigation.

3. Make a post-reflexion plan (which I named trustworthiness in this study because I view post-reflexivity as one component to promoting trustworthiness).

4. Read and write your way through your data in a systematic, responsive manner.

5. Craft a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts. (p. 121)

**Component One: Identify a Phenomenon in its Multiple, Partial, and Varied Contexts**

**Contexts**

Vagle (2014) offered six parts for helping researchers to identify a phenomenon:

1. state the research problem,
2. conduct a partial review of literature,
3. make entry into a philosophical claim,
4. state the phenomenon (i.e., research question),
5. situate the phenomenon in its multiple and varied contexts, and
6. select participants who have experienced the phenomenon. (pp. 122–128)

**Philosophy and Phenomenon**

I presented the research problem and conducted a review of literature (first two parts) within Chapters 1 and 2. For the third part, I drew upon Vagle’s (2014) notions of phenomenology. In defining the purpose of a phenomenological methodology, Vagle drew upon the work of Martin Heidegger to describe it as studying “what it is like as we
find-ourselves-being-in-relation-with others (e.g., teacher with students) and other things (e.g., a book)” (p. 20). Vagle (2014) also noted that many phenomenologists do not believe humans “construct a phenomenological experience”; rather, “when humans experience the world they…find themselves in the experience” (pp. 20–21). By using the term “find,” Vagle did not mean that individuals end up in experiences haphazardly, but that, to find oneself in an experience is “a careful, reflexive, contemplative examination of how it is to BE in the world” (p. 21). More importantly, Vagle explained that, while phenomenologists may be interested in individuals’ decisions or behaviors, many are equally interested in how individuals experience their decision-making (e.g., in pain or satisfaction) and in understanding how multiple factors manifest themselves within people’s experiences.

One term that Vagle (2014) described when defining terms related to PIP was appear. He noted that, “to say that something appears rather than is built inside one’s mind is saying something, philosophically speaking, quite important” (pp. 21–22). To clarify what phenomenologists are not seeking to do, Vagle wrote,

When we study something phenomenologically, we are not trying to get inside other people’s minds…. Phenomenologists are not trying to join chemists, biologists, mathematicians, and physicists in finding more precise ways to explain how things work. Phenomenologists are interested in trying to slow down and open up how things are experienced as [people] are doing what they do…. The phenomenologist, then, is not studying the individual but is studying how a particular phenomenon manifests and appears in the lifeworld. (pp. 22–23)
Vagle (2014) also defined another term, *intentionality*, and described its role in PIP. Vagle first acknowledged that the term intentionality has a philosophical meaning that is distinct from the root word *intention*. He wrote that “the use of intentionality here does not mean what we choose or plan…. It is used to signify how we are meaningfully connected to the world” (p. 27). When using intentionality within phenomenology, researchers are “studying a phenomenon and the intentional relations that manifest and appear” (p. 27). Whereas *intention* might connote purpose or rationale, Vagle (2014) argued that intentionality, as a construct of interconnectedness, recognizes that people do not “act as autonomous meaning-making agents oriented to the world with purpose and intent” (p. 27). In distinguishing PIP from other forms of phenomenology, Vagle offered three prepositions to describe differences between other approaches. He described a transcendental approach as an *of-ness* relationship in that the researcher is studying the relationship between subject and object where consciousness is *of* something and directed towards the object, and a hermeneutic approach as an *in-ness* relationship in that there is a grafted relationship between hermeneutics and phenomenology where the researcher is studying the intersubjective relations between subject and object.

In contrast to these two approaches, PIP adopts poststructural assumptions of knowledge creation (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016), viewing phenomena as *tentative manifestations* that momentarily represent recognizable aspects of phenomena within particular contexts. In PIP, Vagle (2014) considered phenomena as experiences moved *through* as opposed to experiential essences discovered. Using an image to portray his understanding of PIP (see Figure 7), Vagle described it as a “move away from essence and toward contexts, situations, and the partial” (p. 31). The points of overlap in grey
“are multiple and…temporary” and, Vagle wrote, “if the figure could be set in motion the malleable lines would move and shift, as would the points of overlap” (p. 32). The throughness that moves among and within the grey areas manifests itself “through the researcher’s intentional relationships with the phenomenon... in the dynamic intentional relationships that tie participants, the researcher, the produced text, and their positionality together” (p. 5). As referenced in Chapter 1, such tenets of throughness are also reflected in my primary research question with the language, take shape (i.e., “how it is produced in time and space, and how it is entangled and provoked”; Vagle, 2018, p. 150).

![Figure 7. Visual depiction of Vagle’s phenomenological conceptualization.](image)

For the fourth part of identifying a phenomenon, the phenomenon of interest in this study was critical consciousness, particularly from a worldview perspective. I sought to better understand how critical consciousness might take shape for undergraduate students encountering social inequities among and between people of different (non)religious worldview identities and beliefs in college. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Freire (1970) believed that critical consciousness does not manifest itself as a singular, stable outcome that is necessarily reached or achieved. Vagle’s (2014) notion of throughness was pertinent to my research question, and study overall, given that critical
consciousness is a process that operates differently across individuals, is sensitive to context, and may exist as an ephemeral experience or be long-lasting (as supported by Landreman et al., 2007; Taylor, 2017).

**Contexts**

Post-intentional phenomenology embraces the role of context in the research design. Thus, I situated this study, and its subsequent findings, from the location of one postsecondary institution. The school that I selected was both purposeful and convenient (Creswell, 2013). The location of this site was convenient, because I could visit the institution easily and incorporate my own perspectives of the institutional context via observations and access to information shared by students, such as social media posts, locations, or current events on campus. This institution was also purposeful in that, in 2014, the institution I selected reflected a population of undergraduate students whose worldview identifications somewhat mirrored the national average of first-year students in 2017. I believed this was important, not for generalization purposes, but to perhaps capture a representable portrait of students’ experiences by worldview identities. Also, because I could visit the institution easily and often, I was able to meet students in-person when gathering data, allowing me to interact with students’ *embodiment*, their physical, emotional, and conscientious movements through the phenomenon under consideration (Vagle, 2014). I decided to disclose the name of the institutional site so that I could provide more contextual information relevant to the research. Prior to signing an informed consent to participate, students were informed that, although they would be referred to by pseudonyms, the institution would be named. Upon gathering data,
students had the opportunity to remove or edit any information they did not wish to be made public.

The site for this study was William & Mary (W&M), a four-year, public, liberal arts, research institution located in southeastern Virginia. W&M was founded as a private institution in 1693 as the second oldest college in what is now the U.S., became public in 1906 and coeducational in 1918, and is considered one of eight U.S. institutions deemed a Public Ivy, a state-supported institution offering “a superior education at a cost far below that of Ivy League schools” (W&M, n.d.-a, para. 17). The total student enrollment in 2018 was approximately 8,700, including over 6,200 undergraduates. According to the institutional website data in 2018, 33% of the student population were Students of Color, 81% of first-year students graduated in the top 10% of their high school class, and approximately 50% of all students study abroad during their time at W&M. Additionally, the average Scholastic Aptitude Test score for first-year students during the 2017–2018 academic year was higher than any other public university in Virginia. W&M is well-known for its small faculty-student ratio at 1:11, with 86% of faculty teaching courses that have fewer than 40 students. There are approximately 25 student organizations dedicated to students’ spiritual, faith, and religious backgrounds, including at least one interfaith organization that was not active during this study. Interestingly, though there were no organized groups for nonreligious, nontheistic, or secular students in 2018, almost 38% of undergraduate students (n = 1,299) who participated in a 2014 college-wide assessment (the CRSCS) identified as nonreligious, and 23% identified as neither religious nor spiritual. To provide a glimpse into the landscape of students’ worldview identifications and beliefs at W&M in 2014, Table 1 indicates undergraduate students’
preferred worldview identifications \((n = 1,299)\) as well as those from the national sample of 52 campuses \((n = 13,776)\).

Table 1

*Students’ Worldview Identifications Nationally and at W&M by Percent*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identification</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>W&amp;M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worldview Majority</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worldview Minority</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another Worldview</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* W&M = William & Mary

Additionally, pertinent to contextualizing this institution is the role of religion in W&M’s history and the influence of Protestantism and Christianity prior to and following the United States’ separation from England in 1776. The Royal Charter, which established the College, is dated February 8, 1693, and was granted by King William III and Queen Mary II. Established as a 20th-century tradition, aspects of the Charter are read aloud by eight students as a part of an annual celebratory event, titled *Charter Day.* Though W&M is a secular, public institution, the influence of religion, particularly Christianity, is embedded in its founding Charter and continues to be read aloud annually at Charter Day:

Forasmuch as our well-beloved and faithful subjects, constituting the General Assembly of our Colony of Virginia, have had it in their minds, and have proposed to themselves, to the end that the Church of Virginia may be furnished with a seminary of ministers of the gospel, and that the youth may be piously educated in good letters and manners, and that the Christian faith may be propagated amongst the Western Indians, to the glory of Almighty God….And
forasmuch as our well-beloved and trusty the General Assembly of our Colony of Virginia aforesaid, has humbly supplicated us, by our well-beloved in Christ.

(Scanned photograph of College of William and Mary Royal Charter, 1693, p. 1)

The Wren Building, which was built between 1695–1700 and is the oldest college building still standing in the U.S. (W&M, n.d.-b, para. 1), symbolizes the academic core of the institution and was the original Christian center of campus as well. In 1729, a contractor laid the plans for a chapel to be incorporated into the Wren building (Colonial Williamsburg, 2018). A bronze-plated, nearly two-foot-tall cross, which hung above the altar table in the chapel since about 1940, sparked religious debate in 2006 when the 26th President of the College, Gene Nichol, ordered the cross to be stored in the chapel’s sacristy unless needed during services. Nichol’s rationale was that the cross did not mirror the experiences and beliefs of everyone within the public institution. In October of 2006, the Assistant Director of Historic Campus sent an email to student tour guides where “she wrote to advise that the cross had been removed [i]n order to make the Wren Chapel less of a faith-specific space, and to make it more welcoming to students, faculty, staff, and visitors of all faiths” (President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Pluralism Project, 2009, p. 3). The next day, Gene Nichols emailed all W&M students where he wrote, “I have not banished the cross from the Wren Chapel…. [t]he cross will remain in the Chapel and be displayed on the alter at appropriate religious services” (p. 3).

Shortly after this decision and communication, over 7,300 alumni and students signed a petition opposing Nichols’ request, criticized his rationale (Jaschik, 2006), and questioned how many other traditions and symbols (e.g., the pulpit and the alma mater)
would be removed in the future. Nearly one year after the removal of the cross, upon continued reproach from W&M stakeholders and community members of Williamsburg, the cross was returned to the Wren Chapel in a permanent glass display case, not on the altar, where it remains today alongside a plaque acknowledging the College’s history with the Episcopal church and place as a historical training ground for Anglican clergy (Geroux, 2007; Kunkle, 2007).

**Student Participant Recruitment and Criteria**

Because I did not intend to generalize students’ experiences to a larger population, it was not necessary to recruit a certain number of students who identified with specific worldview categories given my methodology. Further, although there is no “magic number” for the number of participants expected in a PIP study (Vagle, 2014, p. 75), for recruitment purposes, I established criteria for students’ participation:

- being enrolled full-time (at least 12 credits) as an undergraduate student at W&M
- being between the ages of 18–24 years old
- believing that their worldview identity is important to them

In developing these criteria, I examined demographic enrollment data from the 2017–2018 academic year at W&M. I turned to these statistics because, given that this study was conducted on the W&M campus, I wanted to gather perspectives from a representative sample of students. The 2017 enrollment data at W&M indicated that 96% of undergraduates, upon entry, were aged 18–24 and 98.6% of all undergraduate students were enrolled full-time, characteristics reflecting most students at W&M. In response to
my primary research question, I sought students who believed that their worldview identity, belief, or perspective was important to them.

I invited undergraduate students from across the institution to participate using a call for participation. I developed a flyer (Appendix A) and posted it around campus in academic buildings, the library, and on outdoor public bulletins (about 30 flyers total). I also posted and shared an electronic copy of the flyer on my personal social media outlets, requested that it be shared by other social media pages run by on-campus offices (e.g., Office of First Year Experience and Center for Student Diversity), emailed student leaders of organizations as categorized in the institution’s online system relating to spirituality, faith, and religion, and sent it to Facebook groups of those same student organizations. Finally, to reach as many students as I could, I submitted the flyer to the Fraternity and Sorority Life LISTSERV (the only active LISTSERV within a Student Affairs Office on campus) because almost one-third of W&M students are involved in a Greek organization. The flyer served as a call for participation that included a website address that directed students to an institutionally supported online survey platform, which students could visit and submit. I provided one random drawing for a $5 Visa e-gift card for students who completed the interest form, which served as a brief questionnaire to gather participation interest and demographic information (Appendix B). In the interest form, students could select as many worldview identities or perspectives with which they identified. There was also an option for other where students could type-in additional responses for identities not listed in the worldview checkboxes. Upon typing-in additional optional demographic information, including gender and/or gender identity, sexual orientation, and race and ethnicity, students were offered a 5-point Likert
scale, asking them to indicate how important each of their identities was for them. The scale items included *not important, slightly important, moderately important, important,* and *very important.*

In seeking a representative sample at W&M, I adapted a categorical approach like the one used in the CRSCS. In the CRSCS, students’ worldview selections were grouped into four categories: (a) worldview majority, (b) worldview minority, (c) nonreligious, and (d) another worldview (Table 1). Christian religious worldviews were grouped into the worldview majority; non-Christian religious worldviews and those who identified as *spiritual* were grouped into the worldview minority; the nonreligious category included agnostic, atheist, nonreligious, none, and secular humanist; and a fourth category was titled *another worldview* for those who did not want to select one of the perspectives offered. Important to note is that, in the CRSCS data, participants could only select one identification and could not type-in additional responses.

For my study, I also established four categories. However, I did not use the language worldview *majority* and *minority* as category titles, which connotes numerical values. If I used that language, students who identified with a Christian religion or no religion would fall into the majority at W&M since they reflect the majority of students. Instead, I used *majoritized* worldview and *minoritized* worldview to acknowledge the ways certain worldview identities and belief systems are marginalized or privileged more than others within the U.S. The majoritized worldview category included students who identified with Christian religions, such as Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic, and the minoritized worldview category included students who identified with non-Christian religions, such as Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. The third category,
nonreligious, included students who identified with terms such as agnostic, atheist, and secular humanist. I titled the fourth category *multiple*, since students could select as many worldviews as they wanted and could also type-in additional responses; thus, several students selected worldviews that spanned the first three categories.

There were three distinct combinations that resulted in me placing students into the multiple category: (a) those who identified with a minoritized and majoritized worldview (such as nonreligious and Roman Catholic, or with Native American traditions and as a Christian); (b) those who identified with multiple minoritized worldviews (such as agnosticism and Hinduism); and (c) those who identified as spiritual and not religious. For individuals who were both spiritual and religious, I further separated students’ responses by those who identified with a Christian and non-Christian religion. For example, I placed those who identified as spiritual and with a Christian worldview into the majoritized worldview category, and those who identified as spiritual and with a non-Christian worldview into the minoritized worldview category because identifying with Christianity signifies some level of majoritization and privilege over other religious identifications in the U.S. (Riswold, 2015). Though no participants in my study only selected *spiritual*, if they had, I would have placed them into the worldview minoritized category, like the CRSCS groupings.

To gather a variety of representation across worldview identities that reflected the W&M population, I sought to include between 15–20 participants. I calculated a number range for a 15–20 participant study in proportion to students’ worldview orientations by the four categories at W&M in 2014 to seek a representative sample (Table 1). As a result, I sought the following number of student participants:
• between 7–9 students who identified with a majoritized worldview
• between 2–3 students who identified with a minoritized worldview
• between 5–7 students who identified with a nonreligious perspective,
• and between 2–3 students who identified with multiple perspectives.

Although the proportional percentages for a 15–20 participant study would have suggested one student for the fourth category, I decided to seek a few more because there is limited research on the experiences of students who identify with multiple perspectives.

**Student Participant Selection**

I collected survey interest responses for two weeks, and at the end of those two weeks I had 72 submissions. Students spent an average of 2–3 minutes completing the interest form. In helping to narrow the interest pool for participation, I began by focusing on those students who believed their worldview identities were at least moderately important to them, resulting in 56 responses. To continue narrowing, I calculated proportional percentages as representative of the student body at W&M based on other characteristics available in fall 2017 (W&M, 2017). I was able to access institutional demographics based on students’ gender and race and ethnicity. None of the students who expressed interest in this study identified with a gender other than male or female, though the ones who participated did discuss gender roles and how they prefer to express themselves. Therefore, with a 3:2 ratio of female to male at W&M, I sought 9–12 female and 6–8 male participants. According to the institutional data, almost 60% of W&M students identified as White, almost 8% as Asian, about 7% as Black or African American, about 9% as Hispanic, almost 5% as multi-racial, 5% as unknown, about 6%
as a non-resident, and less than 1% as American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander. For a 15–20 participant sample, this would equate to 9–12 students who identified as White, up to two who identified as Hispanic, and only one from each group who identified as Asian, Black or African American, or multi-racial. Because I did not know the demographics of students who would express interest ahead of time, I had to wait until I gathered interest to determine how I would select student participants across social identities.

Next, I separated the 56 responses into the four categories described earlier, which resulted in 31 identifying with a majoritized worldview, eight with a minoritized worldview, six with a nonreligious worldview, and 11 with multiple worldviews. Over a two-week period, I invited students to participate in the study to confirm at least 15 student participants. I did not invite all of these students at one time, as I had to continually invite more students to reach 15 students that reflected all four worldview categories and who were, to the best of my ability, representative of the W&M student body by gender and race and ethnicity. Six out of the 31 students within the majoritized worldview category identified as male, so I eventually invited them all, and three confirmed interest and participated in this study. Within the majoritized category, students identified as either (a) Christian and Protestant or non-denominational, or (b) Christian and Roman Catholic. I split these responses into two groups, all were female, and randomly generated an invitation list for each group. Two from each group expressed interest and participated in this study. Thus, seven students who identified with a majoritized worldview participated in this study. I invited all six nonreligious students to participate, and five expressed interest and participated in this study. At this time, I had
12 students interested in participating and I had already invited six students who identified with a minoritized worldview and three who identified with multiple worldviews. At the end of a two-week recruitment period, one student who identified with a minoritized worldview confirmed participation, and two students who identified with multiple worldviews confirmed to participate, resulting in 15 student participants. Table 2 provides an overview of students’ demographic information as self-selected and provided verbatim by students.

Before proceeding with gathering data, students electronically signed an informed consent that I sent using an institutionally supported online survey platform (see Appendix C for informed consent). Students who participated in the study were offered a Visa e-gift card valued up to $50 given the extent of their participation as described in the following sections ($15 each for two interviews and $5 per journal submission, for up to four entries).
## Table 2

**Student Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Worldview Identities</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>Race and Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alix</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bi</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elio</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Cis Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellie</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agnostic, Judaism, Spiritual</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanna</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haven</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kopten</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Christian, Protestant, Liturgical Baptist</td>
<td>Cis Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liam</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Christian, Non-denominational</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Hispanic (Puerto Rican) and White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nima</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Christian, Protestant, Non-denominational</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riley</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Atheist</td>
<td>Cis Female</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riya</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Agnostic, Hinduism, Nonreligious, Secular Humanism</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Asian-Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tristan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agnostic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Caucasian and Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Christian, Spiritual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yessenia</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Christian, Non-denominational</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Black and African</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Bios**

In this section, I introduce the 15 students who participated in this study (in alphabetical order by pseudonym), to provide an idea of how I selected students and a bit more information into students’ worldview backgrounds and other identities they deemed important. As I shared in Chapter 1, I used four categories (majorized, minoritized,
nonreligious, and multiple) intracategorically (McCall, 2005) as a strategic initial use for recruitment purposes. I do not believe these categories are static or necessarily portray specific meanings; rather, the categories often overlap, relate in fluid ways to one another, and are defined by bounded environmental and systemic contexts. This information was gathered toward the end of the spring semester of 2018.

Alix. Alix, who just completed her first year at W&M, intends to graduate with two Economics degrees as a part of W&M’s joint degree program with St. Andrews University in Scotland. She grew up in California and said her family is not very religious. Identifying as nonreligious, Alix does not consider herself atheist or theist, feeling more apathetic to religion and the notion of god(s). When describing the role of ethics or concepts of right and wrong, Alix shared,

I don’t really see how religion would provide me with [a sense of morality]. I think I have that on my own. I’ve always thought the idea of there being a God to be a little weird and, growing up, I often asked questions about religion, particularly when I disagreed with a bible story I once heard.

She believes her worldview perspectives are somewhat important since it “ties into everything else,” influencing other aspects of herself and ethical beliefs. Though her other identities were ranked slightly to not important, she spoke about discovering her bisexuality and the implications of gender stereotypes within the field of law, which is one of her potential career paths. Because Alix intends to leave for St. Andrews for two years, she is not involved in too much outside of coursework, though she joined a Panhellenic sorority.
**Elio.** Having finished his first year, Elio is considering double majoring in Math and Economics. Though he would prefer to major in something he is more passionate about, he shared that he would “die on the sword of mathematics” because it is more practical and also learned from his mother that majoring in English or European Studies, for example, would be “akin to enrolling in basket weaving.” His parents live in Northern Virginia. Elio was raised Methodist, but his family does not regularly attend church anymore. His dad is a pantheist, his mom identifies as Christian, and his sister is Unitarian Universalist. Elio wavers between identifying as agnostic and atheist depending upon how “edgy or benevolent towards humanity” he is feeling any given day. He shared, I couldn’t ever fully endorse a religion like Christianity or Islam, but days when I’m struggling with something, agnosticism is my comfort blanket. I’m a very questioning person and the idea that I’m supposed to be submissive to some God doesn’t square well with me. It seems that religious people lean on religion for comfort, which I think influences me having a worse view of religious people than non-religious people.

Elio described his worldview and nonreligious identity as not too important, especially compared to his gay identity as he has been attacked more for being gay. Thus, he mentioned struggling with differentiating between mainstream Christianity and individuals involved with the Westboro Baptist Church (an American church often cited by the media as a hate group).

**Ellie.** Having finished her fourth year, Ellie graduated soon after this study with degrees in Sociology and Marketing and secured a job to work with a Jewish nonprofit. She grew up Reform Jewish in the Northeastern U.S. and considers herself to be agnostic.
and spiritual. Ellie’s mom transitioned from conservative, Modern Orthodox Judaism to more Reform, and her dad grew up secular Jewish by incorporating Jewish culture more so than religion into their family. Ellie did not incorporate her Jewish identity much while at W&M because she never found community within the Jewish population, specifically the student organization Hillel, whereas growing up she really enjoyed the fellowship aspect of going to Temple. She considers herself agnostic because she does not believe the idea that god plays an active role in her life, but that there are forces that exist, sharing:

A previous partner of mine was agnostic atheist which he described as not believing in anything and believing if he sees it, and I’d say I’m more religious than that, but also really unsure about what it is that’s there. So like praying to god isn’t relevant to me, and I’ll do it in Temple but it’s not relevant. I know some like to try and characterize god, but for me it’s hard to identify, I see it more as like the wind that sometimes speaks, which sounds really weird.

Being spiritual to her means “connecting with others and feeling like what [she’s] doing contributes to [her] values and sense of purpose.” Ellie considers her race and ethnicity (as an Ashkenazi Jewish) and worldview beliefs to be very important. Judaism is something she can turn to “when things are hard” and her religious involvements have given her “a sense of community.” She spoke extensively about the complexity of being White and Jewish because she is ethnically Jewish, having ancestors who were discriminated against, but also being able to pass as White given her skin color.

**Hanna.** Having finished her second year, Hanna is majoring in Psychology. She grew up in a rural town in Virginia near Washington, DC, with her mom and
grandparents. Hanna was not raised in a religious household, though she recalled praying to God as “a child sort of thing.” In high school, Hanna became highly involved in a local church, singing and leading worship because her boyfriend at the time was religious. At W&M, she joined a Christian acapella group because it provided a familiar community and expressed values that she had developed with her boyfriend. Upon ending her relationship at the end of her first year in college, she began to consider herself agnostic given that, although she “would love for Jesus and God and all that to be real…[she’s] also understanding the fact that maybe there isn’t anything.” Hanna shared that she frequently thinks about her worldview and existential beliefs and how they play a role in her life. In addition, though she finds beauty in religion, she also said that “conservative Evangelical stuff is really destructive to our democracy.” She believes her agnosticism allows her “to experience a deeper empathy with people because [she’s] not trying to tell others what is true or not true.” More recently, she began practicing yoga and, whereas she would normally think of yoga and its mindfulness effects as “random and non-empirical,” she has “recently been willing to just go with it and recognize that [she] can put emotional energy into physical energy or transpose [her] breathing into [her] yoga flow.” Hanna described her other identities, being White and heterosexual, as very important and spoke about the discrimination she does not face because of those aspects of her identity.

**Haven.** Haven, who identifies as Roman Catholic (majoritized worldview), just finished her first year and intends to double major. She is involved with a Catholic student organization and joins friends for mass every Sunday. Her family lives in a large county in Northern Virginia, and she purposefully sought out local colleges. Haven
attended religiously affiliated schools since the third grade, so W&M was “a whole new world.” She is the first in her family to attend college and the first born in the states, as most of her family was born and raised in an African country. Her parents identify as Greek Orthodox, so she and her younger sister grew up in a religious household; however, Haven shared that they did not attend their parents’ church because she and her sister do not speak Amharic and their parents did not want them to attend the lengthy services. In third grade, Haven and her sister began attending Catholic school and a few years later, they were both confirmed in the Roman Catholic church. Religion is very important to her “because it’s a guideline or rules book that [she] use[s] to live [her] life by,” and believes her religion is a decision she developed on her own merit rather than something she was born into. She considers herself “a pretty strong Catholic,” following “almost all of the rules and beliefs.” Haven believes her worldview and racial and ethnic identities, being Christian and African American, are more important than her gender or sexual orientation, being female and straight.

**Kopten.** Kopten, who identifies as Christian and Liturgical Baptist (majoritized worldview), just finished his second year and is majoring in Biology, though he is unsure what career he would like to pursue. His family lives in a small city in Northern Virginia, and Kopten was drawn to W&M through high school visits to Colonial Williamsburg. He spends most of his time studying and spending time with individuals in one of the larger Baptist student organization on campus. Considering himself an anxious person in high school surrounding school work, Kopten attributes the decrease in his perfectionist attitude in college to the friends he has made and experiences he has had through the Baptist group. His dad grew up Catholic and his mom was “strongly Southern Baptist.”
Once married, his parents began attending a local Baptist church that Kopten does not feel fosters strong community. He currently attends a church near campus and, though he identifies as a Christian, he shared, “I don’t know if [Christian] is necessarily my ‘identity.’ It’s weird trying to pin down where you fall on the religious identity perspective because there’s lots of factors and different opinions on different things.” Kopten does not define himself as spiritual, describing its connotation as there being something ethereal “out there,” but not labeling it. Since coming to college, he has begun to wrestle with notions of God in the Christian context that he has always known. He also identifies as gay, though he does not think about that aspect of his identity very much. Kopten shared that his parents are unaware of his sexual orientation, but most of his friends are accepting, so “it’s weird being in both [Christian and gay] communities because you have something that’s different about you and it’s weird being outside of the norm with that.”

**Liam.** Liam, who identifies as a non-denominational Christian (majoritized worldview), just finished his second year and moved to W&M from New York. He is a Sociology major and is considering a double major, hoping to go into the Peace Corps or a service-related field after graduation. Liam’s family is Roman Catholic and said his parents adopt a liberal interpretation of the Bible. Once at W&M, he “church hopped” until he found a local non-denominational Christian church that supports a liberal interpretation of the Bible, and joined one of the largest Christian organizations on campus. In the middle of his second semester, his faith began to “fall apart,” and he started opening up about his concerns to close friends. Liam had applied to be a small-group leader within the Christian organization for his second year and described the
process as “weird” since he applied during a time of questioning his faith and almost dropped out. He recalled having lots of big questions and feeling paralyzed by them, sharing: “that was and still has been a very long, painful process, all while still being a part of the Christian community, going to church, and acting like everything’s fine.” He describes his questioning as going in waves, not “necessarily know[ing] where [he is] right now with God and religion.” Though not extremely important to him, Liam described his racial and ethnic identity as White and Puerto Rican, sharing that people have always treated him as White and that his dad tried to separate him and his older brother from their Hispanic identity because his dad recognized that “frameshift[ing]” to White and not engaging with their “Hispanic heritage” was easier.

Missy. As a junior credit-wise, Missy just finished her second year and plans to graduate one semester early with a degree in Psychology. She identifies as Roman Catholic, a majoritized worldview. Her family lives in in the Northeastern part of the U.S. and, though she primarily applied to Catholic colleges as she enjoyed her Catholic high school experience, she was drawn to W&M because of its community. She has become very involved with a Catholic student organization on campus, ushering at masses each week and, more recently, attending service trips and visiting with her “Catholic Family,” a community program where local families “adopt” students and “look out for their interests.” Faith and religion have always been an important part of her life and, “even though [she doesn’t] agree necessarily with everything that is taught by the church…it keeps [her] going and it keeps [her] looking for what is true.” She described her transition to W&M as a “wake-up call,” reminding her that perhaps she does not know as much about her religion as she thought she did, and wondering why college seems to put “a lot
of emphasis on individualism….and [exploration],” even though she “[feels] like [she has] already come to an understanding of what [is] good for [her].” Lately, Missy has been “focused on finding out what the truth is in terms of religion and God,” and is “interested in seeing Catholicism in different areas of the world because, for [her], [she has] a White middle-class understanding of Catholicism where people could pay for private school.”

Nima. Nima just finished her third year and is majoring in Public Policy. She grew up in Northern Virginia with her parents and two younger siblings. Her parents both have large families, with most of her mom’s family living in the U.S. and her dad’s in Somaliland. Nima identifies with Sunni Islam (a minoritized worldview), sharing that, though she and her family are Muslim, she is not “super practicing” and, in describing a range of religiosity among her family members, believes she was always “more in the middle.” Elaborating, she shared that she does not pray five times a day, has not done the hajj (a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca), and tells her mother that she has “three out of the five pillars down pat,” including “the idea that there’s no God but God and Muhammad is God’s messenger, and then alms-giving, and then Ramadan and the fasting process.”

Nima understands almsgiving as service to others and is highly involved with an on-campus volunteer organization. She mentioned the Muslim Student Association on campus and how she is more of a “member in spirit” because the meetings for the Muslim Student Association and her volunteer group occur simultaneously, and because she does not read the Quran regularly she “never felt like [she] had the spiritual cred of talking to everybody.” Regarding Ramadan and regular prayer, Nima said, “it’s something I know I want to do in the future, but right now it’s just not coming together,”
including this year’s conflict with the final exam schedule crossing into Ramadan forcing her to skip a few days of fasting.

**Peter.** In finishing up his first year, Peter has an interest in economics and intends to apply for admittance into the business school at the end of his second year. He identifies as a non-denominational Christian, a majoritized worldview. His family lives in Northern Virginia, including his younger sister and older brother who attends seminary school. Both his parents attended college, including his dad who received a master’s degree. His parents were raised Christian, with his dad’s father being a minister, and his family attended a Presbyterian church up until a few years ago before they found a new church that Peter described as “a tremendous blessing.” He identifies as a nondenominational Christian and Protestant and shared, “My religion and the identity I find in Christianity is absolutely the upmost important to me and it’s where I believe ethically I should be and where I find my highest priority and highest identity.” Peter believes that his Christianity relates to and influences how he sees the world in “every way,” saying “[Jesus] Christ is certainly the center of the religion, so when we can emulate him in our daily lives that’s a huge impact and what I strive for on a daily basis.”

After visiting about five Christian student organizations at W&M, Peter joined one of the largest Christian organizations on campus. He attends church service weekly and is involved in a “freshmen guys small group” that meets weekly. In describing his experiences prior to and at W&M regarding religion, Peter named his home church as “generally a conservative church” and W&M as having “more diversity of thought.” Peter finds some sense of identity in other aspects of himself, such as being sexually male, Caucasian (given that he has “White skin”), and heterosexually attracted to others.
However, he shared that others might find those identities more important to them than he does for himself since, “for [him], [he] think[s] that [his] religious stance, belief, and faith in the Christian God and Jesus Christ is the highest thing in [his] life.”

Riley. One of the first things Riley shared with me is that she is a first-generation college student, just having finished her second year where she plans to graduate with a Physics degree and attend graduate school for Astronomy. She shared that her parents divorced 15 years ago and that she comes from a “southern family in a rural area” of Virginia, describing her family as “pretty fucking racist.” Riley described her mom as a deist, believing there is a God but not worshiping it, her step-dad as a Thelemite (“a rather small religion”), and her dad as having attended a church “full of Trump-supportin’ right-wing nut jobs” that “brainwash him” ever since his near-death car crash when he was an alcoholic following her parents’ divorce. Growing up, she was involved in a Baptist church until she was 12 years old, but realized her mental health issues got worse when she was in the church (such as auditory hallucinations) because she “was getting screamed at every Sunday by hell fire and brimstone.” Riley said she feels “more accepted” as someone who is nonreligious on campus and believes she is most disadvantaged because of her lower socioeconomic status on a campus alongside other “rich White…kids” from Northern Virginia. She identifies as an atheist, but prefers to use the phrase agnostic atheist saying,

I believe the existence of some deity can neither be proven nor disproven, there’s no way to give me definitive proof one way or the other, but I lean towards believing there isn’t one since you can’t prove to me that there is so why should I think there is if I have no evidence?
Aside from the marginalization she has experienced due to her worldview identity, pansexuality, gender, and socioeconomic status, Riley tries to “bear in mind” that she does “have privileges” as being White and works to be cognizant of microaggressions that “have been drilled in [her] from the time [she] was a kid.”

Riya. Riya just finished her third year and is a Math major. She was born in Hyderabad, India and moved to the U.S. with her family as a toddler. Though Riya was raised in a religious Hindu household, she does not consider herself a religious or spiritual person. Instead, she identifies with multiple worldviews including agnosticism, Hinduism, and secular humanism. She spoke a lot about how much of her Indian culture and family’s traditions are tied to religion, which makes it difficult for her to make sense of how Hindu traditions will (or will not) play a role in her own future and family. Riya spends most of her time on campus studying and visiting the on-campus recreation center where she enjoys yoga and group fitness classes. She spoke a bit about some of her experiences on campus as a South Indian when, in her perspective, most other Indian students are North Indian. She shared some of the “awkward” interactions she encounters when meeting foreign students from India because she sometimes assumes she will connect with them, but their cultures and traditions are drastically different. Riya ranked her other social identities, being a straight female, as not very important. Those aspects of her identity were never discussed within her family, and she personally did not grow up interacting with diverse people in terms of their gender and sexual orientations.

Tristan. Tristan just finished his second year and is majoring in Psychology with a minor in Biochemistry where he intends to go into patient care, emergency medicine, anesthesiology, or surgery. His parents are divorced and they both live in Northern
Virginia, along with his younger sister and two half-brothers. He shared that his dad is White and his mom is Chinese, both are deaf, and they met in Shanghai during one of his dad’s business trips. His mom’s family in China is not religious and his dad’s family in the U.S. is, so his parents began attending church together once they moved to the U.S. Tristan said his parents “seemed pretty Christian” when he was younger, but since divorcing they do not really attend church. When he was younger, he recalled spending time with his grandmother (his mom’s mother), who was not an American citizen and now lives in Shanghai, where he learned to speak with her in the Shanghai dialect.

Tristan does not recall ever identifying as a Christian out loud, rather accepted it as a part of his family’s traditions, and believes he was “mostly agnostic or atheist” in high school because he did not think about his worldview much. He remembered praying to God when he was very young, like when “something bad would happen,” but gradually thought it was pointless and began doubting the impact of prayer. He shared that, over time,

I thought I was more agnostic because I don’t believe that there definitely is not a higher power, I don’t think there couldn’t be, I’m just not sure because it could be out there, and so I didn’t want to close that potential.

He currently does not view his worldview beliefs as extremely important to his life, though he would like to give the role of spirituality more thought. As for his other identities, Tristan identifies as male “but not necessarily strictly male,” and believes his gender identity is important because he does not view gender as male vs. female, but more so as personality and gender expression. His sexual orientation, being gay, and his
ethnicity, are also important, sharing he believes it is unique that he “lives his life a little bit differently” and that “[he’s] not like everyone else.”

**Veronica.** Veronica just finished her third year and intends to graduate with a major in Psychology. She identifies as Christian, a majoritized worldview. Though her parents, who live 45 minutes from campus, were supportive of her college search process, Veronica is a first-generation student; therefore, finding an institution with financial support was crucial to her decision to enroll at W&M. She identifies as Christian and has never been baptized, though all of the churches she has attended have been Baptist, and she identifies with the Baptist values shared by her church. She also identifies as spiritual, stating, “some can be Christian but not think there’s an outer entity, and I do think there’s something out there that’s bigger than me and that guides my life and gives me a purpose.” In speaking to the intersections of identities, Veronica said, “I think in a way my religion makes me a little more liberal, and having faith that you’re born perfect by him makes me more accepting of people in a way that conservatives might not be.” She is not currently involved with any of the Christian student organizations, sharing that they are not “really [her] cup of tea” because they are not what she is used to in her Baptist community. Instead, Veronica spends much of her time outside of coursework with her predominately White Panhellenic sorority, for which she received backlash from friends she had made during a summer bridge program since it was not historically Black, describing this experience as the “first time having [her] Blackness challenged.”

**Yessenia.** Yessenia was a senior at the time of this study. She graduated shortly thereafter with a degree in International Relations and was accepted into the college’s Law School for the fall semester. She identifies as Christian, a majoritized worldview.
Her family moved to Virginia after living in another state for 14 years, stating better school systems and a closer proximity to other family members. She identifies as a non-denominational Christian and her family has never attended a denominational church. She believes her grandparents, who live in West Africa, are Episcopalian. Yessenia does not believe Christianity was forced upon her; rather, she described herself as a social person who enjoyed making friends at church. As she got older, she “developed [her] own personal relationship with [God] as time has progressed.” Yessenia’s church at home “is very contemporary with praise and worship…it’s more contemporary praise music.” She also shared that her church is predominately Black, though multiculturally focused, and the pastor is Black, which is drastically different than the churches located near the college. Yessenia tried attending a few churches in the area over the years, but said she is hypercritical of anything different from what she is used to. Though she is not involved in one of the largest Christian student organization’s large group gatherings, she does sometimes meet with women from a small group she attended her first year. To fulfill her need for church service, Yessenia began watching a live stream of her church from home on Sundays and at night her family meets virtually to have family prayer. Yessenia shared that her Christianity and racial and cultural identities are “top tier,” saying “you may not know my religion when you look at me, but you know I’m Black when you see me.” She attended predominately White schools until high school, including private schools from second through eighth grade, and she attributes her time at W&M and involvement in an African cultural organization to strengthening and fusing her Black American and West African identities together.
Component Two: Devise a Clear, Yet Flexible Process for Gathering Data

I gathered data for this study toward the end of the spring semester of 2018. Data sources for this study included: the interest form used for recruitment, two in-person interviews with each student (up to 90 minutes each), student-generated journaling over two weeks (up to four entries per student), and my post-reflexive journaling. The first interview with each student took place prior to students beginning their journal submissions, and the second interview occurred after they submitted their journal submissions over a two-week period. Both interviews were semi-structured, and I audio-recorded all of the interviews using a personal hand-held recording device. I saved the audio files in my personal Google Drive account and used an audio-to-text software, Descript, which translated my audio files into text with ~85% accuracy. From there, I listened to each interview and edited the transcripts as needed.

First Interview

I conducted the first interviews on campus in a reserved study room within Swem Library at times that were convenient for students. The interviews took place over a week and a half time period and each interview lasted between 60–90 minutes. These first interviews served as space for students and I to get to know one another, for me to introduce students to the study and answer any questions regarding the informed consent, and to allow students to expand upon the information they shared in the survey interest form. I used a semi-structured interview protocol, available in Appendix D, and spent time towards the end of each interview discussing the purpose and nature of students’ journal submissions.

Journal Submissions
In offering strategies for gathering data in phenomenological research, Vagle (2014) offered *written anecdotes* as a useful way to gather individuals’ understandings of their lived experiences. His use of written anecdotes stemmed from van Manen’s lived experience description protocol. According to Vagle (2014), a shared purpose of these strategies (between researchers and participants) is to provide researchers with “good access to the phenomenon and the myriad of intentional meanings that circulate through the lifeworld” (p. 87). Another shared purpose is to encourage participants to “write specifically about their experience of the phenomenon as a re-telling” (p. 89). Vagle (2014) noted that too much of a structured protocol might not be appropriate when assuming that phenomena are “shifting, moving, undoing, and re-doing themselves in and over time through various, sometimes competing contexts” (p. 90).

The written anecdote protocol that Vagle offered was intended to allow individuals to reflect upon a specific experience that happened in their *past*, a re-telling in order to bring phenomena to bear with and by the researcher. As reflected in the journal prompt for this study (Appendix E), I was specifically interested in students’ potential future encounters with worldview social inequities following our first interview. Rather than use anecdotes as solely a re-telling, one that may be very distant from the experience, I sought to gather information about students’ experiences shortly after they occurred. I encouraged students to use, in addition to physically writing or typing their reflections, their own preferred formats to capture their experiences, such as drawing or taking photos to keep the memories more vivid. When individuals encounter experiences, they might not sit, reflect upon, and write about their experiences in the moment. Also, such moments may be fleeting or long-lasting; therefore, I encouraged students to jot
down ideas, take a photo, or make a brief audio recording that they could return to later (preferably within 24 hours) to reflect upon and write about.

I asked students to submit their journal submissions over a two-week period following our first interview, which overlapped with several religious holidays including Easter and Passover. Although this timing for data gathering was not intentional, it further contextualized the findings from this study. Thus, the tentative manifestations (momentarily recognizable aspects of phenomena) I present in Chapter 4 would likely be different had I gathered data during a different season, such as Winter which encompasses other religious holidays, or a season with little or no holiday celebrations.

I did not provide deadlines or suggest that students submit their reflections in any particular order. Though it was impossible to know how many experiences students would recognize, encounter, or reflect upon, I did not expect or ask students to submit more than four reflections. Among the 15 students who participated, two did not submit journal reflections prior to our second interview together, two submitted one, three submitted two, three submitted three, and five submitted four. Students’ reflections were between one paragraph and one double-spaced page in length. All students typed their reflections before sharing them, and one student included Google images and personal drawings. Some students emailed their reflections to me over their two-week period, some emailed them to me the night before our second scheduled interview, and some brought them to our second interview.

Second Interview

Written anecdotes are a way to capture an individual’s understandings of an experience from a specific moment in time, so they are particularly useful for of-ness and
in-ness phenomenological approaches. However, because I used PIP, a through-ness approach, part of the second interview was focused on how students made meaning of the experiences they wrote about as well as how they continued to make meaning of those experiences upon returning to their reflections. I also conducted the second interviews (see Appendix F for protocol) on campus in a reserved study room within Swem Library, which took place over a week-and-a-half time period, and each lasted between 60–90 minutes. The purpose of these interviews was to allow students to expand upon the experiences they submitted, to explore how students made, and continued to make, meaning of those experiences, and to revisit students’ understandings of their own social identities in relation to the experiences they discussed.

Because two students did not submit reflections prior to the second interview, and some submitted a couple that were very brief, I developed an additional written prompt for some students to respond to if not much discussion arose from the written anecdotes exercise. Upon discussing any reflections they did submit or sharing their impressions of the study thus far, I left the room for 15-20 minutes and encouraged students to respond to the following two questions:

1. Over the past few weeks, or perhaps since your time at William & Mary, have you interacted with others who you believe (or who you know) hold different beliefs than you? How did you, or how do you continue to, make sense of those differences?

2. What do social inequities mean to you?

There were four students (Helen, Kopten, Liam, and Riley) who spent time responding to these questions, and we spent their remaining interview times discussing their responses
in more detail. I then closed all the interviews by asking a final question, “Given this project, please write about what you’ve learned about yourself, other people, or social inequities or issues regarding people’s worldview identities and beliefs.” I offered students a choice to either spend some time alone writing their responses, which most students did, or to respond to the question out loud in the moment.

**Component Three: Trustworthiness**

Because data analysis is a subjective, interpretive, and complex process in qualitative research, I adopted strategies (in addition to post-reflexion) to promote trustworthiness through relational competence, which address issues researchers bring to the research process (Jones et al., 2014, p. 38). Jones et al. (2014) defined trustworthiness as a set of strategies or plan for “assuring a study is of high quality” (p. 35). Though some qualitative scholars adopt inquiry-related considerations to ensure trustworthiness (e.g., concepts related to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability), Jones et al. acknowledged that this language stemmed from, and is oftentimes preserved through, the language of quantitative research. In outlining relational considerations for promoting trustworthiness, Jones et al. drew upon other qualitative and feminist scholars to outline the following criteria for relational competence: social identities, researcher positionality, power relations, and reflexivity (e.g., Lather, 2006; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Oleson, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2010; Weis & Fine, 2000). Below, I expand upon these four criteria to situate myself within this study and discuss how I leveraged my relational competence.

**Social Identities**
Through this research, I worked both within and outside of my community. Though I hold multiple social identities, the community for which I am explicitly working within is that of the nonreligious and nontheistic population. However, unless I disclosed this with student participants, they would have had no idea that I do not identify with religion or hold theistic beliefs. Even within my community, there exists a variety of perspectives. Though the two identities, atheist and antitheist, hold similar and differing beliefs, I often identify as atheist and have yet to identify as an antitheist. Antitheism is sometimes defined as a deliberate opposition to theism and oftentimes implies activism against theism on behalf of the identifier. I felt inclined to share these distinctions in the context of this study, because although I do not practice religion or hold religious beliefs, am not a spiritual person, and do not make sense of my world in a supernatural or paranormal sense, I have been mostly inactive in promoting my secular ideals over religion through research or advocacy. My nonreligious identity is an important part of who I am and influences how I view and make sense of the world. Additionally, I identify as a White, privileged, cisgender, female-identifying, temporarily abled, and first-generation person who is in a long-term relationship with another cisgender female (I do not tend to name my sexual orientation). Therefore, I represent several identities that placed me in unique marginalizing and majoritizing positions within this research.

**Positionality and Power Relations**

Because the methodology I used encourages researchers to embrace researcher positionality and incorporate notions of reflexivity into the research process (discussed in the next section), it is important that I acknowledge my positionality and the role of power in this study. Positionality allows me to recognize the role of my social identities
as well as the experiences, as a partial result of those identities, that have shaped my preconceived notions of the topics in this study. Such experiences inevitably influenced my interactions with student participants, the questions I asked and how I asked them, and how I interpreted and made sense of the data. Thus, I offer a brief autobiographical glimpse into factors and experiences that informed the purpose and development of my study and, ultimately, the findings I present in Chapter 4.

I grew up essentially an only child, with two half-brothers who are much older than me. I was raised by my biological parents who have been married 33 years now. I grew up among Christian practices, celebrating Christmas and Easter and attending Sunday school at a Catholic church in North Carolina. Though I recall attending church as a child, I do not remember when I stopped attending church. My dad never attended, though I understand (and still understand) him to identify as a Christian. I also never recall my parents reading the Bible, though I remember them buying me a version that was intended to make the concepts and language easier to understand for children. My earliest recollections of reading that Bible, which I believe I was in middle school at the time, was when I began asking my parents how “all those things” happened in seven days—I had not gotten past the first page at that point, and I was stuck on it for a long time. My mom stopped attending church sometime during my primary education, so I did, too. In high school, upon questioning my sexual orientation and disclosing that curiosity to my parents, presumptions were made that I was confused, and that church and religion had been missing from my life. Therefore, for a couple years during high school, I was encouraged to attend Christian counseling, visit medical doctors, and had several long and difficult conversations with others regarding religion and sexuality.
Around that time, I remember attending a church with my cousin, perhaps to give it another try. The church had a large high school student population, so it gave me somewhat of a sense of community. The church was located a good distance from my home, and although my mom and I attended this church for several months, we eventually stopped going. Whether we stopped due to the distance or something else, I cannot recall.

I continued to explore my sexuality throughout high school, was not attending church, and continued reading the Bible mostly in an attempt to have conversations with my parents about concepts with which I was struggling. It was often difficult to have conversations with my parents about religion and sexuality, so I was excited once I was in college because I could engage with others about difficult topics. I attended a small liberal arts college in the mountains of North Carolina. As I transitioned between majors including Zoology, Chemistry, Biology, and Psychology, I grew to appreciate neuropsychology, the role of consciousness, and habits of mind. I began to investigate topics such as spirituality, evolution, religion as an organization, sexuality, and the interplay between them, ultimately leading to my undergraduate thesis on sexuality and cognition. Developing my own worldview was an integral part of how I defined myself, interpreted situations, and made decisions. Exploring these topics in college was not an easy task for me as a first-generation student. When I was grappling with school, my major, and topics of interest, my parents had no context for how to assist me with making meaning of my experiences. Rather than being able to talk to them about my struggles, I recall some of their support coming in the form of recommendations to attend church or,
in one salient memory, my mother calling my professor and advisor directly to question why I was “studying homosexuality.”

As I continued my career in college environments, I met people of various worldview beliefs, many of who also identified as Christian (like my parents), but who held drastically different beliefs than them. From those experiences, I continue to grapple with differences across religious and nonreligious beliefs and how those influence others’ lives to this day. Within the context of a college environment, I believe it is crucial that students do not feel pushed to the margins regarding their (non)religious identities and that they are supported in addressing perceived inequities. I share the information above to provide an idea of some of the experiences that influenced my current understandings of worldview diversity, religion, and spirituality in the context of college students’ experiences and development in college. Similar to how I asked students to disclose and share with me some of their own social identities and experiences on campus, I also worked to share with students some of my identities and experiences that led me to this research topic. I was able to share some of my own identities toward the beginning of students’ first interviews, letting them know I thought it was only fair to share with them what I was asking them to share with me.

Because I view knowledge creation from multiple perspectives, I am aware that I need to simultaneously recognize, support, and represent students’ own stories, while leveraging my tendencies to question, critique, and consider the roles of external factors on students’ meaning making. To do this, I practiced post-reflexion as a form of reflexivity and implemented multiple forms of member checking to invite students into the process of considering, revising, and validating their experiences from my
interpretations. One form of member checking occurred during the second interview with students when I asked follow-up questions related to students’ submitted journal submissions to clarify that I understood their experiences more fully. A second form occurred after data gathering and analysis during which I constructed first-person summaries of students’ stories across all the data they shared with me and sought feedback (I describe this in more detail in component four).

Post-Reflexivity

Though Jones et al. (2014) discussed the use of reflexivity as a relational criterion, Vagle (2014) suggested post-reflexivity as a method for positioning oneself in the research process. Creating a post-reflexion plan is one of five components Vagle suggested for conducting PIP. These plans enable researchers “to stretch [their] idea of openness and humility” by paying attention to their assumptions of normality, how they connect and/or disconnect with the research process, and moments when they are shocked by their data (Vagle, 2014, p. 131). Post-reflexivity can be understood differently than some forms of reflexivity in that it allows researchers to move beyond a practice of bracketing, setting aside, or suspending knowledge of phenomena. Instead, Vagle (2014) viewed post-reflexivity as a process by which individuals unhinge, “doggedly question,” and critique, not only their knowledge of phenomena, but also their assumptions of that knowledge (p. 74). This kind of reflexivity requires more than a one-time, “autobiographical account” of personal biases, pushing investigators to continually post-reflex throughout data gathering and analysis (p. 132). For my plan, I wrote and recorded myself talking during moments in which I questioned my research design, read students’ submitted journal submissions, made adjustments to interview questions,
analyzed data, and interpreted findings in relation to my primary question. I used Google Docs to record my written thoughts and returned to them throughout data analysis to incorporate my thoughts, questions, and concerns into the findings.

**Component Four: Read and Write Your Way Through Your Data in a Systematic, Responsive Manner**

This component “is at the heart of data analysis” (Vagle, 2014, p. 134), and Vagle offered four steps that researchers can consider when analyzing their data:

1. A whole-parts-whole process,
2. A focus on intentionality and not subjective experience,
3. A balance among verbatim excerpts, paraphrasing, and researcher descriptions/interpretations, and
4. An understanding that the researcher is crafting a text—not merely coding, categorizing, making assertions, and reporting.

Though analytical designs vary across phenomenological approaches, Vagle noted that most approaches have a commitment to a *whole-parts-whole* method for analysis. Vagle (2014) argued that digging through the data in a whole-parts-whole way “forces us to dig deeply into and across our data...[giving] us opportunities to better see the shifting, fleeting, and fluid nature of phenomena” (p. 134). Vagle believed it important to begin *posting* the data, or reading data in a post-intentional way that recognizes the instability of findings, and to deconstruct the wholes that are developed. While that may seem counterintuitive, to go through a whole-parts-whole process only to deconstruct the whole again, Vagle (2014) argued that this is crucial for two reasons: it allows researchers to gain a strong sense of what might *mark* the phenomenon (i.e.,
present themes or tentative manifestations), and it is a good way to develop concrete information early in the analysis.

In order to deconstruct wholes, Vagle turned to what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described as *lines of flight*. Vagle (2014) believed this concept pushes researchers to consider the way all things are connected and interconnected, rather than assuming that “any thing, idea, belief, goal, phenomenon, person, animal, object, etc. can be thought of as stable, singular, and final” (p. 118). Whereas, in other forms of phenomenology, like hermeneutic or transcendental, the goal may be to uncover essential structures that a phenomenon holds, the goal of PIP “is to see what the phenomenon might become” (Vagle, 2014, p. 119). To practice this technique of lines of flight, Vagle further suggested that researchers employ two analytical “noticings”: to (a) “actively look for ways that knowledge takes off” by questioning what “mis-fit” notions or ideas exist in the analysis to uncover what “is not yet think-able,” and to (b) “distinguish lines of flight from other lines operating on us and the phenomenon” by interrogating preliminary manifestations through questions such as, “Where might I appear ‘uncertain’ of what something means?” and “Where might I have retreated to either/or thinking?” (pp. 135–136).

Admittedly, all the above recommendations and ideas seemed extremely daunting and confusing as I prepared to analyze (and when analyzing) my data. Although I kept Vagle’s four steps in mind once I finished gathering my data, my approach to analysis and how I read and wrote my way through the data, was a long, evolving process. This fourth component of Vagle’s PIP methodology is purposefully the vaguest because it differs by researcher and phenomenon, among other factors. Next, I share what my
process entailed, not because I believe my methods are necessarily replicable or adaptable to other researchers’ phenomena or research processes, but because I want others to know the choices I made and why I made them.

My first step in the data gathering process included interviewing all 15 students. Then, I utilized Descript to translate the audio recordings into text. Through that program, I uploaded the audio recordings from each interview, and, within about five minutes, the program populated a transcription with about 85% accuracy. Then, I conducted a holistic listening and reading of each interview while editing for transcription errors. I completed these transcriptions before the second set of interviews began. As students submitted their journal reflections over the two-week period, I saved their entries but did not read their entries until 1–2 days before each student’s second interview (or the day of the interview depending upon when they shared them with me). I read each student’s journal submissions and made notes to ask follow-up questions in the second interview. Following the second interviews with students, I conducted a similar process as I did for the first interviews, using Descript and conducting a holistic listening, reading, and editing of each interview.

Next, I focused on data for each student separately. In doing so, I re-read both transcripts from each student and copied verbatim excerpts into a separate Word document. These excerpts included information shared by students that related to the purpose of my research question and provided additional familial background or demographic information that I believed would better inform the findings. Then, I crafted a first-person narrative from the perspective of the student based on the excerpts I used from students’ interview transcripts. With 30 interview transcriptions ranging from 14–34
pages in length, these narratives were 6–7 pages in length, single spaced. These narratives served two purposes: as a way for students to provide feedback on my interpretations of what they shared with me in the interviews, and for me to familiarize myself even more with the data. I invited students to review their summaries and, if interested, to let me know their thoughts on my interpretations and to share any concerns or questions. Most students responded to let me know they had received the summaries, and only a couple had some suggestions for further anonymizing their stories.

As I discussed previously, Vagle (2014) encouraged researchers using PIP to look for tentative manifestations during their analysis process, which some phenomenological or qualitative scholars may refer to as themes or patterns of meaning. To begin the process of identifying tentative manifestations, I re-read across all of students’ data points, including the descriptive summaries I shared with students and their interview transcriptions and personal reflections. I used a Word document that I titled, “Data Parts,” which I organized by columns. I named the first column “Ideas,” the second column “Excerpt,” and the last column “Student and Location.” I began the “Ideas” column by naming aspects of students’ data, which resulted in an array of ~200 topics including “reason for attending W&M,” “family structure, locations, and dynamics,” “personal worldview descriptions,” “friends,” “campus involvement,” and several emotions such as “fear,” “discomfort,” and “frustration.” These topics ranged from conceptual and demographic ideas to emotional or verbatim terms that I noticed in students’ data. The “Excerpt” column included students’ transcribed data that were associated with each idea and the “Student and Location” column indicated from which student and where the data came.
Then, in acknowledging Vagle’s (2014) perspective that manifestations exist in-between and among individuals and their world, and that phenomena are not solely individually constructed, I worked to identify which ideas were prevalent across several students’ data, which resulted in about 65 ideas. I moved these ideas onto physical sticky notes that I could move around on a wall. At this stage in my data analysis, I became stuck on how I wanted to move forward. I felt as if I had too many ideas floating around that were perhaps not relevant to most students or did not seem to relate directly to my research question, as highlighted in one of my journal entries on July 2, 2018:

I’ve been really worried for a while, continually thinking about how I would analyze my data, how I would begin to even dig into all of that information across students. I kept returning to my research question and was getting confused about how I would analyze data given my primary RQ and my informative questions....I should be able to “trust the process” of an open analysis and not get too bogged down at the start that the manifestations won’t “respond to” my RQs in an appropriate or specific way.

As I continued working through each student’s data to pull ideas into my Word document, I was hesitant to name them, as I described on July 5, 2018:

As I began to do a 3rd or 4th? line-by-line reading of students’ data, I began with Alix. In pulling excerpts and “naming” the idea of the excerpt, I found that sometimes I would give a brief overview or 2-3 words that signaled what the excerpt was about. For instance, when I first added excerpts from Alix regarding her experiences with citing the prayer with her sorority, I had notes like “Guilt for saying Christian-prayer” and “guilt for being silly over guilt” and things like that.
And then other times, she may have given an experience, like with the cafeteria worker and she felt “resigned,” so I named that excerpt “resignation.” So these “idea interpretations” are even forming as I go along. Then, as I added a second student, I was going through Riya’s transcripts again. When I got to the parts on her experience with yoga on campus, she talked about the experience feeling inauthentic, and then feeling “bad” for saying things like that. And as I was processing this experience, it reminded me of Alix’s feeling of guilt, guilt for saying the prayer and guilt for not saying the prayer. Feeling like if she did say the prayer, it would be a lie and inauthentic…in a way. This reminded me of Riya’s sense of “feeling bad” for acknowledging that the situation seemed inauthentic and, later, when she discusses feeling like a hypocrite for expressing concern over the music when she isn’t “super Indian.”

As shown in Figure 8 below, I spent some time re-orienting myself to my primary research question, understandings of the phenomenon, and some of the methodological principles of PIP. Because the photo may be difficult to discern, below are some ideas or goals that I adopted from Vagle’s work, which I tried to focus on as I moved forward in my data analysis process by writing them on my data board:

- Theorize the ways things manifest or appear
- I am not studying the individual; rather, how a phenomenon manifests and appears in the world
- I am curious how people are connected meaningfully (intentional relationships)
- Elucidate manifestations, not center them
• Intentionalities are always becoming, not static
• Phenomena are social, not egocentric
• I am crafting a text and am open to potential forms

Figure 8. Image of my Data Board During Data Analysis.

Vagle (2014) suggested that researchers tentatively adopt titles for manifestations and adjust them throughout the analytic process. In continuing to organize the ideas I had named into similar groupings and in removing ideas that were not relevant to most students’ experiences, I began to tentatively name some manifestations. The first set of manifestations I named were: learned, emotions, power dynamics, privilege, understanding of inequities, and action against inequities. At that point, I did not feel confident that I understand enough about what each manifestation meant and, more
importantly, how they related to one another. So, I went back and reviewed my theoretical frameworks and literature that I shared in Chapter 2 to re-familiarize myself with terminology from the field to continue to help me hone and re-name the manifestations. Below is a journal entry I wrote on August 4, 2018,

As I’m coding, I’m beginning to realize the differences in how I’m naming these ideas that are cropping up and that I’m putting a name to. Many of the ideas I’m recording are usually an expression, or a feeling of some sort, nouns almost, the idea of apprehension or fear, for example. And when I do that, I’m working to capture students’ feelings and emotions of those particular situations. What I recognize, though, is that those feelings are essentially a constructed reality, based on that person’s experiences and abilities to articulate those experiences as well as how I’m interpreting them. It’s a very constructivist perspective to name an emotion as a phenomenological noun. I’m wondering how I might also express additional factors or patterns that relate to my research question and present those as findings, outside of students’ own words. I am also developing findings and making summarized connections across students’ experiences that they might not speak to, and I’m unsure yet if those should be separated from the tentative manifestations of students’ experiences or sort of intertwined.

As I continued to name and re-name the manifestations, they became the following: emotionality, schema, identity, exposure, power, privilege and oppression, and normativity. At this point in my data analysis, I began writing about students’ experiences that were associated with each manifestation in a separate Google Document so that I could easily move text across manifestations if needed. However, I quickly came
to realize that students’ experiences seemed to span multiple manifestations, making it difficult to maintain separate Google Documents for the different manifestations. For example, I found myself writing about a student’s experience in one manifestation (such as emotionality), and then wanting to address the same experience again in a different manifestation (such as normativity). Upon trying to continue with that method, I realized how disoriented the findings became because I was isolating certain pieces of students’ experiences by manifestation—rather than experience—which disrupted students’ stories and the manifestations, making it difficult to read and understand coherently. From this realization, over time, I came to understand what I named emotionality as the primary tentative manifestation. In the next chapter, I present varied expressions of emotionality through students’ data, which addresses the fifth methodological component of PIP—crafting a text that captures tentative manifestations of the phenomenon in its multiple, partial, and varied contexts. As a reminder, manifestations are deemed tentative in PIP; thus, tentative manifestations reflect momentarily recognizable aspects of phenomena.
Chapter 4: Findings

…write around and through the grey areas—whatever they might come to be.

—Mark Vagle, Crafting Phenomenological Research, 2014

Until I began writing this chapter, I thought that the literature review was the most time-consuming and that my introduction was the most difficult aspects of this inquiry to put into words. However, as highlighted by Vagle’s quote, I had never experienced so many grey areas of information until I analyzed my data and began putting my findings into text. I want to begin this chapter by acknowledging, perhaps the obvious, that these research findings are subjective and highly influenced by my own experiences, social identities, understandings of related inquiry, and interpretations of students’ data—reflecting the nature of most phenomenological approaches to research. Though I worked to insert ways for students and me to shape their stories together, these findings are just one representation of how critical consciousness regarding worldview inequities took shape for these students.

As a reminder, my primary research question was, “How might critical consciousness take shape for undergraduate college students (aged 18–24) whose (non)religious and existential worldview beliefs are an important part of their social identities?” The language, take shape, refers to how phenomena are “produced in time and space, and how [they are] entangled and provoked” (Vagle, 2018, p. 150). Additionally, there were three informative questions I asked while developing this study
that supported how I examined my research question, the literature and theories I used, and the data gathering and analysis methods I adopted. Those informative questions were:

- What kinds of social inequities between or among people of different worldview identities and beliefs do students recognize in their daily lives?
- How might students make meaning of those worldview social inequities?
- What is the role of context in how students make meaning of worldview social inequities?

Through both their written reflections and interactions during our interviews, I sensed a variety of emotions from students. Initially, I recall naming some of the emotions that students identified in their own written reflections, such as when they used the term “frustrated.” However, as I read and re-read the data, I was reminded of my interactions with students and realized that their emotional expressions were being conveyed in ways other than their naming of emotions. For example, I began recognizing emotions from students in ways other than their spoken or written words, such as in their body language and physical responses (e.g., hand movements or deep breaths) as they spoke about their experiences. Though emotions may signify solely internally driven phenomena, in that students are expressing their emotions, as I will share throughout this chapter, I believe students’ emotions were also influenced by their environmental and systemic surroundings and past experiences, suggesting their emotions existed as relationships between students’ own development and their environments.

My naming of the term emotionality as the primary tentative manifestation was influenced by my understanding of how Vagle (2014) described phenomena through the
concept of intentionality, or connections between the self and the world. I was reminded of the term intentionality, as opposed to intention (like emotion), within phenomenological research. As I wrote in Chapter 3, Vagle (2014) argued that intentionality, as a construct of interconnectedness, recognizes that people do not “act as autonomous meaning-making agents oriented to the world with purpose and intent” (p. 27). Thus, in a similar way, not only did I understand emotion as self-expressions from students, I also came to understand emotionality as varied expressions of the intentional relationships that existed between students and their experiences with worldview inequities.

**Expressions of Emotionality**

I recognized more emotions than I will discuss in this chapter; however, I identified the following most often across multiple students’ experiences in my analysis: frustration, discomfort, guilt, fear, conflict, sympathy, and curiosity. The remainder of this chapter is organized by students’ expressions of emotionality. The order of these emotions began as an order of when I named the emotions as I analyzed students’ data alphabetically by their pseudonyms. However, as I crafted my findings, I rearranged the ordering based on conceptual transitions between emotions that I include throughout the chapter.

**Frustration**

When reading through students’ reflections, and in interacting with them during our interviews when discussing worldview inequities or prejudices, I sensed frustration from several students including Peter, Tristan, Alix, Riya, and Missy. By frustration, I mean feelings such as annoyance, anger, and aggravation. I first introduce Peter and
Tristan’s experiences and then segue the others’ experiences into the next section because their feelings of frustration were also complicated by other emotions of discomfort and guilt, which Peter and Tristan did not portray. At one point during my second interview with Peter, I asked him if there had ever been times that he encountered a topic or situation that was particularly challenging for him regarding people’s worldviews on campus. In response, he recalled an event that occurred in a Hinduism course he had taken during his first semester (the term prior to this study) at William & Mary (W&M). One of his class assignments was to write a poem in the “spirit of Hindu poetry,” and part of students’ grades included reading the poems aloud during class. Peter said that one student read a poem that was a “very large critique of the Christian faith, the church, and the religion,” and it was very “openly anti-Christian in the way it was written.”

Although Peter said this situation did not “hurt” him, he was “a little bit frustrated” and it “put [him] in a really uncomfortable situation because of [his] beliefs.” After a brief pause, Peter continued:

I almost wanted to talk to her [the student who wrote the poem] like, “Hey, I understand maybe that’s the perception but that’s not necessarily correct.”

Because there were definitely some factual errors in it as well that were coming from a place of stereotyping.

I asked Peter if there was any encouragement for discussion by the instructor where he could have shared some of his thoughts. Peter said, “No there was not….it was just you know, okay, great job, next, type of thing.” Through this experience, it appeared that

3 Peter is a first-year student who identifies as Christian, Protestant, non-denominational, male, heterosexual, and Caucasian. When re-introducing a student participant for the first time after a significant amount of text, I will footnote their self-descriptors as a partial reminder of ways they identify.
Peter was in a situation where another student shared her thoughts about Peter’s worldview, which Peter believed to be stereotypical and factually incorrect. This led me to wonder, too, about the other student’s perspective on the experience and to recognize that their “critique” of Christianity was perhaps a result of their own past experiences and personal knowledge regarding Christianity. However, because the students were unable to engage in dialogue about their poems, Peter was forced to sit with his frustration and missed an opportunity to process his emotions, gain a new perspective, or experience differing emotions.

Similar to Peter, I gathered a sense of frustration from Tristan from one of his reflections. Easter (a Christian holiday) took place during the two-week period when students were writing their reflections. In one reflection, Tristan wrote about an experience that occurred on Easter morning as he was walking into the dining hall on campus:

Many students and their families were all dressed up and taking pictures. I assumed this was because it was Easter and they had gone to church. There were two girls dressed up in front of me about to enter the dining hall. I heard one of them remark to the other, “Look at the guy over there with the bedhead. He’s just wearing sweatpants today.” At first, I thought that it was somewhat unusual that he was the only person who dressed down in a room full of people in suits and dresses. And then I thought, why does it matter what he’s wearing? After re-reading his reflection in our second interview, Tristan said, “I just thought it’s interesting, like the difference between my initial reaction, just what I noticed based on

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4 Tristan is a second-year student who identifies as agnostic, male, gay, and Caucasian and Asian.
instinct, and then after thinking about the situation a little more.” Tristan said that he realized “it doesn’t even matter what he’s wearing and this isn’t some formal event, it’s just people meeting up at this place.”

Additionally, I believe Tristan’s reflection further demonstrated the “pervasiveness” of, in Tristan’s words, and normativity of Christian holidays on the W&MC campus, other campuses, and society at large. He wrote,

Easter is a Christian holiday that obviously everyone doesn’t celebrate. The fact they were pointing out how someone wasn’t dressing up for that specific holiday really made me realize how ingrained certain religious events are in our culture. I’m assuming that’s what they meant, so that’s how I interpreted it. I’m not Christian, so I didn’t go to church or dress up either. I felt slightly irritated that this person just assumed everyone should be participating in Easter and dress up, and if you didn’t, that was to be looked down upon.

In our interview, Tristan spoke a bit more about how religion is integrated into our culture, but that “it shouldn’t be an expectation that everyone participates” in the “one dominating culture” (i.e., Christianity). He noted that it “seems kind of obvious” that not everyone should participate in Christian holidays, but when it is reworded to something like “American traditions or holidays,” people just assume “that you are going to celebrate most of the important holidays.” Tristan spoke about how, in general, he does not get frustrated or irritated very often because he tries not to allow negative situations bother him too much. From my time with Tristan during our interviews, I gathered a general sense of mellowness from his personality, in that he appeared calm, easy-going, and was soft spoken when compared to some of the other student participants.
In the following section, I move to discussing some students’ feelings of, not only frustration, but also discomfort and guilt. Though I similarly sensed frustration from Alix, Riya, and Missy, the three of them also shared additional feelings around discomfort or guilt that Peter and Tristan did not appear to express. As I will describe through Alix, Riya, and Missy’s experiences next, I wondered if Peter’s and Tristan’s frustrations stemmed from being observers in their respective stories, whereas in the other three students’ stories, they were the persons being influenced by the frustrating or discomforting experience. Though there are probably several factors that contributed to the differences between Peter’s and Tristan’s feelings compared to those of Alix, Riya, and Missy (such as other social identities and contextual factors), I noticed a marked distinction in these students’ position—as observers versus recipients of inequities—within their experiences.

**Discomfort and Guilt**

In addition to feelings of frustration from some students, others, like Alix, Riya, and Missy appeared to be frustrated while also feeling some form of discomfort and/or guilt. By discomfort, I mean feelings such as anxiety, uneasiness, or unsettledness. By guilt, I mean feelings such as regret, remorse, or shame. I begin with Alix and Riya, and then share Missy’s experiences that I believe highlight different forms of discomfort and guilt compared to those of Alix and Riya. During the two-week reflection period, Alix’s sorority initiated several new members. During our second interview, I gathered a sense of frustration and guilt in Alix’s reflection and dialogue. Although she was “not allowed to discuss what happens during the initiation,” she wrote generally about her experience

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5 Alix is a first-year student who identifies as nonreligious, female, bisexual, and White.
and perspectives. She shared that, during the initiation process (as well as during chapter meetings), her sorority recites a Christian prayer that is part of the sorority’s traditions. In her reflection, Alix wrote that she is “not forced to say the prayer” and that it is “not likely that anyone would notice if [she] didn’t say the prayer” since everyone recites it as a group. However, she shared,

I still felt some pressure to say the prayer. That day, I said the beginning part of the prayer. I know the beginning better and part of me feels guilty and less a part of my sorority if I do not say at least some of it. I felt guilty for saying the prayer because I cannot say it sincerely. It feels wrong to repeat what I do not believe and I feel like I am deceiving the people I am around even though they probably wouldn’t mind if I did not say it. I know that I am not the only non-Christian person in my sorority, so I also felt a little annoyed that we still have to go through the motions of a Christian prayer. It is frustrating that even though our organization isn’t Christian, we still have to say this prayer.

Upon re-reading her reflection in our second interview, I asked Alix what information drew her attention. She named the experience “a lose-lose situation” because she felt guilty “either way” by reading or not reading the prayer. She said that when she recites the prayer, she is saying words that she does not believe in, which “seems inherently contradictory” because their Creed is “about being honest in what you’re saying.” Alix said she also found having to say the prayer “mildly annoying” because her sorority is not specifically a Christian organization any more (most sororities and fraternities with a religious foundation were historically restricted to religiously-identifying individuals). In asking her to share a bit more about her own initiation
process, she shared that, not until she was initiated and a part of the sorority did she discover that saying the prayer was optional (or encouraged as optional), which was “kind of frustrating.” It appears that a combination of the pressure Alix felt in having to say the prayer, as well as the guilt she experiences for both saying the prayer and not wanting to say the prayer, played a role in her overall frustration of the situation.

Riya, similarly, expressed feelings of frustration, guilt, and discomfort through an experience she shared. During our first interview, she expressed discomfort with some of her experiences at the recreation center on campus, while also portraying guilt for expressing her feelings and concerns. She spoke about how much she enjoys visiting the recreation center on campus, where she often attends group fitness and yoga classes. She mentioned a yoga certification program she had begun the semester prior and shared that she began avoiding the recreation center altogether because of her experiences in the yoga program and several yoga classes. She said that the yoga classes felt “slightly inauthentic,” and elaborated,

I’m gonna feel bad for saying this, but even for, like the name of the school is Shanti Garudasana, which shanti means peace and garud means eagle, but asana means pose. And so she [the instructor] keeps saying the name of the school is peaceful eagle and in my mind I'm like, “that's not what it means.”

Throughout her interview, Riya seemed to negate her concerns. For example, she said she felt like “a snob” for complaining, but that some of the instructor’s music selection makes her uncomfortable. She also said,

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6 Riya is a third-year student who identifies as agnostic, Hindu, nonreligious, a secular humanist, female, straight, and Asian-Indian.
Some of the songs that they put on, they’re fairly commonly known in Hindu because when you do your prayer you have different versus that you say and so it’s basically those verses, but I’ve always heard them in a very traditional setting because I’m from Southern India. And so [the music] just sounds really weird to me to hear it sung in an opera way. So even if I was trying to do yoga or whatever pose I was in, I would hear the music and I would be like, “oh my God, why do they have to keep using this song?” Because [the instructors] all kind of use the same songs because they have the yoga teacher Spotify list. I just feel uncomfortable listening to that because I felt like they were ruining my culture. But I mean, I don't want to say that because I get that it comes from a good place, but I've just always heard it in a certain way. I just feel very uncomfortable listening to some of the music and so I started avoiding it or mainly instructors who use that music.

As Riya said above, she started “avoiding it” and shared that “at some points [she] would go an entire week without working out because [she doesn’t] like running” or using stationary forms of cardio. Riya was just as unhappy and uncomfortable going to the recreation center and attending yoga classes as she was not going to the recreation center at all. Though Alix and Riya both expressed levels of frustration and guilt through their respective experiences, it seemed that Riya also felt a sense of discomfort that Alix did not express.

Through one of Missy’s reflections, I also gathered a sense of discomfort—though a very different form of discomfort when compared to Alix and Riya. In one

7 Missy is a second-year student who identifies as Roman Catholic, female, heterosexual, and White.
reflection, Missy wrote that she had been thinking about her Spanish class “when [she] realized it promoted a worldview.” She wrote,

I also felt as though if you had a certain worldview, it would be easier to get a better participation grade in the class. Our class requires us to participate in cultural activities and write reflections on them; however, many of the activities promoted by the professor are those that highlight individualistic thinking and the promotion of queer identities…. Many religious perspectives focus on the importance of humbling oneself and requires one to focus not on the self as the most important aspect of one’s life, but God, a greater deity, or the other. I feel as though the content and syllabus of the class I am in assumes that everyone believes in the promotion of individualism…. I also became wary knowing that other classes, such as the Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies class I took, promote individualistic thinking. I was reminded of the uneasiness that I felt last year when my religious views on chastity and abortion did not align with the views of others in my greatly discussion-based [Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies] class, causing me to question the validity of my worldview, to participate less in class for fear of anger directed towards me, and to become confused in general.

As we were talking in the second interview about this reflection, I asked Missy if she ever felt inclined to share her feelings with anyone about her experience. She said that, in her Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies course, she thinks “a lot of people assume certain things about those with different beliefs or the church,” and so she has “spoken up” in support of what she believes the church truly teaches. Nevertheless,
Missy is “also really uncomfortable in those situations because [she doesn’t] want to be against anybody.” It seems that Missy was experiencing some discomfort from this course because it led her to “question the validity of [her] worldview.” As Missy also suggested, she becomes uncomfortable when she is in situations where she may be perceived as being “against” others or when she expresses religious opinions that she believes, in those contexts, are different from the majority. Although I believe it is important to recognize that Missy was experiencing discomfort in those courses, such a form of discomfort appears to be a very different form when compared to Riya and Alix who were uncomfortable in situations where their worldview beliefs and practices were being forgotten, ignored, or exploited. Thus, though Riya, Alix, and Missy did not speak directly about the roles of their own social identities in these experiences, their feelings of discomfort were further complicated by the privileged and oppressed identities they each hold.

**Fear**

In addition to the discomfort that students expressed, some, like Tristan, Missy, and Yessenia, also expressed feelings of fear. By fear, I mean feelings such as worry, angst, or distress. In-between our two interviews, one of Tristan’s friends shared an experience with him that she encountered at her part-time job, a child-care center on campus. That day, some of the children were playing a parachute game where they were using a large nylon material to toss in the air and run underneath from one side to the other. One of the children’s moms arrived during the game and, as Tristan wrote according to his friend’s re-telling,
One of the other employees, a woman in her fifties, ran over to tell the boy his mom was here. My friend said she brought over the boy and the rainbow parachute over to the mom, and then said, “Look, you can use this as a rainbow hoodie!” [Presumably, the employee was suggesting that the parachute could be worn as a hijab.] The mother apparently chuckled awkwardly, either due to not understanding or discomfort. My friend found this highly inappropriate but felt she could not do anything, since the employee was an older superior. She appeared to feel bad for remaining passive, but at least the situation didn’t escalate. I was somewhat surprised that adults still acted that way today. The employee’s careless ignorance of the Muslim woman’s religion by joking about a religious garment was definitely unwarranted. This reinforced my thought that some individuals do not take non-Christian religious practices seriously or do not take the time to understand other religions or cultures. They make any statement that comes to mind or may seem comical, without considering how another person might view the comment.

Upon re-reading his reflection during our second interview, Tristan highlighted information that stuck out to him, including the words “chuckled awkwardly,” saying that he and his friend were not “really sure why she [the mom] might have reacted that way, it’s unclear, and [the mom] also didn’t have very good English and might have thought that it was sort of insulting.” He wondered if the mother was uncomfortable due to not understanding the employee, or because she was offended by the employee’s comment. Other words Tristan highlighted from his reflection above were “older superior” (referencing the employee), and he said,
I’ll highlight older superior because that’s something that contributes, or might stifle a conversation about sensitive religious and cultural topics. Because usually in any situation, when you have a superior and you think that something’s not going right or something’s not working out you don’t feel motivated to tell them about it or debate with them because you have a personal risk as well…of being told you’re wrong or losing your job.

From Tristan’s own reflection of the situation, and the interpretation he shared regarding his friend’s concerns, his friend felt as though she could not say anything about the situation due to potential repercussions. Tristan appeared to agree with his friend’s fears, confirming that there is a personal risk involved when confronting an “older superior” about “sensitive religious and cultural topics.”

The fear that Tristan and his friend referenced, and potentially live with through additional situations involving superiors, is driven by power and power dynamics. Power can be understood through positions or roles, such as a supervisor (or manager) in an employer-employee relationship. Interestingly, in his reflection, Tristan used the term superior, which can connote a sense of higher quality or importance in addition to, or as opposed to, positional ranking. I believe Tristan’s words are important as they substantiate his and his friend’s feelings that there is often fear and risk involved in addressing concerning topics with superiors, or those deemed more important.

Similar to Tristan’s experience, Missy shared a reflection in which the notion of fear arose. However, as Missy’s sense of discomfort was quite different in comparison to Alix and Riya’s, it seemed that Missy’s sense of fear was also different when compared to the fear described by Tristan. In one of her reflections, Missy wrote about a car ride
during which some members of her mentoring club were on their way to a volunteer opportunity the Saturday before Easter. Missy shared that someone asked the group what everyone planned on doing that upcoming weekend, and that the resulting conversation revolved mostly around Easter and Passover traditions. Missy told everyone that she was going to a three-hour vigil that night in celebration of Easter; however, she found herself “worried that [she] would begin to talk about something of which someone in the group was unaware.” Thus, she went into much more detail about her tradition than she normally would with others whom she knows are Catholic. She wrote that “one of the members did not contribute much to the conversation other than to ask when Easter was,” but Missy had previously heard that individual talk passionately about other topics that were of interest to them. Missy said that she was “pretty confident” the other student did not have strong religious beliefs, if any, and that they were not familiar with her Catholic traditions, so Missy said she was thinking, “Oh no, I don’t want this conversation to be isolating.” As suggested through Missy’s previous reflection from her Gender, Sexuality, and Women Studies classes, she was aware of feeling isolated because of her religious beliefs. Perhaps her dislike for feeling isolated played a role in her concern over placing the other student in an isolated position during the car ride.

In her reflection, Missy concluded her experience by writing,

I think that this campus does a good job of not assuming people’s religions, but I think that I have learned to worry about how I affect others in talking about my religion of which they might not agree. I do not mind having to explain myself or my religion, but I sometimes feel as though religion, spirituality, or the lack
thereof is a taboo topic on campus. It is really strange to me because these topics are what guide everyone’s lives.

During our second interview, Missy postulated that many people generally “want to avoid contention,” and earlier in a different reflection, she shared that she is similarly uncomfortable in situations where she may be perceived as being “against” others—leading me to wonder if Missy’s fears and discomfort over engaging in conversation of controversial or differing topics influences her belief that perhaps most people also want to “avoid contention.” She also shared that she personally has “a lot of worry or consciousness of how [she] affects others” and is often hesitant to talk about her Catholic religion and traditions with others. Missy’s perception that worldview topics are “taboo” on campus might certainly influence her willingness to engage in conversations with others about her or others’ worldviews; however, it also seems plausible that her own fear of engaging in such topics contributes to her limited conversation with others regarding worldview differences. Finally, Missy’s statement above, “It is really strange to me because these topics are what guide everyone’s lives,” leads me to wonder about the diversity of conversations she is having about worldviews because such worldview topics are not necessarily “what guide[s] everyone’s lives.”

For Yessenia, she shared a somewhat similar notion of fear when compared to Missy in that she expressed concern over how she might be perceived by others, as a Christian, on a “very liberal campus.” One question I asked all students during our first interview was to share with me some of their experiences on campus given their particular worldview(s). Before attending college, Yessenia attended a private school in

8 Yessenia is a fourth-year student who identifies as Christian, non-denominational, female, heterosexual, and Black and African.
Illinois, inclusive of Bible class and mandatory chapel visits, from second through eighth grade, everyone at her school knew she was Christian, and “Christianity was an assumed characteristic of everyone there.” Yessenia recalled being very stressed when she first moved to Virginia because it was going to be the first time she would attend public school, mockingly saying, “I was concerned cause I was like, Oh my God, these public school kids are gonna offer me weed and they’re gonna make me sin and what am I supposed to do?” Yessenia shared that when she came to W&M, she wanted others to know she was Christian and referenced a “pastor effect,” which is when “pastors are afraid to tell people they don’t know that they’re pastors because then people change the way that they act around them and they change the things that they say because they feel like they’re being judged.” She continued,

William & Mary is a very liberal campus, very. But there’s also a lot of people that go here who have been oppressed by people from the Christian religion and people who claim Christianity. And so my concern being on campus, and not now so much anymore, but when I first came and I was aware of that culture I didn’t want people to make assumptions about me because of what I said that I believed because I didn’t want them to equate me with people who I distance myself from within Christianity specifically.

As she ended on this thought in the interview, Yessenia asked me to clarify my original question. I encouraged her to continue speaking about those experiences and asked her what she thought contributed to her awareness around the idea that some people can feel oppressed by those who claim Christianity. She recalled a time when “a group of old people” were on campus, who she said visits every year to “hand out New
Testament Bibles around campus.” The time she was referencing occurred when “Yik Yak [a smartphone application where individuals create discussion threads anonymously within a five-mile radius] was still a thing.” She said that students were posting about how “they got their Bible and threw it away because of how the church has said this about them and they don’t want to have it,” and that she “was like ‘oh snap, oh no.’” These thoughts reminded her of “a thing in general” regarding the Westboro Baptist Church [a U.S. Christian church that many individuals deem a hate group due to their protest activities toward, for example, non-heterosexual and non-Christian people] and how, although it is “an extreme end,” there are “still people in that realm causing trouble.” She wondered aloud, “Will people think that I think that way?” and shared, “I was afraid that I would say it [being Christian] and then I would never be given a chance to explain myself.” Yessenia then noted that this was a concern that she has since “gotten over” and said,

I’ll say I’m a Christian now, even though two weekends ago I was at William Mary’s law school admitted students’ day and I was going around with a girl that I had met there who I was looking to live with next year if I stay here, and they had an activities fair and it was all the different tables and organizations that they had. And they had a Christian Legal Society, and just because of the nature of the conversations that we’d been talking about, we’d been talkin’ about going out and drinking and all that kind of stuff and I felt like I had not been presenting as Christian and I felt like she was someone who would see that as a lame thing and so I didn’t go over to the table. She was walking around with me and I didn’t want her, I didn’t, like I knew she wouldn’t say anything but I didn’t know what she
would start to think about it. So I didn’t go. And thinking about it, I missed out on an opportunity to talk to people about the society on campus. But it’s just, it’s a process, it’s progress. And so I’m still learning and figuring out what I’m comfortable with and what I’m not comfortable with.

It seemed that Yessenia was experiencing some conflict between feeling proud about her identity and wanting others to know she is Christian, while also feeling worried that others might think she holds oppressive ideals because of her Christian worldview. Although the original purpose of the written reflections in the study were to be for experiences that happened in-between our interviews, I encouraged Yessenia to consider writing a reflection about that experience, if she was interested, because I believed it to be integral to my overall exploration of critical consciousness. Yessenia decided to write a reflection about this experience, and in her reflection, she wrote,

I also didn’t have any idea what [the newfound friend’s] stance on religion was and I didn’t want her to make assumptions about me before I’d even had a chance to shake the hand of the smiling girl standing next to the Christian Legal Society table. My Christianity is CENTRAL to my beliefs and values, to who I am. It is something that I want people to know about me. But it’s hard to put that desire in to practice, sometimes. There are a lot of Christians in today’s world who do and say outrageous, bigoted, racist, sexist, etc. things in the name of God. They make actual Christians look so BAD and they’re the ones that often speak the loudest. I always feel so silly/privileged when I think about this because there are Christians in other countries that risk their lives daily for the chance to go to church. There are people of all manner of religions, Islam in particular, that are relentlessly
harassed and discriminated against right here in the U.S. If all of those people can claim their beliefs unabashedly, why couldn’t I just walk up to a table???

I believe these passages from Yessenia reflect, among other things, her awareness around how some individuals with majoritized Christian identities hold discriminatory beliefs toward non-Christians, influencing her own willingness to openly and proudly claim her Christianity. As a senior, she shared that all her friends know she is Christian and that she believes in God, but she still feels like she is “not always living up to the standard of what Christianity’s supposed to exemplify.”

Additionally, Yessenia’s feelings of fear around what others might think of her is further complicated by her own awareness of Christian privilege, not only within the U.S. but also worldwide. For example, in her second interview she said,

Christians in other countries that are risking their lives to claim the religion and claim their love for Christ and live according to the Bible and that kind of thing and then people in other religions who are actually persecuted and who are actually suffering for their faith because whenever I talk about being afraid to come out as Christian I feel so stupid just because there are so many people who are truly persecuted by Christians including historically and in the present and so I don’t know I just feel it’s something I need to get over….not get over but acknowledging the privilege that I have because Christianity is one of the largest religions in the United States. And in the Black community it’s an assumed belief so I’m lucky I guess that I don’t have to experience the outright actual bias and prejudice that my friend who’s a Muslim deals with on a daily basis from people who don’t know her.
Thus, while Yessenia and Missy both seemed to hold fears around others making assumptions about their religious identities and accompanying beliefs, Yessenia seemed to name the complexity and, in her words, “stupidity” of her fear by acknowledging her privilege as a Christian among those with other religious identities. I would imagine that Yessenia’s awareness of her privileged position plays a role in how she claims and engages others with her Christian identity when compared to Missy who seemed to focus solely on the fear of isolating others in conversation.

**Conflict**

The most prominent aspect of emotionality that I noticed across students’ experiences was the notion of conflict. By conflict, I mean feelings that reflect inconsistency, contrast, or opposition. For some students, like Elio, Alix, Riya, and Nima, students expressed confliction about how they should respond, act, or feel given their experiences. Others, like Ellie, Hanna, and Haven, appeared conflicted given their own roles or positionality within their experiences.

During my first interview with Elio I asked him how he believed his agnostic identity showed up on campus (if it did), and he said,

I feel like the only time where I felt kind of weird about the whole agnosticism atheism thing is when, like one of my friends is really involved in, shit what’s it called, one of the Christian groups here on campus. He shared that the specific group typically tries to “fight for the rights of children abroad,” and that his friend invited him to attend one of the group’s meetings, and he

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9 Elio is a first-year student who identifies as agnostic, cisgender, male, gay, and White.
figured that since it was for a “wonderful purpose,” he would attend. He described part of his experience like this:

And then we went and they were spending half the time talking about having prayer sessions about how the power of prayer was going to save these children in rural Rwanda. I’m like are you fucking kidding me? Like oh my God how is you, how is your praying on the Sunken Garden [a large outdoor grassy area on campus] before your 12 o’clock class gonna do anything to save these people? And that was the only time where I was like shit. Oh my God. Am I out of place on this campus? Like clearly, oh my God, people are praying on the Sunken Garden and I’m like what the fuck is happening? That was literally the only time where I felt like it was really a part of my identity that wasn’t jiving well.

A few minutes later, I followed up, asking Elio to share, if he could remember, how he was feeling during the meeting he attended with his friend. He said,

It was just very, it was, I wouldn’t say uncomfortable. It was just awkward because they all, like at the end of the meeting they have a minute of prayer, like everybody bowed their heads. And I was like motherfucker what do we, like I wondered what do I do because everybody there was clearly pretty into it….I was like I’m not gonna say anything, I’ll just look like I’m going along with it but I feel so awkward in those moments because I feel like they all know that, like that fucking gay guy in the corner like he doesn’t know what he’s talkin’ about he’s not clearly praying like that’s fake praying, wrong posture. I think religious people think that they do have something over non-religious people, like that they have some moral high ground, they’re clearly more devout they’re living their
lives in a more judicious proper way, so I just feel awkward giving them that satisfaction by like buying into it and bowing my head in prayer, but also you can’t be that asshole who’s like sitting there frowning while everyone’s praying because then you just look like the biggest prick so you’re just like okay. This is fine. I’ll just grin and bear it for a minute.

Elio certainly expressed many emotions through his sharing of this experience. Given what he said above, as well as the other conversations we had together, Elio has strong feelings toward the purpose and importance of prayer for religious people. I believe these feelings are probably related to his own upbringing and exposure in a fairly non-religious household, as well as his own identity formation and perceptions of how religious people may view him as an agnostic, atheist, and gay person. Along with expressing frustration, it seemed that Elio felt resigned to engage in a similar way with others so as not to appear like an “asshole” or “prick” for not praying for the rights of children abroad. Though this experience does not illustrate an inequity between students and their worldviews, and Elio chose to attend the meeting of a Christian organization, it does highlight the internal turmoil Elio felt and how such discomfort perhaps played a role in his decision to bow in prayer, prompting an inauthentic or assumed sense of harmony among the group.

Similar to how Elio’s action to bow his head in prayer, given his conflicted feelings about wanting to support the group’s efforts while maintaining his nonreligious identity, perhaps contributed to an assumed sense of harmony among the group, it also seemed that Alix and Riya experienced a similar dynamic. For Alix, in addition to feelings of frustration and guilt, it also appeared that she felt conflicted between wanting
prayer to be removed from her sorority’s initiation practices and continuing to either pretend pray or not pray along with the group.

Early into Alix’s second interview, she had referenced the notion of people singing out loud to themselves, and she said that she typically “minds her own business” when something bothers her like that. As we were discussing her sorority’s initiation experience, I reminded Alix of that comment and asked whether she held similar or different beliefs regarding “minding one’s own business” toward this situation. She said,

In this case I think it is more of my own business because I am a member of the sorority. But also, to go complain about that I think I would have to write a letter to the national headquarters and they’re still having issues with basic things like diversity and not having members to wear blackface, that happened a couple years ago. And they’re all, from what I know of Greek life a lot of it is based in the South and I would imagine that a lot of members that join also are probably Christian…. I doubt that anything will change about that in the next 100 years or so. I’m thinking now I kind of want to write a letter just because I thought if I didn’t like I was ignoring my principles, and this is a tradition that’s been around for more than 100 years.

I worked to clarify what Alix was telling me, asking if she thought there were perhaps “levels of issues or discrepancies in inequities.” She said, “I think [sisters wearing blackface is] more of an active affront to people that shouldn’t be tolerated and this [prayer during initiation] is more of a little grade, we’re doing it out of habit activity.”

Through these excerpts, it appeared that Alix was feeling some level of resignation toward the prayer being instituted as an assumed expectation, as suggested through her
comparison to the situation to perhaps more consequential inequities like members wearing black face. I believe this reflects a unique finding, that among some students, inequities regarding worldview beliefs and identities may be viewed and accepted as more or less important when compared to other forms of inequities. Not much longer into our interview, Alix said, “I’m thinking now I kind of want to write a letter” to the sorority’s national headquarters expressing her concerns over her experience—presenting an conflicting dynamic of the desire to request change and the resignation to not draw attention away from other issues. Alix’s use of the word “now” when she said she is “now thinking” she wants to write a letter about her concerns, led me to wonder about the role of the study itself in students’ exposure to worldview discrepancies.

In addition to Alix’s mixture of feelings toward this experience, similar to Tristan’s experience in the dining hall on Easter morning, religious normativity was moving through Alix’s feelings and accompanying future actions. Alix seemed to recognize such normativity when she said, “I also felt a little annoyed that we still have to go through the motions of a Christian prayer. It is frustrating that even though our organization isn’t Christian, we still have to say this prayer.” She also said that, even though the sorority was founded by individuals of the Christian faith, “any links to Christianity don't seem necessary.” I wonder if Alix’s articulation of her frustrations as well as her recognition of Christian normativity—certainly not a factor all students recognize—influenced her desire to consider writing a letter about her concerns.

Riya’s experience was also similar to Alix’s in that they both wondered about how important each of their concerns or experiences were, or perhaps how others might perceive their experiences’ level of importance. As I shared previously, Riya spent some
time during our first interview discussing her experiences with yoga on campus. For one of her written reflections, she wrote about her experience in attending a yoga class in-between our two interviews. In the reflection, she recalled the feelings she shared during our first interview about her frustrations and discomfort over the music selections and wrote, “Today, I had a thought about my reactions to that.” After describing a particularly difficult pose she had attempted in the class, she wrote,

A thought I had here was about one of the key points of the meditative aspect of yoga: to take in your surroundings but not overreact to them – specifically in terms of emotional reactions and being able to control your mind. It was difficult because I was in a position of stress and the addition of the terrible music was making it worse, but I had to get through it by focusing internally on myself and ridding myself of external influences. That got me thinking about how I can approach the music issue I had from a different perspective. I realize that it comes from a good place so instead of avoiding yoga like I did before, I need to further my interaction so that I can develop myself mentally instead of just physically as I was thinking about before….I need to adapt to various surroundings and the only constant thing is going to be me. So instead of worrying about my surroundings, I need to focus on being consistent myself.

In our second interview, Riya re-read this reflection and then I invited her to talk to me a bit more about the experience. She said that after our first interview she decided to try another yoga class and was thinking, “I should probably be a bit more like understanding and not so judgmental about it.” As she began to notice the “scratchy violin” music during class, she was reminded of a saying, written in what she believes is
the Bhagavad Gita [a Hindu Sanskrit scripture], “where it talks about how one who is enlightened is someone who is consistent inside regardless of what happens around him, he is consistent on the inside.” She continued, sharing that this thought encouraged her to consider ways to “control herself,” and said, “because it’s not like I have control around the circumstances so I just need to be in control of myself rather than trying to control other things.” I followed up, noting that she highlighted the word “overreact” upon re-reading her reflection. She said,

Yeah, I feel like sometimes I just immediately….like if something bugs me, I just immediately go like oh my gosh, why is that happening to me, this is not fair, my life is over and I just I act like a bit of a drama queen….If I really think about it, is this really the biggest issue? And it’s not like they’re [yoga instructors] doing it to be terrible, someone felt really good….so I’ll take the good feeling from it not really care about the product so yeah just kind of goes with my overreaction thing like I shouldn’t overreact so. Something my mom tells me all the time too.

I was interested to learn more about Riya’s last comment here about her mom in relation to the current yoga experience. I asked Riya whether she thought expressing her feelings or concerns over the yoga selections might be something her mom would consider an “overreaction.” Riya explained that the yoga instructors are very nice, and so since she had waited so long to say something about her concerns that they might think her feelings were an overreaction. I asked, in confirmation, “So you believe that the way you might approach it would be a different style?” She said,

I normally wouldn’t really consider myself a person to initiate anything either so it’s kind of just my own self-control…I also feel like maybe I wouldn’t be the
right person to say it just because I mean it’s not like I’ve ever studied Indian music or anything, but it’s, when you see it, like I know it when I hear it. And then it’s not like I have the greatest, I can speak my language, but it’s not like I can read or write it so I dunno, I just feel like I wouldn’t be the best person to say it just because I feel like I might be a little hypocritical myself. But yeah, I mean, I don’t know. I mean compared to other people I might be in a better position, but I feel like it wouldn’t sound the same as if it came from a person who actually grew up in India or something…So I feel like someone who, I dunno, they would just be better able to explain it or just be more authentic about it.

From these excerpts, along with the ones I previously shared from Riya, she often feels uncomfortable with the music selections because she is used to hearing such music during Hindu practices such as prayers, which influences her ability to concentrate during her practice. It seems like a combination of the discomfort and guilt Riya has felt through yoga, as well as her belief that she “overreacts” a lot and is “a bit of a drama queen,” played a role in how she made sense of these experiences. Additionally, her relationship with her mother, someone who (in Riya’s words) tells her she overreacts all the time, may have further complicated Riya’s feelings toward the yoga instructors’ music selections. From these experiences, Riya also appeared unsure about whether the music was “really the biggest issue,” and ultimately concluded that “instead of worrying” about her surroundings (such as the music), she needs “to focus on being consistent [her]self.”

Given Riya’s reflection, and her comments about focusing on herself rather than the external issues, I was curious to know more about how Riya perceived other students’ roles or feelings in the yoga classes. I asked her whether other students had ever shared
any similar concerns or if she thought others would be affected by any changes in the music. She said, “Probably not because I’ve never really seen any other Indian people besides me, it’s mostly just White people…. So, it probably wouldn't really affect anyone else. I don't really see a lot of Indian people there.” Though Riya came to make sense of her experiences by turning to some of her religion’s principles, I often struggled in understanding Riya’s decisions as a mixture of solace and resignation toward her concerns with the music. She shared that she believes she can only control herself rather than her surroundings; thus, determining that, although instructors will continue to select their own music, she would like to focus on being consistent herself and not worry about the music.

However, I do not believe that Riya’s decision to internalize her concerns is solely an internally driven decision. Her comments about other White students perhaps not being affected by a change in music, and her questioning of whether she is the “right kind of Indian” to say something, suggests that Riya has been also been influenced by racialized assumptions of who should care about her concerns and who is worthy enough to express such critiques. Though Riya’s own identity formation complicates her experience, as suggested by how she understands herself as an Indian woman and a practicing Hindu, I imagine there are additional environmental, familial, and institutional factors that also shaped how Riya came to her decision “to focus on being consistent [her]self.”

Finally, although Riya and Alix both experienced a conflicting mixture of desire and resignation toward their frustrating experiences, Alix suggested that she held some desire in contacting the sorority’s national headquarters regarding her concerns and Riya
seemed to internalize her concerns and did not express any explicit desire or hope for external changes. Alix, a White woman, held no qualms about whether or not she was “nonreligious enough” to express concern over the sorority’s use of prayer, whereas Riya, a Hindu woman, shared that she is not “Indian enough” to express concern over the music selections. This led me to wonder if extant assumptions and stereotypes about non-White individuals being perceived as negative when they express concerns (as suggested by Veronica in an experience I share later), unlike White individuals, also played an additional role in how Riya made sense of her experience when compared to Alix.

Like how Alix’s feelings of confliction were surrounded by Christian normativity, so too were Nima’s. About halfway through our second interview together, Nima began talking about how she is “a very anxious person in general.” In giving examples of her stressors, she said,

This might be a sacrilegious thing to say, and I don’t even know if I’m using that word correctly…. But I don’t read as much of the Quran as I should and I don’t pray, but Ramadan’s coming up and that’s my chance to do that…. If you do the fasting for 30 days all of your minor sins from the past two years are gone. It’s like, thank you, I would like to do that. I’m gonna do that. That’s my biggest concern is, can I like pray regularly during Ramadan? Because my sister and mother do it now, but they’ve been doing it for closer to three years, they know to have a backpack and know their area like which space is, there’s nobody there and start doing it now…. I don’t have the energy. We have a meditation room here but sometimes people are using that, sometimes people have meetings, and

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10 Nima is a third-year student who identifies as Muslim, female, straight, and Black/African American.
then it’s fine to reserve a study room but, five times a day? And it’s only 15 minutes so I don’t feel right taking a whole study room. And I know I’d have space in my room but I can’t go to my room five times, so I’d have to find space on campus and then every semester my schedule changes. I’m sure somebody’s making it work but at this point in my life I don’t think I can make it work. But I want to.

I followed up, asking about the meditation room that Nima mentioned. She shared that there is one in the Campus Center and also one in Swem Library, but that the one in Swem is not “specifically the meditation room.” She continued,

The one in Swem is really free so that one would probably be open, but all of my classes are in the old campus and so most conservatively seven minutes if I’m fast. I am not. So, it would be a hike. I mean there’s probably a room there I could corral but it would feel weird with people looking at me and it just would require a lot of planning and I don’t, I’m just gonna wait til I leave and then figure it out.

Nima continued talking about how there are many aspects of Ramadan that she would have questions about, saying, “I don’t know as much as I want to.” I asked her where or with whom she could direct those questions to. She said that there is a “Mosque of Williamsburg,” which is a 10-minute drive, but that the closest ADAMS (All Dulles Area Muslim Society) Center is in Sterling, Virginia (two and a half hours away). I also followed up, asking Nima to share more about her comment regarding feeling “weird” with people looking at her during prayer on campus. She said,

I don’t know if I could cultivate any habit here…right now I’m just trying to eat all three meals regularly and reasonable snacks and finish water and the bare
minimum of a person…. I just didn’t want anybody to see me, like not even as an I’m ashamed kind of thing, not by any measure, just more I don’t want people gawking and be like, what’s that? What is she doing? I just didn’t want the stare cause I’m kind of an anxious person.

Through Nima’s writings and excerpts shared above, it seemed that her desire to form better religious habits (like praying five times a day and reading the Quran) was complicated by her desire to also form better personal habits (like eating well and balancing academics with campus involvement). Though she would like to practice Ramadan while at school, she also appeared resigned in waiting until she graduates to focus on the Muslim pillars of practice. Not only were Nima’s behaviors around practicing her religion influenced by her own identity formation and personal habits, but her behaviors were also being shaped by her environment (e.g., other students, physical spaces) and her perceptions of that environment—perceptions that are further influenced by her own familial upbringing and dynamics given that Nima acknowledged that she does not practice as much as her sister and mother. Thus, although it appeared that Nima was expressing a combination of desire and resignation toward practicing her Muslim identity on campus, those feelings were also influenced by her prior experiences (exposure) and the lack of seamless integration of Muslim culture on campus (normativity).

Whereas the previous four students shared conflicting feelings about how they understood and reacted to their experiences, Ellie, Hanna, and Haven shared experiences in which they held influential roles in the situation, complicating the internal conflict they
were working through. During this study, Ellie had her first opportunity to host her family’s Passover dinner, a Jewish holiday, in her college apartment and was able to lead the Seder, a Jewish tradition, which her mom and aunt typically lead. In one of her reflections she wrote,

This is one of the most fun parts of the Seder—there is a little song that we sing after each sentence, and I think it’s fun. I realized as I was reading it that some of the translations could be understood as offensive. Example being ‘if god had only parted the Red Sea for us and not obliterated our enemies after, it would have been enough.’ Or ‘if god had only punished the Egyptians and not killed their first borns, it would have been enough.’ I was watching the faces of my extremely socially-aware friends and felt horrified.

As Ellie was re-visiting this experience out loud in our second interview she said, “It was really just mostly bad in my head, I’m like, oh my god I just invited my super liberal friends to the Seder where I’m talking about massacring other people and Israel, which, they’re definitely against.” I followed up, asking Ellie, “I believe you said, ‘I shouldn’t have had to apologize.’ So I’m curious, when you think about the experience, at what point did you start recognizing what was being said, and what led you to feel inclined to apologize?” Ellie responded,

So I’m reading it, and I think there's a thing to be said for reading the words out loud on the page. I can look at them on a page and hear someone else read them, but saying them out loud yourself you’re like. Ohh, ohh. And then I realized that it wasn't as fun as I wanted it to be and I couldn't, I didn't understand why and

11 Ellie is a 4th year student who identifies as agnostic, Jewish, spiritual, a woman, heterosexual, and White.
then as I kept reading I was like, oh my god, what I'm reading is actually pretty bad. And that's not what I believe in and that's not what I meant to share but I didn't write it and it and at that point it was like well, I've already gone like 8 through 16 verses so what am I supposed to do? And people were participating but I could tell that there was tension in the air so I was like well shit. Can you ever feel like when the air is heavy and people are mad at you, but they're not saying anything?

Returning to Ellie's written reflection, she continued chronologically,

I kept reading, knowing that this is just one translation of the Hebrew actually written in the original story. Plus, as offensive as it is, I choose not to take the customs of this holiday literally, and I hoped that others would understand. After my family left, I apologized, mostly jokingly, for how offensive the Haggadah was. I didn’t want to be afraid of performing my Jewish customs the way I am used to, but there I was apologizing for doing just that. I didn’t write the book, so I don’t think I should be blamed for it’s offensiveness. But also, sometimes, history can be offensive and I think we need to deal with it anyway…. I walked away feeling mad that I had even apologized.

In our interview, after re-visiting her written reflection, Ellie added,

I really shouldn't have apologized, like it's not me (she took a deep breath) but on the other hand, I should choose to only read books or translations of this that align with my social values… I don't know but also I invited you [her friends] to participate in this so shouldn't I get to decide the custom and you can be offended if you want. Yeah, I really don't know how to feel about it.
From Ellie’s excerpts above, it seemed that her inclination to apologize to her friends was influenced by the tension and discomfort she felt from her friends during the Seder. In processing the experience, Ellie shared that she felt conflicted by wanting to share her Jewish traditions with others, while realizing that some of those traditions could be understood as “offensive.” As sensed from Ellie’s concluding words—“I really don’t know how to feel about it”—it appears that the dissonance she encountered, of reading words from the Haggadah that she does not necessarily support, created continued confliction for her moving forward.

Ellie’s role in leading the Seder at her family’s Passover dinner also highlights the role of power in how inequities may be generated and sustained. It appeared that Ellie became aware of her friends’ discomfort during the experience and continued to feel conflicted about her role and responsibility in that discomfort. Thinking back during our second interview she said,

But there are a million versions of this book [the Haggadah] that I could have used, so I was like, “Great, I suck,” because I wasn’t intentional about it beforehand. And I didn’t think to look ahead, that just hurts. I didn’t think to look ahead, all of my friends would have thought to look ahead, and so I feel like, in the arena of being socially aware and being an activist, I didn’t think to look ahead, really?! That’s such a careless mistake and I made people uncomfortable and I endorsed this version of Judaism that I don’t believe in.

Ellie did not use the word power or position in her writings or discussion of the Seder experience. However, when I think of the influential role Ellie held in this experience, she appeared to have developed an understanding of the importance in
selecting Haggadah readings, something she had never previously considered. She recognized that, historically, her mom and aunt made the reading selections and that, because it has been such a family tradition, she never took the time to seriously evaluate the words being read. In this scenario, her friends, who had never attended a Passover dinner, experienced the Seder under the sole influence of Ellie’s choices. Though Ellie developed an awareness of how the Haggadah she read could be offensive both during and after the experience, her feelings of conflict that I spoke about previously further complicated her actions afterwards. She said she felt obligated to apologize, but also shared that she did not believe she should have needed to apologize. I wonder if her feelings of conflict influenced the extent of her understandings of her role (such as passive or powerful) in this experience.

Whereas Ellie seemed very attuned to others’ reactions and feelings toward the Seder practices, resulting in much internal turmoil about how she wants to approach that tradition in the future, Hanna shared a story where her past experiences drove how she responded to the situation, perhaps overshadowing her ability to recognize her own positionality in the outcomes. I learned during our first interview together that Hanna is highly involved in a women’s Christian a capella group on campus. Through one of her reflections, she wrote about an experience that occurred during one of her group’s rehearsal gatherings. The final agenda topic they were to discuss that day included voting on a new group t-shirt for the upcoming academic year. Prior to the meeting, members shared photos or drawings for t-shirt ideas and one of the “younger members” submitted a photo of a t-shirt that listed statements including, “Love thy neighbor, thy Muslim

12 Hanna is a second-year student who identifies as agnostic, female, heterosexual, and White.
neighbor, thy Jewish neighbor, and thy Atheist neighbor.” Hanna shared that the student believed that sometimes Christian organizations can be misunderstood as unwelcoming to diverse others, so the younger member was excited about her idea. Hanna wrote,

One of the senior members who is very Catholic said, “I personally do not like the shirt, and find it exclusive to mention specific groups of people like this.” I immediately felt the need to stick up for the younger group member, however our president chimed in by saying, “Regardless of how we all feel about the t-shirt, we cannot copy another organization’s design.” Feeling relief in her bringing us back to practical, objective concerns, I relaxed a bit more, however; I wish I would have said “Given Christians’ record with these marginalized groups of people, I feel it highlights a dedication to fixing these wrongs and pursues a different future relationship with them between Christians.” But, I did not. I contributed to the silence.

Upon initially reading Hanna’s words, “feeling relief in her bringing us back to the practical, objective concerns,” I wondered how (un)comfortable she was in this situation. Though Hanna did not describe how she felt about the student’s t-shirt recommendation, she said she felt relieved once the topic was closed.

In our second interview, I invited Hanna to share more about this reflection. She reiterated that the group members were choosing their t-shirts, and “one of the girls who is Catholic was like, I don’t like the t-shirt.” Hanna said that the senior member thought that the t-shirt would “single people out” and questioned if people would think the group is not inclusive of groups not listed on the t-shirt. Hanna said that others responded to the senior member with, “Well of course not,” and Hanna added, “but we didn’t say anything
just because it was, I think we were honestly kind of short on time as well.” As she was processing this experience out loud, she continued,

It definitely bothered me for sure. Because these are the people who that, they often either from the Bible directly or from other churches or just the Republican party who claims that they’re so Christian. It’s just the antithesis of Christ so I think it’s better to highlight the fact that these people are exceptionally accepted.

I followed up by asking specifically about the last statement of her reflection. I said, “You shared at the bottom, ‘I didn’t say anything,’ and then you also were like we were low on time. What kind of sense did you get from other people in the room?” Hanna said,

I could tell [the younger member] was kind of in scold mode almost, like I’ve been scolded by an older member type thing…. but I think what is important is that I, it’s not that I don’t feel comfortable enough to say that, I think I just bite my tongue almost just because I’ve been around the conservative Christians, I’ve told you through high school, and so I just know it’s not worth giving my energy to…. I recognize that there are just some things that aren’t, they can’t even register because it would be tapping into the hard drive of them, it’s tapping into the identity and integrity of God which that does not waver, but clearly it needs to. So, I think I’ve just learned that there are just things that it’s just not worth my time. Now obviously if it’s this ridiculous injustice, I would say something just because that’s not okay, but I think her opinion on a t-shirt just wasn’t even though those things can escalate.

At this point in the interview, I remember wondering about the groups of individuals that were represented on the t-shirt suggestion and, given that I know Hanna
is White and nonreligious, I wondered about the makeup of the rest of the organization. I said, “I was curious about the groups that were represented on the t-shirt. Do you, I guess my question was thinking of who’s in the room, and did anyone talk about the actual t-shirt, like what was on it?” Hanna responded,

What’s interesting is that, so we have, right now she’s not with us because she’s really overwhelmed this semester and so she’s taking a semester off, but she is Black. So, I do wonder if that could have, she wouldn’t have said anything because I just know her. I know that. I mean, well atheist, I mean I’m agnostic. I know that we have a member who is a bisexual. So, I mean, they’re different, but in that realm I guess of when it says gay. And then I feel like everyone knows someone who struggled with addiction. I think it’s just talking a lot about, just like we need to love everyone, and I think if we had really gone through and looked at this it would, I think it would have been a different conversation probably.

Hanna’s response to my inquiry was perhaps influenced by the wording of my question, since I asked her to share some of the identities of the group members and whether the details of the t-shirt design were a part of the discussion. She responded to my question in an order that was based on the t-shirt layout, acknowledging student members who perhaps identified similarly with the various groups listed on the t-shirt. Hanna said that if the group had “really gone through and looked at” the t-shirt, perhaps they would have had a different conversation. However, it seems that no one in the group initiated a nuanced discussion around what the t-shirt could represent, and it did not appear that
Hanna recognized how the design might mean different things for members with diverse (non)religious, racial, or sexual orientations and identities.

In continuing her discussion from the above excerpt, Hanna said,

And so I’m the president next year of [the organization] and so our t-shirt is gonna be ‘Love is our Common Ground.’ That’s what I kind of, when we talked about this later I was like, here’s my proposition. This is happening. Because right now I think we have a Bible verse and it’s just like I think we want to make it clear that our message, I know for me especially as not a Christian, I just I want it to be clear that this isn’t, we’re not the typical evangelical conservative group.

At this point in the interview, Hanna had come to a pause, so I followed up chronologically, returning to something she shared earlier. I asked her, “When you talked about the extent or level of this incident, you were like sometimes it just feels not worth my time. How do you decipher what is worth your time?” Hanna responded,

I think this is something I’m still growing in. Because I think originally when I came to college I was like, all right, you’re either Christian or you’re smart. That was kind of how I was, and, clearly, I don’t think that anymore because I know geniuses who are Christians. I think I have attributed it more to the this idea of, if you are growing up and everyone around you is telling you like your mom your dad all your adults are telling you this is true why would you believe anything else? And then if that’s been this core function part of who you are, that’s hard to change…. If I know that they’re not open-minded, if it’s just biblical literalism I just don’t even say a word I just listen, and I’m just like this just adds to my archetype of that, those people. And it’s not even so much judgmental it’s more
that I’ve had direct experiences that have influenced my opinion. And I would say
I really am more empathetic than most towards this group of people…. I found at
William & Mary a lot of the Christians at least in [the largest Christian student
organization] or those kinds of groups, there’s a lot who are very, this is just a
way of life and the Bible is a guide and then there are people who are like this is
what it says and this is the word.

As shown above through her reflection, Hanna wrote that she wished she had said
something in support of the other members’ shirt. Given her own role as the upcoming
president, perhaps her investment and interest in her idea contributed to her lack of
engagement toward the other student’s idea. Additionally, although Hanna identifies with
an identity (non-Christian) that is often minoritized, her personal ideologies toward
Evangelical Christians seemed to have influenced the rationale she shared behind her t-
shirt choice (or lack of choice of the other options). Hanna wanted to spread the idea that
her organization imbues a message of love to avoid others making any assumptions that
they are an Evangelical Christian group. Finally, I wonder if Hanna’s positional power as
the upcoming president also played a role in the group’s final t-shirt decision, a decision
in which the younger member’s rationale for wanting to showcase a more inclusive,
religious identity for the group was essentially invalidated. Thus, with the group’s
selection of Hanna’s t-shirt, it is unlikely that those outside of the group would know that
their organization is religious at all. Hanna’s desire to ensure others on campus hold a
positive perception of their Christian organization overpowered the other members’
interests in initiating more inclusive messages.
Like Hanna, Haven also shared an experience regarding her involvement as a student leader in an organization on campus. As a first-year student, Haven became involved as a representative for Student Assembly (SA), the student-governing body on campus. During the time of this study, SA had a scheduled event, a movie night that took place on Good Friday (a tradition held on the Friday before Easter Sunday that is celebrated by many Christians). In one of her reflections, Haven wrote,

A certain freshman that was part of one of the religious groups [the Catholic Campus Ministry which Haven is also a part of] felt that he and his religious group were being, unintentionally, excluded from this event because it fell on this holiday [Good Friday]....A petition was even made in order to try to persuade Student Assembly to change the day. In the end, this young man didn’t get what he wanted, but we did have a great movie night.

During our second interview together, I invited Haven to re-read her reflection and share any additional information she would like about the experience. She shared that Student Assembly was planning a movie night at Matoaka (an outdoor amphitheater on campus) and they had worked collaboratively with another student group who usually uses that space to host movie nights. Haven’s group contacted the other group to ensure that her group could host the event, and they could. She expressed how relieving this confirmation was because organizing events and passing funding through bills with SA takes a lot of time and effort.

Shortly after the event was approved, Haven shared that she was on social media when she noticed that a student had posted their concerns about the date of the movie

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13 Haven is a first-year student who identifies as Roman Catholic, female, straight, and African American.
night and begun an online petition to have the date changed. At this point she said, “[she] was really confused.” Haven explained that students were going back and forth in the social media platform offering different dates, but then students would realize that the offered dates fell on other holidays, such as Orthodox Easter Sunday. I asked Haven if this topic came up for discussion among SA leaders and, if so, how those conversations went. She said that once the social media posts began, she sent a message to their representative GroupMe chat (a free group text messaging smartphone application) with a screenshot of the student’s post. Upon discussing the situation with other SA members Haven said,

And then we realized all the conflicts between religious organizations and our accommodations for them and then how that’ll get us into a sticky situation later on because what if next year we have something that falls during Ramadan? Now we're gonna have to change everything because we didn't accommodate for Muslim students but we accommodated for Christian students.

Continuing to talk about her experience, Haven said, “I was thinking in my head, we can’t keep changing it,” and then said, “and then it also kind of made me realize that, I understand, at the time, people do want to come to the events.” She said that she was sad since she does not want people to feel excluded or like SA is trying to be intentionally unjust, but that “it just has to happen this way.” Haven continued to speak back and forth between the students’ concerns over the date and her own perspective as a member of Student Assembly. For example, she said,

But then also I do understand because for those students who had to pick and choose do I go to church on this day even though it's not a holy day of obligation,
or do I go to this really fun event which all my friends are going to and there's free food which I really like and all that jazz. So it was just a pick and choose situation so I can understand why he felt upset by the situation. But then also at the same time he did not need to create such a scene for it.

As shared above, Haven said that the student who expressed concern was a member of the same Christian organization as her. Just as the other student shared that they would prefer not to engage in celebratory events on Good Friday, I asked Haven what kinds of perspectives she holds about that day. She said that she kind of has “a similar perspective” in how Good Friday should be “a time of sadness/sorrow” and that you are “not supposed to eat meat.” She said that, even though they had ordered Buffalo Wild Wings for the event, and most people enjoy their chicken wings, they also bought mozzarella sticks for vegetarians that students could choose from. The following passage continues to highlight the conflict Haven seemed to be experiencing for how she felt about the other student’s concerns:

I can kind of see the conflicting aspect for the student because there was only one mass time [that the school was hosting] and that was starting at the same time that our movie night was starting so they both started at 7 p.m. So I could feel I can see why he was conflicted if it had started like earlier and then he could like leave to go to it I can see why but it's still also it's not the whole day you're supposed to be like just sad and can't have any fun but your main focus is supposed to be like around Jesus Christ and his death and like being sad essentially like a funeral like just because I'm going to a funeral today does not mean that I can't go to my friend's birthday party because it's fun, but you still are 'posed to be in that
mindset of like I just came from a funeral and 'posed to be sad because the loss of somebody that's important to me.

Much of Haven’s discussion so far in our interview had been about how the other student felt about the event. Because Haven shared that she also celebrates Good Friday, I asked her how she personally felt about the movie-screening. She said,

So I was trying to figure out, because I did have the responsibility with [the Christian organization], especially because, I mean for Student Assembly, especially because the freshman class were the spearheads that started this movie night and we were kind of the main group that was promoting it and we put it in all of our group chats and spread it to all our friends….So I had to focus on that, but I also had to remember that it was also Good Friday and not just any other Friday….So I didn't eat any of the Buffalo Wild Wings because it was still Friday and I'm 'posed to be sad.

Though I did not use any discourse or language frameworks to analyze this research, I found it interesting how, in this last excerpt, Haven said that she had a “responsibility with [the Christian organization]” before re-stating, a responsibility “for Student Assembly.” This could have been because we were discussing both groups simultaneously and she mixed them up, or it might highlight some of the dissonance she was experiencing between her responsibility to Student Assembly as a leader and her personal religious beliefs or commitments to her Christian organization. It seemed that Haven simultaneously understood why the student may have felt torn between attending the event and maintaining their Good Friday ideals—as she shared how she also had to consider such a dilemma—while also questioning the student’s approach to sharing his
concerns and in how he chose to celebrate Good Friday. Haven had a difficult time making sense of the other students’ perspective or concerns, suggested by her own diverse perspectives around the holiday as well as in how she rationalized SA’s decision to maintain their event date.

**Sympathy**

It appeared that a couple of students, particularly Missy and Peter, expressed forms of sympathy from the experiences they wrote and spoke about. By sympathy, I mean feelings such as sorrow, concern, or pity. Whereas empathy can be understood as expressing an understanding of others’ emotions when one has experienced similar situations or emotions, sympathy can be understood as working to take part in others’ emotions by expressing concern toward another’s emotions or situation. For Missy and Peter, some of the experiences they wrote about included others’ burdens, ones that Missy and Peter had not endured previously; yet, they seemed to write and speak sympathetically toward how others had been or might be affected in the future.

In one of her reflections, Missy wrote about a conversation she had with another student she had just met following a frisbee tournament. The two were discussing Missy’s “Catholic family” or “adoptees,” which is a program she is involved with through a Catholic student organization where she is paired with a local family that supports her in various ways (e.g., taking her out to eat, buying her Christmas gifts, and sending her gifts during final exams). Missy shared that the other student thought the program was amazing, and told Missy that, as a Jewish person, she wished Hillel (the campus’ Jewish student organization) had something similar. Missy wrote that she told the other student she was glad that the campus was opening a new Hillel house, and the
student agreed, discussing the importance of a space to cook more Kosher foods. Missy mentioned that the “cafeteria food did not seem up to par,” and although the other student does not eat Kosher herself, the student shared that she knows it is difficult to practice on campus. Missy wrote that the other student wondered about the limited resources on campus while mentioning that there is a small population of Jewish students on campus who actually eat Kosher. Missy wrote that she expressed to the student that she thought all students should have adequate resources. Toward the end of her reflection, Missy wrote,

I also mentioned that the [Catholic student organization] had a Catholic student center that has really brought students together and has felt like a home for me. I told her I even could walk around without shoes on in the center. I felt guilty when realizing that I have a space on campus in which I can relax and do work. I felt more at ease just thinking about sitting in the space adjacent to the Alumni house, and felt as though many students do not have a place to relax on campus.

During our second interview, I asked Missy to share a bit more about this experience and, upon re-reading it, she shared that the conversation around students not having adequate resources to eat Kosher foods made her wonder if students’ limited access to Kosher foods might force some students to not be Kosher entirely. She mentioned that first-year students, in particular, are required to purchase an on-campus meal plan, and said,

I can’t imagine having to look for food longer than other individuals and have to worry about getting back to your table and everybody might have started eating already and the meal being a really important part of getting to know people.
Missy, as a Catholic, is not Jewish and does not eat Kosher. However, it seemed that, from this conversation with a Jewish student about limited resources on campus, Missy said that she could not “imagine” being in a situation where she had to spend a long time finding appropriate foods on campus. It seemed that, although Missy has not experienced Jewish students’ lack of Kosher options on campus, she was trying to sympathize with other students who may be negatively impacted by such limited options. Additionally, she began addressing the institutional constraints around forcing students into a meal plan without providing a diversity of options for all students’ needs. Although Missy was unable to experience empathy toward some Jewish students’ experiences, given that she has not experienced such situations, she appeared sympathetic to their challenges with inequitable food options and began wondering about additional repercussions of institutional meal plan policies.

Peter similarly expressed notions of sympathy. I began every first interview with students by asking them to share what brought them to W&M. Peter spoke very highly of the Day for Admitted Students event, which is held annually on campus where students and families who are admitted can attend and explore campus, meet with faculty, and learn about co-curricular involvement opportunities. He said, “So that’s super brief, that’s kind of what brought me here, I credit Day for Admitted Students for it, just this wonderful first experience.” In speaking about his involvement on campus since being at W&M, he shared that he began exploring religious groups during the student organization tabling event at Day for Admitted Students. In discussing the event, Peter said,
And then actually going to those events and talking to people, getting to know people, trying out different things and kind of getting a feel for what fit for me…. And I found that by doing that. I got a pretty good idea pretty quickly of where I fit in and where I didn’t.

Over time, Peter came to be “heavily involved” with the largest Christian student organization on campus where he participates in the large group gatherings weekly as well in a small group. From our first interview, I could sense that the Day for Admitted Students event played a large role in Peter’s decision to attend W&M as well as his interest in becoming involved with the Christian organization. During the two weeks between our interviews, the annual Day for Admitted Students took place, and Peter wrote a reflection about his tabling participation at the event as a representative for the Christian organization. He wrote,

As I spoke with the students, I observed the recurring theme and purpose of seeking the comfort and support of a group of individuals with a comparable worldview, a mission I can empathize with in my own experience. After observing that consistent goal, I evaluated the organizations nearby and noticed a large disparity in the traditions represented. From where I was standing at the [Christian student organization] table, I could see three other Christian groups in my sightline, and no tables on behalf of other religious groups. This prompted me to review the list of organizations represented, and I discovered that there were nine Christian groups present, and less than five from other traditions. As I reflect upon my own experience at Day for Admitted Students in 2017, I remember the reassurance and positive impact of being able to interact with those of a similar
faith background. Seeing the lack of variety in religious representation led me to consider how many prospective students from diverse religious backgrounds would struggle to envision that community. This inequity of worldviews presented could cause prospective students to feel less welcomed and a decreased sense of belonging in the William & Mary community.

Because Peter had spoken about this same event in our first interview, and he wrote about its importance in his own decisions to attend W&M and feeling welcomed, I asked Peter whether he had noticed such disparities in (non)religious organizations when he attended as a prospective student. He said,

It didn't hit me then, perhaps because I was pretty tunnel-visioned then and I was also a little bit overwhelmed as you know from your college search process…. as I told you, at day for admitted students, I literally had a list of the organization's I was going to so I was just one after another not really being very observational to be quite honest…. And in writing this I tried to convey, and I'm not sure I did effectively, sort of the sense of how much that impacted me as a prospective student. And so then when I reflected on that other people probably won't have, that how much of a negative impact that could be.

Peter shared that, as a participant at this event the year prior, he was not aware of or was not focused on the representation of (non)religious organizations. At the time, Peter was visiting to determine if W&M was a place he would enjoy, and he was purposefully looking for certain religious organizations, specifically Christian groups. It seemed that, because Peter was able to find community through the event, he was more aware of what opportunities other students might have who are also looking for a place
that supports their worldview(s). I came to understand some of Peter’s words as a reflection of sympathy. Though Peter was not in a position where he lost an opportunity to find community, thus he may not understand what it is like to be in such a position, he was able to recognize the possibility that, even though he has not experienced it, others might miss an opportunity and be disappointed or upset by that. He said,

   So, if you’re a prospective student walking in, trying to find community that can support you and your deeply held worldview and faith and you don’t have that, I mean, I don’t, I haven’t experienced it, but I would imagine that it’s incredibly disappointing and a pretty upsetting thing.

In addition to how Peter’s sympathy manifested, I believe that his own exposure to the past year’s event and personal understanding of the privilege he was afforded by finding a community that supported his beliefs, also played a role in his experience and how he made sense of it. His sense of appreciation for his own opportunity and recognition that others may not have the same, influenced his desire to determine what other groups were represented. For Peter, his action in finding out about which organizations were present, was perhaps his form of action when it came to better understanding the imbalance of groups in attendance. Sympathy did not manifest itself alone; rather, Peter’s own opportunities (exposure to the event) and recognition of those opportunities perhaps spurred such sympathetic feelings and accompanying actions.

**Curiosity**

   Through some of the experiences they shared, Liam, Veronica, and Peter seemed to express a sense of curiosity that stemmed from their reflections. By curiosity, I mean that, through and from the experiences these students shared, they posed questions about
the situation or shared ways their experience made them reflect further about their own position within the experience, reflecting some inquisitiveness. Liam wrote a reflection about a small discussion series that was hosted on campus by two student leaders, which focused on how those with minoritized identities (including racial, ethnic, and religious) experienced mental health on campus. He wrote,

There were twelve of us in a circle and for the entire time I was one of the only ones who was not talking and who was participating the least since most of the other people were people of color and therefore had specific ways that they had seen stress culture or mental health issues on campus interplay with their minority identities. During this discussion, one girl shared about the emotional labor she has taken on because of her Muslim identity. In multiple history classes this semester, she has been singled out as being the only Muslim student in the room and has been asked to give explanations or fact check the professor. Additionally, she has had to raise her hand to call out inaccurate statements or generalizations that the professor has made about Muslim culture. She said that this was something she wouldn’t have to deal with if she were of a different religion because nobody asks Christians to be the spokespeople of their entire religion to a class or to fact check professors. This made me realize how religion impacts classroom experiences. Due to her minority identity as a Muslim student, she was forced to enter a weird power dynamic with a professor, sacrificing her comfort in that class and potentially creating tension. This made me realize that I very infrequently think about how my race/ethnicity or religious identity affects my

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14 Liam is a second-year student who identifies as Christian, non-denominational, male, bisexual, and Hispanic, Puerto Rican, and White.
experiences in classes. I have never felt unrepresented or singled out because of any of my identities and they’ve allowed me to have significantly more comfortable and easy experiences than people who have not had this be the case for them.

After re-reading his reflection out loud during our second interview, Liam said that, according to the student, the instructor had been discussing architecture and art in a Muslim country and asked the student to talk more about the topic. Liam said the student “was like, I would never expect us to be talking about Roman history and the professor be like, are there any Christians here?” He shared that the student also mentioned feeling lucky that they were involved in their religion because, had she been someone whose religious identity was less important, she may not have known how to respond in that situation. Liam said, “Yeah, that’s definitely not pressure that I feel as a Christian.”

In working to better understand how Liam may have felt during the situation, or afterwards in processing it during our interview, I asked, “One question that I was gonna have for you was about feelings or emotions. So, what things were coming up for you, or come up for you now when you think about the story that the student shared?” Liam responded,

I don’t know what emotions. I guess I feel some sort of responsibility to be more aware in classes, that any part of my identity may be impacting my experience…I think what actually prompted this was afterwards I had written down, or during I wrote down something, I was like, “Am I aware of the ways that my identity affects my classroom experiences?….Do I ever, in my class am I aware of like, “Oh that person may be the only person of color.” Then I wonder if they feel like
they have to speak for other people and I don’t know it’s weird too, not weird, I guess I don’t think enough about how, because of being a White Christian, I am in a place where I don’t feel like I’m alone, especially in the classrooms, because I like to think of that [a classroom] as a very egalitarian setting and I guess it is not.

I believe this experience and reflection from Liam highlights, not only the power dynamics that occurred between the instructor and the other student, but also Liam’s own questioning and sense-making upon hearing from the other student’s experiences—suggesting that his exposure in the discussion influenced his understandings of potential inequities and diverse experiences in the classroom. Additionally, Liam shared that, after the experience was over, he asked himself whether he was aware of ways his own identity affects his classroom experiences and wondered if students in similar situations as the Muslim student would also feel such pressure. Though Liam gained an opportunity to learn from others’ experiences and critically reflect upon his own religious privilege as a Christian, the student who shared her experience was put into a position where she had to expend her own emotional labor to educate Liam and others. Rather than, for example, the instructor not making assumptions about the other student’s religious beliefs, practices, knowledge, background, and identity initially, or others addressing the instructor’s alienation practices in the classroom, the Muslim student was forced into isolation, put on display in front of her peers, and, finally, was asked to share those experiences with others for others’ benefit.

Liam’s experience also reminded me of information that Peter shared during his second interview that I believe further supports the role of Liam’s exposure to his discussion series event on how he made sense of classroom power dynamics. In our
second interview, Peter was talking about his Hinduism course that he had mentioned in one of his reflections and said,

In that class, there were a couple students who were very open about, they were from South Asian descent, they were very open about their Hindu faith, which my Professor liked [who is White] because then he could talk with them about, “hey, have you noticed this in your experience?” and things like that. I didn’t really interact with them very much, just based off the way the class was structured.

Liam and Peter responded quite differently to a similar phenomenon, of instructors turning to students with certain identities to speak for an entire race, ethnicity, or culture. Peter believed it to be a positive thing that instructors would invite students to share their experiences with others in an educational setting. In Peter’s experience, the instructor had asked a student with South Asian descent (a student who may or may not have ever visited the country from which their family migrated however long ago) about their experience with the Hindu faith. Although the instructor in Peter’s course may have had good intentions in trying to learn more about a student’s experience in the course, when someone, like the instructor, in a dominant position who holds majoritized identities, like being a White male, asks a person with minoritized identities to speak to their experiences, it singles out that person and can make them feel like they have to be the spokesperson for an entire identity (i.e., religion). In Liam’s experience, the student in the discussion series spoke about such emotional labor. For Peter, his perception was that his instructor was using a fruitful teaching method to invite students to discuss their own experiences. Because Liam had the opportunity to hear from the other student’s experience, he seemed to have an understanding of the power dynamics created in that
situation that Peter did not recognize, suggesting that recognition of power is interwoven with exposure.

Similar to how Liam reflected upon an experience that inspired him to pose questions, highlighting his curiosity, so too did Veronica. In one of Veronica’s reflections, she wrote about an on-campus event including two student organizations. She holds a leadership position in a “minority pre-law” organization, and her group had a social event with a graduate student organization within W&M’s law school. The purpose of the event was to initiate discussion about law school and the application process for undergraduate students. In her reflection, Veronica wrote,

I asked them a lot of questions, and for the most part there was a huge consensus on the answers provided. However, when I asked a question about fears during the application process the room got extremely quiet before the only advice I got from the entire room was “pray on it.” There was really a lot of emphasis on the philosophy of “what’s meant to be will be,” and the role religion played from the beginning of their application all the way through the decision process. All of us in the room identified as Christian, so this answer was just enough for us to hear, but what if someone wasn’t Christian asked for the same advice? What if “praying on it” wasn’t relevant to them?

In our second interview together, Veronica expanded upon this experience. She said she thought that, early on during the conversation between the groups, that the graduate students’ answers were “very clear cut,” focusing on the application materials and their reasons for going into law school. Then, she said she asked everyone how they

15 Veronica is a third-year student who identifies as Christian, spiritual, female, heterosexual, and Black/African American.
coped with the fear of not getting accepted to law school, “and all they could say was just pray on it, pray that you get in where you want to go.” Veronica continued in our interview,

And so, to me the answer was enough, and everybody else in the room was like yeah, a lot of prayers, just pray, and what is meant for you will be for you. And then I reflected back to our [first interview] whole religion talk and I was like, but what if you’re not religious? So that was, yeah another instance where I didn’t question it because I mean the answer was good enough for me and everybody else in the room and I didn’t want to make it awkward or give the impression that I wasn’t on the same page as them. But if you didn’t have anybody to pray to, what would your answer be then? It was just a general consensus in the room to just pray on it and it just kind of felt like we were all on the same page like yeah, we’re all praying to the same God, everything like that. And it was very obvious that religion was a huge part in all of our homes growing up.

I followed up, asking Veronica if she had ever met students from the graduate organization before this event because she mentioned that it seemed like everyone was on the same page, so I wondered if she knew their religious affiliations. She said that, no, she had not met them before, but that there were “head nods and everybody was snapping fingers like that’s it, that’s all you can do,” and that “even people on [her] side” (within her organization) “were just like, okay, that was enough for us to hear.”

From these excerpts, Veronica expressed concern about how others may have felt in the group if they did not identify as Christian. As suggested through the questions she asked herself in her reflection, she was curious about how the situation might be different
for non-Christian students. It seemed that part of our conversation together from the first interview and the context of the experience being related to prayer contributed to her questioning of how others might feel in that situation. For some students in this study, I would try to follow up with questions regarding students’ behavioral reactions to the experiences they wrote about. Yet, unprompted, Veronica also shared that, not only was the answer “good enough for [her] and everybody else in the room,” but that she also “didn’t want to make it awkward or give the impression that [she] wasn’t on the same page as them.” This made me wonder about the potential influence of Christian normativity in her experience and in how she responded during the meeting. Regarding normativity, it appeared that most of the students at the event gave advice and responded in ways that made assumptions about others’ worldview beliefs, particularly that they were Christian, or at least held theistic beliefs. As Veronica shared, she did not want to make the situation “awkward,” and defined awkward by saying she did not want to give the impression that she did not agree with or believe in their prayer recommendations.

From Veronica’s reflection and discussion during our interview, it did not appear that she made any connections between her own identity formation and her experience in the meeting. However, upon re-reading Yessenia’s interviews at a later time during data analysis, I realized that Yessenia shared information, not directly related to any of her reflections, which I believe might further inform how Veronica made sense of her own experience. During our first interview together, Yessenia spoke about her various social identities in ways that highlighted some of her worldview perceptions and assumptions, which I believe ultimately provided more nuanced information regarding Veronica’s experience. About halfway through our first interview together, Yessenia had been
talking about her various social identities, particularly those she named in the interest survey. She began to talk about several of her identities at once. I followed up, encouraging her to continue talking about ways she believed her identities interacted with one another. She began by sharing that her Christianity “mixes with everything,” particularly her race and ethnicity. She said,

It’s interesting to see because it wasn’t something that I was aware of until I was consistently interacting with other Black people, but there’s a belief in God, it’s not like, it doesn’t permeate in every Black person that I know because there are definitely people that don’t believe or have other religions, but Christianity is almost the base assumption when you’re interacting with other Black people. You kind of just, like if they don’t say otherwise, they may not certainly be a Christian but you know they or you can assume that they believe in God and know Bible verses and know similar church songs, which is just interesting because we’re all coming from different places different backgrounds all that kind of stuff. But it’s just interesting that we make jokes about stuff when people do things, like oh God wouldn’t appreciate that or someone starts singing some random gospel song and everybody else knows the words.

From here, Yessenia continued to share some of her thoughts around why some Black people, including herself, may hold an assumption that other Black people identify as Christian. She said, “If you go all the way back to slavery in America…slaves did use their faith and their faith in God as a means of forming community with one another and getting through the hardships.” In also acknowledging her African heritage, she said,
Most of the Africans that I know, Christianity is just some brand some whatever denomination of it is just the faith that their parents have and so even if they themselves don’t fully identify with religion or go to church or whatever it’s the tenets of their parents.

As shared previously in Veronica’s experience with the law organizations, she discussed the implications of students making assumptions that others are Christian in a meeting where most students identified as Black. I wondered if the perspectives that Yessenia shared in the excerpts above provides crucial insight into the idea of the normativity that arose in Veronica’s experience. From Yessenia’s experiences, it is likely that Christianity and Black or African cultures are intricately connected for some students, which may influence some Black students’ tendencies to assume other Black students identify with Christianity. As suggested by Veronica’s experience, such assumptions could have questionable implications for students who do not identify with Christianity. Simultaneously, it is equally important to acknowledge some students’ reasonings for making such assumptions, such as the ones Yessenia shared.

I close this section with one of Peter’s classroom experiences. During our first interview, Peter had shared details about the academic courses he had taken so far at W&M and mentioned a Hinduism class he took the semester prior to this study. This course came up again as a topic in one of Peter’s reflections. Every Sunday, Peter attends church off campus and the church he attends provides a free shuttle service to and from campus. Upon going to church on Easter Sunday, he wrote the following in his reflection,

As we embarked on our return journey to [a building on campus], I considered the privilege it is to have this service, and the hardships it could cause individuals of
other faiths if they cannot access, or simply do not have, a holy place near campus. When I considered this privilege, I was reminded of the Hinduism class I took last semester. I recalled that the nearest Hindu temple is in Newport News [30 minutes from campus], and if the deity worshipped there is not suitable, one would have to travel to Southern Chesapeake to find the next closest option. As I reflected upon that fact, I quickly did a Google Maps search and discovered that there is only one Jewish temple near campus, and there are only two Islamic Mosques within any reasonable distance, neither of which are walkable. Of course, Christian churches are plentiful in the Williamsburg area.…

Unfortunately, this isn’t true for all faith communities. The comfort, growth, and confidence of being well-represented through places of worship near campus is unequally slanted toward particular traditions and is a problem that should be addressed and resolved.

Upon re-visiting this reflection during our second interview, I specifically followed up regarding Peter’s final statement, “...and is a problem that should be addressed and resolved.” Peter responded,

I think it needs to be. And that’s a hard thing I mean, I don’t have a solution right. That’s a very hard thing to do. But I definitely think that in some way, you know, it does need to be addressed in some way. And I’m not sure what that is, but it does need to be addressed in some way.

I asked Peter if he knew whether or not there were any spaces on campus that are dedicated to supporting students’ diverse worldview practices, such as places for meditation. He said,
I mean, there’s one on the second floor here [in the library], there’s a meditation room. So, those things could help tide it over. But again, I do think that it’s really important and, in my experience at least with the Hinduism class, I’m not as familiar with Judaism or Islam, but those spaces are very important to at least be able to go to on occasion if you’re a pretty dedicated follower.

As suggested by Peter’s excerpts and actions during his van ride, he discovered and expressed that students with diverse worldviews do not have access to appropriate spaces on campus, or even in close proximity to campus. Though Peter did not have any explicit suggestions during our interview about how the university, or anyone, might address the discrepancy in students’ access to places of worship, I gathered a sense of desire from him that, not only should there be more opportunities, but also that perhaps it is a plausible feat. To be clear, Peter did not state that he envisioned a solution any time soon, it simply appeared that he was not too concerned about the long-term effects of limited places of worship in the area. I wonder if Peter’s expression of desire that I sensed may be influenced by Peter’s own Christian identity and not having had experienced a lack of space, thus not having had to lose hope for potential solutions when compared to the other six students I discuss next.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented findings from my research that responded to my question, “How might critical consciousness take shape for undergraduate college students (aged 18–24) whose (non)religious and existential worldview beliefs are an important part of their social identities?” I described what I came to name *emotionality*, the primary tentative manifestation, and detailed the varied expressions of emotionality
through students’ experiences: frustration, discomfort, guilt, fear, conflict, sympathy, and curiosity. Not only did students name specific emotions through their spoken and written language, but they also expressed body language that influenced how I understood their reactions to the experiences they discussed. In the next chapter, I discuss ways that emotionality served as a form of meaning-making and problematization for students and consider how various environmental and systemic factors shared an interdependent relationship with students’ expressions of emotionality.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

In this final chapter, I present a discussion of my findings as they related to my informative questions and primary research question. I then acknowledge limitations and delimitations of my work and conclude with implications for practice, methodology, and research.

Informative Q1

What kinds of social inequities between or among people of different worldview identities and beliefs do students recognize in their daily lives?

The kinds of inequities that students in this study shared and spoke about spanned contexts including academic classrooms, dining halls, student organizations, and on-campus childcare and recreation facilities. Not only did students share inequities they recognized or experienced on campus, but some shared experiences from places outside of campus such as the surrounding community, airports, childhood homes, and public places of worship.

Some of the extant quantitative research on worldview diversity offers findings on pluralistic engagement and intergroup dialogue that informs worldview prejudice and discrimination on college campuses (Bowman et al., 2017; Mayhew, Rockenbach, & Bowman, 2016; Rockenbach & Mayhew, 2013; Rockenbach et al., 2017). What much of that research does not necessarily do is offer detailed, qualitative information about how students experience and make meaning of inequitable experiences and practices that
show up in their daily lives. In exploring the phenomenon of critical consciousness in my research, I was able to focus more specifically on what shaped students’ recognition of and action towards worldview inequities.

Some specific inequities that students discussed included a lack of appropriate dietary options and prayer spaces on campus, religiously normative practices and dialogue within the campus culture, and educators’ limited knowledge of and awareness toward cultural and worldview differences. Although the methods I adopted asked students to share experiences they encountered in real time over two weeks, some students also shared experiences from their past that they believed were relevant to the topic of worldview inequities.

Further, though the focus of this study was on worldview inequities, some students often shared their experiences on campus with other forms of inequities. For example, Elio shared one experience that I did not present in my findings because, at the time I analyzed it, I did not believe it was explicitly related to worldview inequities. However, upon revisiting my goals of applying intersectional and critical theories, I realized that Elio’s experience was entangled with his worldview identity. In that experience, Elio had attempted to donate blood on campus, which he could not do given the Red Cross’s policies on same-sex intercourse. As a gay male who had recently been sexually active, Elio could not donate blood.

Reflecting back on my conversation with Elio, I wonder about the roles of his nonreligious identity and familial background in his experience with donating blood. Though Elio did not make any connections with that experience and his nonreligious identity, I also did not encourage Elio to consider such a connection. As the researcher, I
discounted Elio’s experience with donating blood as irrelevant to ones that I believed had explicit connections with worldview inequities. I am confident that Elio’s prejudicial and discriminatory experiences with religion because of his sexuality played a role in the frustration he experienced when attempting to donate blood on campus. Perhaps, in that experience, his feelings of undesirability outweighed his interest in or need to consider the additional and intersecting influence of religion. Elio’s experience here belongs in the findings of my study, but I placed it here to acknowledge that, the kinds of inequities students recognize and encounter are complicated by their multiply marginalized identities.

Elio’s experience reminds me of the kinds of third wave student development theories I introduced in Chapter 2 that incorporated interdisciplinary and social identity frameworks, such as intersectionality and queer theory, to better articulate the complexity of privilege, oppression, and systemic factors that influence students’ experiences (Abes & Hernández, 2016; Abes et al., 2007; Johnson & Quaye, 2017; Jones & Abes, 2013).

The findings I presented in Chapter 4 provided crucial insight into specific inequities that students encountered from a worldview perspective. However, because students’ worldview identities and beliefs are intertwined with other aspects of their identities, it is necessary to explore the nature of multiple forms of inequities regarding the functioning of critical consciousness.

When thinking about the kinds of worldview inequities students discussed, I was reminded of Rockenbach et al.’s (2017) findings that, although students from their sample reported experiencing minimal incidents of overt prejudice on campus, they wondered if it is the covert practices that “reinforce students’ inclinations...to interact
primarily with people of the same worldview” (p. 6). In the context of their study, overt was defined as students noticing people of different worldviews quarrel with one another, and covert was defined as students feeling pressured to keep their worldview to themselves (among other examples). Similarly, most students in my study reflected primarily upon instances of covert practices and norms that contribute to systemic worldview oppression (i.e., assuming people pray or should dress-up on the Easter holiday and avoiding difficult religious conversations in class) when compared to overt instances of discrimination or prejudice among individuals with differing worldviews.

**Informative Q2**

**How might students make meaning of worldview social inequities?**

In this study, students’ expressions of various emotions reflected how they made meaning of the inequities they shared—and their emotions were influenced by environmental and systemic factors. Research on the notion of meaning-making within student development literature continues to evolve. As I shared in Chapter 2, some scholars who offered theories in what Jones and Stewart (2016) named the *first wave* of student development theories proposed that individuals progress through increasingly complex developmental orders or stages across the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains of development. Because most of the student development theories during that time were framed by psychological and developmental perspectives, students were understood as “bounded cognizing individual[s]” (Smithers & Eaton, 2017, p. 72) that moved progressively and linearly in a “somewhat...universal pattern” (Abes, 2019, p. 9) toward scholar/educator/organizational-established norms of development.
Second wave theories presented a more explicit focus on students’ social identities and were “less siloed by [developmental] domain” (Abes, 2019, p. 10). Regarding meaning-making, Abes et al. (2007) posited that meaning-making served as a filter through which students understood their contexts and multiple social identities. Through their Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (R-MMDI), Abes et al. (2007) suggested that students made meaning of their social identities as filtered by their environments and other contextual influences. In their 2013 publication, Jones and Abes acknowledged that one limitation of the R-MMDI was that the roles of systemic oppression were not considered in how students made meaning of their identities and, thus, incorporated intersectionality theory as another analytic framework. In doing so, they discussed the importance of micro- and macro-level analyses when exploring how students understand their identities. Though they continued to discuss the importance of the meaning-making filter, they shared that, in using an intersectional perspective, the meaning-making filter was less explicit and even more complicated to theorize. Johnson and Quaye (2017) presented a more explicitly defined meaning-making structure in their Queered Model of Black Racial Identity Development (Q-MBRID). The notion of desire in their model served as a meaning-making system and operated as both an outward (social identity performatives) and inward (sense of becoming) force, whereas the R-MMDI filter operated as solely an inward force.

As presented through my findings, I believe that emotionality tentatively manifested itself as students’ form of meaning-making toward the worldview inequities they experienced and reflected upon. The varied expressions of emotionality that I named presented figurations of the intentional relationships that existed between students and
their experiences with worldview inequities. Further, rather than students’ emotions being entirely self-driven expressions, I believe that emotionality also provided insight into how some students problematized their experiences. When writing about students’ emotions in the early stages of my analysis, I remember wondering, “Where is the action happening in these students’ experiences?” Initially, I did not recognize any idea or pattern around what I was assuming should be deemed action, such as physically doing something or making a change. I re-visited my literature as I worked through these ideas, and was reminded of Freire’s (1970, 1973) ideas of critical consciousness being a praxis, one defined by both reflection and action where critical reflection can also be action.

When returning to Freire’s (1970) work, I came across his understanding of problem-posing inquiry (sometimes referred to as inquiry that includes problematization or problematizing). To problematize something (such as a concept, term, or statement), is to question its inherent assumptions and de-mystify what is understood as the dominant truth (Crotty, 1998). I was not familiar with the complexity of this concept when writing my literature review because it was not something I came across or perhaps necessarily understood at the time. Given Vagle’s (2014) support for partially reviewing literature when conducting post-intentional phenomenology, I thought it was important to share how this information organically re-entered my study and discuss its implications with my findings, rather than go back and introduce this concept as a part of the literature that framed this research. Next, I share how problematization showed up in some students’ experiences.

In Chapter 4, I shared how aspects of guilt and frustration showed up for Alix when reflecting upon her sorority’s use of prayer. As we discussed how bothersome she...
found this practice, Alix first reflected upon the nature of her concern when she said, “to
go complain about that I think I would have to write a letter to the national headquarters
and they’re still having issues with basic things like diversity and not having members to
wear black face.” Though she wavered about whether she should express concern, adding
that she doubted anything would “change about that in the next 100 years,” she ultimately
said that she was “now” thinking she wanted to write a letter. I believe this example
highlights how Alix critically reflected upon and made meaning of her experience in a
critically conscious way.

As another example, I was reminded of Peter’s experience in participating at the
Day for Admitted Students. Because this was an event where Peter found a faith
community and met people with “a comparable worldview” during his visit as a
prospective student, he felt driven to investigate how many groups were represented
while tabling for the Christian student organization in his second semester. He quickly
realized that an overwhelming majority of the groups were Christian and less than five
were from other religious traditions. Because Peter had such a positive experience when
he attended, he seemed sympathetic to other students who might not find a group they
identify with at that event. Whether Peter will continue to be involved in that event in the
future, and whether he works to implement change given his concerns, this experience
sparked some initial critical reflection for him.

Informative Q3

What is the role of context in how students make meaning of worldview social
inequities?
The contexts in which students lived, worked, and engaged with others played a role in how they recognized, made meaning of, and acted upon worldview social inequities. By context, I refer to environmental (such as locations and campus climate) as well as systemic factors (such as power dynamics and normativity). As I shared in Chapter 2, many researchers who study human and college student development have acknowledged the important roles of environmental or contextual factors on how individuals understand their worlds and interact with others. Though emotions may signify solely internally driven phenomena, in that students are expressing their feelings, those emotions, and how they made meaning of those emotions, were ultimately influenced by the environmental and systemic contexts surrounding their past and ongoing experiences. Students’ encounters with other people, their classroom and co-curricular experiences, and students’ perceived campus climate also appeared to play a role in the situations students experienced, recognized, and chose to write and speak about. Finally, the stories students shared with me were even further situated by the study’s parameters given its two-week timeline for reflections.

As I shared throughout Chapter 4, students’ experiences on campus and perceptions of the climate were common topics in our interviews. Several students referenced the liberal nature of campus when discussing their experiences. In our second interview, Haven, who identifies as Roman Catholic, shared, “especially considering that William & Mary’s a predominantly liberal school, so I’d say that we have a really high religious tolerance here.” This perspective, that the campus is generally accepting of religious differences, is perhaps complicated by Haven’s leadership involvement with and commitment to Student Assembly. Haven shared that, although she did not want
people to feel excluded from the movie-screening event held on Good Friday, she believed that it “just ha[d] to happen [that] way.” This example leads me to believe that Haven’s involvement on campus and perspective of the school’s liberal nature contributed to the conflict she experienced over this event—further muddling how she reflected upon and responded to the other student’s concern.

In addition to environmental contexts, Wijeyesinghe and Jones (2014) noted that, “although the social world and its contexts have always been considered in theories, exactly what constitutes context has evolved to also include larger structures of inequality” (p. 9). There were systemic factors that I recognized during my analysis, both through students’ own language and recognition of such factors as well as through my own interpretations. By systemic, I am referring to institutionalized, normalized policies and practices that are socially, economically, and politically reinforced by dominating cultures and ideologies (both from an individual- and systems-level perspective). I found that notions of power and power dynamics permeated many students’ experiences. By power, I mean ways that privilege and marginalization were demonstrated, either by students in the study or other people that students referenced. In my findings, I refer to power as both (a) positional power, in a sense that people’s roles are sometimes associated with authoritative power; and (b) systemic power, in a sense that there are socially constructed schemas that contribute to who is deemed powerful and powerless given people’s various social identities.

Such “social power...legitimizes sets of knowledge while isolating others” (Wijeyesinghe, 2019, p. 29). The most prominent example of systemic power in this study arose by way of Christian and religious normativity. Though students did not use
the term normativity, several spoke about situations in which Christianity was assumed to be the dominant belief system or appeared to be valued more than other religions. This phenomenon was apparent in Alix’s experience with prayer in her sorority, Veronica’s story about students assuming people should or would want to pray for their law school applications, and Tristan’s experience with overhearing a student and her family make negative comments about others’ clothing on Easter Sunday in the dining hall.

From Veronica’s experience, though she questioned the group’s assumption that everyone was religious and would want to pray for their applications, she shared that she did not “question it” because, not only was the answer “good enough for [her]” as a Christian, but she also “didn’t want to make it awkward or give the impression that [she] wasn’t on the same page as them.” Abes (2019) argued that, when using critical and poststructural theories in research, that “it will never be enough to simply describe students’ experiences or the meaning they make of those experiences” (p. 12). Instead, educators should analyze “the intersecting domains of power and structures of inequality that frame development in the first place” (pp. 12–13). Without considering the pervasiveness of Christian normativity in which Veronica lives and interacts with others on campus, someone might wonder why Veronica did not say something to the other students or express her thoughts. However, the idea that others might question her faith or level of shared beliefs played an, understandably, influential role in how she responded to the situation.

As I shared at the start of this chapter, not only did students discuss their experiences on campus, but some also shared stories from childhood and high school that alludes to how influential prior contexts can be in how students engage with inequities.
Duran and Jones (2019) argued, “theory and higher education research frequently fails to consider how experiences that occur outside of colleges and universities influence the development of students” (p. 178). From my findings, it is not enough for educators to seek to learn only about students’ experiences on campus when trying to better understand climate and systemic oppression. I present practical implications for educators following my discussion.

**Primary Research Question**

**How might critical consciousness take shape for undergraduate college students (aged 18–24) whose (non)religious and existential worldview beliefs are an important part of their social identities?**

Emotionality represented varied expressions (i.e., emotions like frustration, discomfort, guilt, fear, conflict, sympathy, and curiosity) of the intentional relationships that existed between students and their experiences with worldview inequities. Further, emotionality, which served as students’ form of meaning-making and problematization, existed at the intersections of their developmental domains and shared interdependent relationships with environmental and systemic factors. These complex relationships detail how critical consciousness took shape for these students, or how they recognized, made meaning of, and acted upon worldview inequities.

As I shared in Chapter 2, before conducting my study, I created a visual for how I believed various components of my literature review might relate to one another. I did not intend to use the visual as a way to then test or confirm those relationships; rather, I found that the visual helped me organize numerous areas of research related to topics in my study. In Figure 1, I placed critical consciousness at the center of the visual at an
intersection between students’ domains of development (cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal). At that time, I placed the notion of meaning-making within the cognitive domain of my visual because I believed it was a function of cognition. However, I tried to remain open to new forms of meaning-making to discover how it might show up for students in my study. Finally, I was confident that context would play a role in how critical consciousness took shape, so I enclosed the visual with contextual factors, but I did not yet know how context would function in students’ experiences.

In reflecting back upon Figure 1, there were several discrepancies between the visual I presented in Chapter 2 and my findings I discussed in Chapter 4. Rather than critical consciousness existing as some ambiguous phenomenon at the intersections of students’ developmental domains, like I foresaw it to exist in my literature, I discovered that emotionality (just one aspect of how critical consciousness took shape in this study) tentatively manifested itself for students at the intersections of their domains of development. Additionally, the concept of meaning-making did not operate solely within students’ cognitive domain of development like I imagined previously. In this study, the notion of emotionality served as students’ form of meaning-making, where emotionality encompasses more than cognitive functioning, it represents the intentional relationships that existed between students and their experiences. Thus, whereas critical consciousness was centered in Figure 1 of the literature, emotionality was centered in my findings.

Further, in Figure 1, I acknowledged that context surrounded students and their experiences. However, I did not understand forms of movement or relationships that may have existed across other aspects of the figure like I do now at the conclusion of this study. Not only did students’ various expressions of emotionality (frustration, discomfort,
guilt, fear, conflict, sympathy, and curiosity) exist intersectionally with development, they were also evidently entangled with contextual (or environmental) and systemic factors. Emotionality existed as an interdependent relationship with such factors in that contextual and systemic forces played a role in how emotionality manifested among students and, reversely, students’ expressions of emotionality influenced their environments. As Duran and Jones (2019) argued, when using poststructural or critical theories, researchers “must not only address context but also...presume it as a significant influence on development, regardless of whether the individual sees it as such. Furthermore, context...is always tied to larger structures of inequality and an analysis of power” (p. 171). Thus, how critical consciousness took shape was much more complex than I anticipated, involving multiple components including emotionality (and its meaning-making nature), developmental factors, and environmental and systemic factors.

While crafting my findings, I spent a long time trying to determine how I would present the complexity of findings and whether I wanted to use a visual diagram in addition to text. I was also conscious of Vagle’s (2014) image (see Figure 7) for describing tentative manifestations in PIP research. When crafting post-intentional texts, Vagle (2010) noted that “one is elucidating...grey areas (tentative manifestations)—not trying to center the meaning” (p. 7). In grappling with how I could visually communicate my findings, I discovered Smithers and Eaton’s (2017) critique of representational models in student development research. In applying Rosi Braidotti’s (2011) concept of nomadic subjectivity (a relational subjectivity), Smithers and Eaton argued that, even among third-wave theorizing like the Q-MMDI (which I described in Chapter 2), authors of that
model acknowledged that, even though queer theory is antithetical to representation, they only used a visual model for the purposes of “utility” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 204).

In “rejecting and resisting the call for representational models,” Smithers and Eaton (2017) discussed the terminology of figurations over representations or models as a way to “emphasiz[e] process over product, nonlinearity over linearity, and radical entanglement in a shifting and contingent world” (pp. 82–83). As these scholars shared, Braidotti (2011) defined figurations as “ways of expressing different situated subject positions” that “defy established modes of theoretical representation” (p. 14). Thus, I decided to present my findings as a figuration of critical consciousness. I spent time sketching ways to convey such a figuration, one that would acknowledge the relationships between and three-dimensional movement among the components of my findings. I then used tools I was knowledgeable about and somewhat comfortable with using (e.g., PowerPoint and Canva) to best display my findings. In the end, I used two figurations that I created with PowerPoint.

The first figuration, Figure 9, is a display of how critical consciousness regarding worldview inequities took shape for students in this study. As I described previously, emotionality existed at the intersections between domains of student development and shared interdependent relationships with environmental and systemic factors. The second figuration, Figure 10, is a detailed depiction of the emotionality center of Figure 9 and indicates the seven expressions of emotionality that I named from students’ experiences in this study. The arrows signify rotating movement among the emotions as they sometimes interacted with one another for students in this study.
Figure 9. A figuration of how critical consciousness regarding worldview inequities took shape for students in this study.

Figure 10. A figuration of the various expressions of emotionality. The arrows signify rotating movement as the emotions sometimes interacted with one another.
Previous critical and poststructural theories and models of student development and critical consciousness share some commonalities and differences with my own findings and figurations. As Jones and McEwen (2000) noted, their MMDI and R-MMDI, did not serve to portray developmental processes. Rather, the models illuminated the interactions of multiple social identities “and hint[ed] at factors that contribute to the development of identity” (p. 412). Similarly, my findings suggest that multiple factors interact in complicated ways and that how students made meaning of their experiences was constantly in flux. Ironically as it may seem given the complexity of my findings, they are supported by Johnson and Quaye’s (2017) perspective that notions of meaning-making in student development research can be understood as more specific, nuanced, and unique manifestations rather than as an intangible filter. In this research, critical consciousness took shape as a larger process, with emotionality existing at the intersections of developmental domains and sharing interdependent relationships with environmental and systemic contexts.

When reviewing the evolution of student development models—the actual depiction of those models—it is apparent that scholars have always grappled with articulating and visualizing how students make meaning in relation to their environments. I believe that one crucial aspect of the findings from my study, as further supported by my methodological approach, suggests that the shaping and functioning of critical consciousness is a complex, developmental phenomenon (convoluted by contextual and systemic factors) that students are constantly moving through rather than toward. Next, I discuss more about the roles of student development in critical consciousness research.
The Roles of Student Development in Critical Consciousness

Because I chose to include student development theory in my literature, the methods I used and questions I asked inevitably influenced the kinds of data I gathered and provided insight into how students’ developmental domains showed up in the shaping of critical consciousness. For example, some of my interview questions referenced students’ relationships with their friends (relating to interpersonal development), how students described and understood their social identities (intrapersonal development), and how they understood and made sense of worldview inequities (cognitive development). As a reminder, I did not use student development theory as an analytic framework to measure or gauge students’ levels of development in relation to critical consciousness because that was not my research question and because developmental research necessitates longitudinal findings. Rather, I used student development theory to conceptualize the various factors that often influence how students develop, not to what extent they develop.

In various ways, students in this study shared experiences that highlighted the roles of all three domains of development regarding how their critical consciousness took shape. Students’ awareness of their multiple social identities, how salient certain identities were to them, their past experiences given their identities, and their understandings of the marginalized and privileged nature of theirs and others’ identities, all appeared to play an influential role in how students made sense of the experiences they wrote about. Even the kinds of inequities that students noticed (or did not notice) related to their levels of exposure with others who hold different worldviews, personal experiences with worldview discrimination or inequities, and educational moments
within academic settings inclusive of diverse worldview perspectives. Most of the experiences students wrote about included other individuals such as students’ friends, instructors, supervisors, and family members. Such relationships inevitably influenced students’ levels of involvement on campus and ultimately the social and organizational groups they were introduced to, the kinds of conversations they engaged with, and events that they attended on and off campus. Oftentimes, those other individuals would be a part of students’ meaning-making process because they would encounter inequities with other people or be around their friends when reflecting upon an observation. As suggested throughout Chapter 4, students’ pre-existing beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and biases were also present in the emotions they conveyed and how I interpreted what sense they made of their experiences. All of the nuanced details of students’ interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive domains of development certainly complicated how critical consciousness took shape.

As an example, the kinds of inequities students recognized and encountered were influenced by students’ own identities and accompanying and ensuing experiences. Like Taylor (2017) discovered, the racial socialization and awareness that students in her study experienced differed by students’ racial identities. Taylor (2017) shared that Students of Color seemed to have entered college with “an abstract understanding of the systemic nature of racism,” as influenced by conversations with their parents, whereas White students often described “isolated examples of incidents their parents had labeled as racist” (p. 166). Taylor’s findings reminded me of some of my own. Haven, who is Roman Catholic and submitted a reflection about the Student Assembly screening of a movie on Good Friday, shared in her reflection that she “had never seen nor heard of any
social inequities between/among people of different worldviews on campus.” During our second interview, she spoke to me briefly about a friend of hers, who is Muslim, who once told her how she had experienced an unwarranted security search in an airport. In describing her friend’s experience, Haven said, “it is a situation that is not unheard of and sadly is very common for most Muslims.” Haven, who does not identify with a minoritized worldview, such as Muslim, seemed to have an understanding of worldview inequities based on a specific incident someone shared with her rather than a recognition of extant Christian normativity that exists, like it did in her experience on Good Friday.

How students’ developmental domains showed up also informed a larger conversation in the literature, which I discussed in Chapter 2, regarding where liberation lies for those who are oppressed and who should be responsible for such liberation. Freire (1973) wrote that, “it is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors” (p. 58). In complicating Freire’s perspective in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Bacon (2015) envisioned a pedagogy for the oppressor and questioned whether oppressors are “released from any obligation to act” (p. 228). This dichotomy of a pedagogy of the oppressed versus oppressor became complicated when considering students’ experiences intersectionally. Wijeyesinghe (2019) wrote that “most people inhabit social locations of marginality and privilege” (p. 30). Because the 15 students who participated in my study had such a variety of experiences and identified with multiple social identities, both historically marginalized and majoritized, I was able to recognize the complexity of how critical consciousness functioned across students’ experiences. When I consider my findings with Bacon’s (2015) argument for a pedagogy for the oppressor, I wonder if he might believe that those who are Christian (and perhaps
generally religious in certain contexts) hold the responsibility in dismantling worldview inequities. Such a perspective, though, would continue to perpetuate a dichotomous understanding of who should be critically conscious, who has the responsibility to upend inequitable structures, and, consequently, who is deemed powerless in those efforts. Intersectionality theory complicates that dichotomy because, for example, a person who is Christian may hold privilege in U.S. society, but they may not always hold privilege, especially if they identify with other minoritized identities. For students who live in spaces where they experience marginality and privilege, thinking and behaving in critically conscious ways can be both empowering and exhausting.

For example, this discussion reminds me of Alix’s experience with her sorority and their use of prayer. As a nonreligious person, Alix is in the minoritized position among her Christian sorority sisters and as a member of an organization that was founded in Christian principles. Some educators might believe that it should not be Alix’s responsibility to recognize, address, and make changes toward a practice that is not inclusive of her worldview identity and beliefs. While I do not believe that it should be the sole responsibility of Alix, I also know that Alix expressed feelings of empowerment in our interview when she realized that she may actually be able to do something about her concerns, to write a letter. How critical consciousness functions is convoluted, and a dichotomous perspective on who should or should not address inequitable structures is too simple of a solution. In Alix’s experience, I also believe that other people (like university educators) should be seeking out and making practical changes aside from Alix and her more privileged sorority sisters—something I present in my implications section to follow.
As I shared in Chapter 2, scholars have discussed the importance of exposure to diverse others and cognitive complexity in how both students and educators move or progress toward critical consciousness (Landreman et al., 2007; Taylor, 2017). Similarly, Freire (1970) expressed a similar idea that awakenings, or encounters with critical incidents, influence individuals' development of critical consciousness. Upon writing Chapter 4, I discovered Taylor and Reynolds’s (2019) discussion on the dangers of how cognitive dissonance can be understood in student development research. Their perspective is crucial to my findings because, for many students in my study and as supported by previous research on critical consciousness, experiencing dissonance may be the “critical incident” (Landreman et al., 2007) that sparks self-reflection for students. Taylor and Reynolds (2019) presented the perspective that “an ability to navigate persistent dissonance is not development for marginalized communities. Rather, the experience of persistent dissonance represents the perpetuation of systemic oppression” (p. 100). In their article, Taylor (a professor) asked Reynolds (who was a doctoral student in Taylor’s course) if it was necessary for Reynolds to learn through an experiential opportunity that Ecuador represented an unjust system. Reynolds responded,

If that is what I was supposed to learn, I would have rather done it in a class-room than experience it in the way I did…The classroom, while it can be a hard space, is an easier space because there is a distance from it. (p. 105)

This information made me reconsider the experiences for some of the students in my study who live with marginalized identities, either in addition to their marginalized worldview identity or in addition to their privileged identities. What did it mean for the students in my study who hold marginalized identities to not only live within, but to also
seek out, inequitable systems? Although I invited students to participate who are all marginalized and majoritized in various ways, there is nuance in students’ experiences given their varied identities and the spaces in which they live. There is ample room for additional research regarding how intersectionality theory and critical perspectives of student development theory (like questioning the role of cognitive dissonance) further complicates how critical consciousness functions.

**Importance of No Reflections**

There were two students who participated in my study for whom I did not share specific experiences from in Chapter 4. I decided to write more about them in this section because I believe that a discussion of how students’ developmental domains and tenets of intersectionality played a role in students’ experiences similarly had something to do with why Riley and Kopten did not submit reflections. Okello and White (2019) reminded me of Riley when they wrote, “a consciousness of existence...is determined by the constraints and possibilities experienced in one’s life/existential situation” (p. 147). Throughout her childhood, Riley experienced a lot of marginalization in the church her family attended. As I briefly introduced in Riley’s bio, she grew up attending Baptist church, but shared that she “was getting screamed at every Sunday by hell fire and brimstone.” She also shared that, her church’s stance on women and non-heterosexuals helped “to drive [her] away from the church.” She spoke about a specific incident when she was 16 years old where she was having a conversation with the pastor and Riley used the word “exemplary” in a sentence. The pastor responded with, “Wow, exemplary. That’s such a big word!” and Riley said the pastor told her she was “such a pretty girl.” Within the context of this two-week study, even if worldview inequities existed around Riley,
perhaps because she had to deal with religious and gender discrimination for so long, her attentiveness to or priorities toward worldview inequities was minimal. In our second interview, Riley shared that seeking out inequities was not necessarily a “priority” for her because she has never had to experience religious inequities on campus and that William & Mary “is a fairly liberal campus” so she is in “the majority” as a nonreligious student. For the first time in her life, Riley was living in spaces where she felt included because of her nonreligious identity; thus, perhaps because she lived among such inequities for so long, she was not actively seeking more out. Finally, most of the experiences that Riley shared with me during our time together included reference to her lower socioeconomic status compared to other students on campus. So, although Riley did not submit any reflections for this study and did not discuss any examples of worldview inequities on campus, she shared a great deal of information about her other marginalized identities that further supports the role of intrapersonal development and intersectionality theory in how students make meaning of inequities.

As I shared briefly in his bio, Kopten is a White male who grew up Christian, is highly involved on campus with a Christian student organization, and recently began sharing his gay identity with friends on campus. In our second interview, Kopten said, 

Since our first meeting, I just didn’t find anything honestly. So I guess that’s good… I guess we’re blessed to be on a college campus, I think college campuses are probably one of the better places in the world that address inequities and try to do that sort of thing.
Kopten was one of the students to whom I asked two additional reflective questions during our last interview, one of those being, “What do social inequities mean to you?”

He said,

In defining social inequities, my thoughts were pretty similar to the definition you had ...that there’s some sort of particular attribute about them in how they’re treated or how they interact with society, it means that they don’t have the same access to some of the same things or the inherent freedom to do certain things….I don’t have any personal things to describe that.

As he began to reflect upon larger systemic inequities that he was aware of, like access to quality education, he transitioned to a discussion about marriage counseling in churches.

He said,

I’ve been reading a bit lately on blogs, in considering my future, finding a partner and things like that. I think marriage counseling is taken for granted in churches. That won’t happen if you’re in a non-affirming congregation, they’re not going to give you marriage counseling.

For Kopten, he has not been the recipient of discrimination or marginalization because of his Christian identity, which he acknowledged often in our conversations. Unlike some of the other students in this study, like Nima, Alix, and Riya, Kopten has not experienced a lack of resources or opportunity because of his worldview (or other) social identities. In addition to a lack of personal experience with discrimination, Kopten did not share any stories where he has had opportunities to learn from others with different worldviews than his own. What I am curious about, is how Kopten’s functioning of critical consciousness will evolve if or as he begins to encounter inequitable opportunities
because of his gay identity, which he has only recently begun sharing with others. Riley and Kopten’s experiences prior to this study acknowledge the importance of the components I discussed previously through my figuration (i.e., developmental domains and contextual and systemic factors) in understanding how these students’ critical consciousness took shape or may take shape in the future.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

There were some limitations in the research design and methodology of this study. As a full-time doctoral student in my program with limited external funds to support the scope of my research, I chose to conduct my study at the institution I was attending. Though this allowed me to easily recruit and meet with students at times most convenient for them, and I was able to relate to some of the students’ stories given my familiarity with the campus, the location of this research was limited to one particular institution, a small-medium sized four-year, public, liberal arts, research institution in southeastern Virginia.

Further, the timing of the study offered both benefits and challenges. Because I gathered data during the latter half of an academic semester, I allowed two weeks for students to record and submit their reflections to try and accommodate for students’ academic and personal responsibilities. However, I conducted the study right before final exams and there were several religious holidays that took place during the two-week reflection period. In some ways, the timing of the study perhaps offered more worldview-related experiences given the religious holidays, but in other ways, students were busy with other responsibilities that may have compromised some of their interest in or commitment to the study.
Additionally, findings from this research were limited to a particular group of students, those that volunteered to participate. In much qualitative research, participants are recruited and the sample for the study is then limited by those who are willing to participate. Thus, the nature of this research, the topic under investigation, and my reported findings are limited by students who, presumably, identified somewhat strongly with their worldview identity. Though this was a purposeful goal in my design, to recruit students who believed their worldview identity was at least somewhat important to them, the findings do not reflect how critical consciousness might take shape among other populations of students.

This study’s findings were also delimited by several factors influenced by me as the researcher. Because I wanted the student participant sample to proportionally reflect the student population in terms of students’ worldview and other social identifications such as gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation, I needed to purposefully select participants, which eliminated others who were interested in participating and limited my findings to specific students’ experiences. Although the findings I shared offer implications that can be used and adapted to similar and different contexts, students’ experiences from this study are not intended to be generalized to similar populations of students. Like how the phenomenon of critical consciousness was shaped in various ways among the students in this study, it would most certainly take shape differently for other students.
Implications for Practice

Being cognizant of the limitations and delimitations of this study, in this section I present some practical implications of my findings related to assessment, purposeful problematization efforts with students, and professional development for educators.

Campus Assessments

Researchers have developed several quantitative instruments that institutions can use to assess concepts like campus climate, pluralism, and worldview diversity and engagement. Such tools have offered findings that provide insight into national trends among students’ worldview identities, pluralistic development, and pervasiveness of discriminatory practices. However, large-scale quantitative data does not often provide the nuanced experiences that students encounter and attempt to grapple with related to micro- and macro-level worldview inequities. Examining how students experience inequities and uncovering what factors are involved in the functioning of critical consciousness requires qualitative methods that are tailored to an institution's context.

As my findings suggest, social inequities can exist and are perpetuated in a wide variety of places on college campuses. While a university’s student involvement, health and wellness, or multicultural development offices (among others) may implement their own assessment efforts, the leaders of those offices may not consider the importance of worldview inequities and the larger implications of critically conscious practices when gathering data. As more research is conducted about critical consciousness, findings should be used to inform campus assessment efforts to more accurately collect information on topics like worldview diversity, engagement, and inequities among students and educators in higher education. In thinking of the Jewish students’ experience
who Missy met during a frisbee tournament, it makes me wonder whether student services, such as dining or recreation facilities, are doing enough to assess students’ qualitative experiences with equitable practices, let alone those involving worldview identities and beliefs.

Though there are ongoing efforts in higher education to gather information about campus climate, about many topics and areas of research, some instruments may only provide a time-restricted glimpse into what is happening on a given campus. Further, when collecting such data, findings are limited to students’ first-person, conscious accounts of their experiences. However, such a solely constructivist understanding of students’ experiences, and the inequities they disclose, may not provide a perspective inclusive of systemic factors that exist outside students’ current awareness. Thus, it is important to consider a theoretical borderlands perspective (Abes, 2009) when gathering and assessing campus climate data, one that accounts for multiple forms of knowledge creation and allows for possibilities (i.e., implications) that fall in-between perspectives (e.g., constructivist, critical, poststructural, etc.). As with any research, simply gathering data about students’ experiences is not enough for assessment efforts and most certainly not enough to make practical and policy changes. If institutions purchase outside quantitative instruments to measure campus climate, or use their own institutionally developed qualitative instruments, data should be evaluated critically so that changes can be implemented.

**Purposeful Problematization**

As I shared in Chapter 1, leading educational organizations and many higher education institutions promote critical thinking as a student learning outcome. To think
critically, particularly in critically conscious ways, requires some form of problematization (Freire, 1973), an “awakening of critical awareness” (p. 19). My findings suggest that emotionality served as a form of problematization for how some students in this study made meaning. As I discussed earlier when responding to the question of how students made meaning of worldview inequities, Peter and Alex shared experiences in which their emotional responses (including frustration, discomfort, guilt, and curiosity) supported, and perhaps influenced, how they problematized their concerns. Further, as shown in Figure 9, not only were students’ various domains of development involved in how emotionality presented itself, but environmental and systemic factors also played an equally important interdependent role with how students problematized (or did not) their experiences. Thus, it is imperative that an institution’s efforts to encourage students’ critical consciousness and students’ abilities to problematize inequities include attention to both the concept of emotionality as well as developmental, environmental, and systemic factors.

I came to understand problematization in this study, not only through how students critically made meaning of their experiences, but also through the problem-posing role of the reflections and interviews. As I shared throughout Chapter 4, several students often referred to the task of writing the reflections and our conversations during our first interviews as influential factors in how they noticed and made sense of the topics they wrote and spoke about. For example, Alix said in her second interview that she was thinking “now” that she wanted to write a letter about her concerns with the sorority’s prayer. I think this statement is important because it suggests that, perhaps after having the space and time to critically reflect upon potential worldview inequities, Alix seemed
to problematize the situation through her frustration, not necessarily because she knew it existed. For Peter, in our second interview he had just finished sharing his experience as a representative of his Christian organization at Day for Admitted Students event, and I asked, “What do you think may have contributed to how you reflected on this experience?” He said,

I think a huge thing was meeting with you the couple weeks before, because I definitely would have noticed that I mean it was very obvious that there wasn’t equal representation so I definitely would have noticed it. But would I have said wait, let’s actually see what’s going on and think through it? Maybe, maybe not...I think just kind of being prompted to do it really helped and I’m glad because I would have missed out on understanding that if I hadn’t taken that step forward.

Because forms of problematization will present differently for students, it is important that there are opportunities across campus for students to purposefully raise their awareness about worldview inequities. Purposeful problematization and space and time for critical reflection can occur in a variety of ways, not just through written prompts within doctoral research like it did in mine. I believe such problematization can be encouraged on campuses through both formalized programs like research, assessment, and educational initiatives, but it can also happen organically (as supported in my findings) in places like the classroom, in conversations between students, faculty, and administrators, in the dining halls, or during the planning of student events. However, just because inequities are in existence and individuals are having conversations about worldview differences does not mean that they are recognizing inequities and making sense of their feelings and reactions to those inequities. Thus, perhaps by identifying
administrative roles that are dedicated to promoting critically conscious practices, educational programs, and professional development for faculty and staff, institutions can begin to incorporate ways for others to problematize inequities on their campuses.

Though it seems appropriate for educators working in units such as multicultural or spiritual and faith development on campuses to develop programmatic curricula around critical consciousness, it is equally imperative that such efforts reach other units on campus across student and academic affairs offices. There are several published examples of programs and pedagogical efforts that explicitly focus on interfaith and intergroup dialogue and building community across worldview differences (Correia et al., 2016; Edwards, 2014; Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013; Zúñiga et al., 2007). Still, findings from my study regarding power dynamics between students and faculty or staff members suggest that institutions need to direct an equal amount, if not more, attention toward promoting critical consciousness regarding worldview inequities among educators than they currently do for students.

**Positions and Professional Development**

Using a theoretical borderlands approach (Abes, 2009) and tenets of intersectionality encouraged me to examine, not only how students were engaging with and making sense of worldview inequities, but also what external factors (e.g., educators, systemic structures, culture) were influencing students’ experiences. As I shared in Chapter 4, several students in this study shared experiences that both directly and indirectly involved educators on campus. When Peter spoke about the Hinduism course he took during his first semester, he shared that, even though students were asked to share their poems aloud to one another, there was no room for dialogue. Such opportunities for
dialogue can both promote and hinder how students make meaning of worldview differences. Even if Peter’s instructor had encouraged the students to have a conversation with one another after they shared their poems, conversations may go unbalanced for more introverted students (Edwards, 2016). And, as my findings suggest, shyness or other personality characteristics and expressions are just one of many factors (e.g., developmental, environmental, and emotionality) that influence how and why students engage in conversation about worldview differences and inequities. Thus, though it is important for faculty to make space and time for students to engage with one another in the classroom, verbal dialogue is just one method for accomplishing those goals (e.g., written reflections and responses, discussion boards, blogs). For instructors seeking to encourage critically conscious conversations and practices, whether regarding topics of worldview identities and beliefs or otherwise, they should have professional development opportunities on campus that are grounded in empirical findings to develop their curricular efforts.

Outside of the classroom, I am reminded of Nima’s experience with finding limited spaces on campus for practicing her prayers throughout the day and Riya’s experience with encountering inauthentic yoga classes because of the instructors’ adaptations of traditional Hindu songs. As I shared earlier, both Nima and Riya experienced a complicated mixture of resignation and desire in making sense of their experiences. Riya wondered about how important her concern was and how others might perceive her concerns differently, and Nima spoke about how, given the limited access to meditation and prayer spaces on campus, she would “feel weird with people looking at [her]” and that she did not want “people gawking” and wondering what she was doing.
Some educators might question where the responsibility lies in bringing these inequitable practices to the attention of faculty and staff. I believe it is the role of institutions and their leaders to develop ways for students to not need to feel responsible for making themselves feel welcomed and included (and to then feel guilty in doing so). Only when critically aware of one’s own privileges and oppressions can one more effectively work toward liberatory practices for others (i.e., students) (Landreman et al., 2017). To achieve such critical awareness, educators, just like students, need opportunities for purposeful problematization of inequities that exist around them and that they themselves perpetuate.

In a paper where I shared preliminary findings from my dissertation (Armstrong, 2019), I wrote,

> If interworldview efforts and programming continue to place full responsibility of students’ development of pluralism on the students themselves, such efforts ignore the responsibility of practitioners and faculty in examining their own capacities to think and act in critically conscious ways, creating power dynamics that contribute to and hinder students’ experiences and abilities to engage across worldview differences. (p. 178)

Additionally, through my own experience working in student and academic affairs, I have gleaned that some educators do not feel comfortable with or are not interested in supporting students emotionally. I often hear them say some sort of variation of, “We are not mental health counselors.” While I agree with this perspective, in that I would never try to assist a student with long-term psychological care, I do believe it is my responsibility as an educator to recognize the strength and role of students’ emotions and the various factors that contribute to how they express them. Findings from this study
support the reality that, for some students, emotions function as a form of meaning-making. Students in this study often expressed certain behaviors or stated various feelings when talking about the experiences they encountered and how those experiences affected them. Thus, being attuned to how students express themselves can provide insight into what kinds of inequities exist. It is up to educators to then respond and take action.

Perhaps a combination of campus assessment efforts, dedicated administrative positions, and professional development or training for educators would help in placing more responsibility on university leaders for identifying worldview inequities and implementing practices to change them. Further, responsibility does not mean a lack of collaboration with students; rather, it means that students, such as many in my study, should not feel the burden of initiating conversations with higher education and student affairs educators (faculty and staff) about how and why they feel excluded because educators are not taking the initiative to ask students first.

**Implications for Methodology and Research**

I begin this section by offering implications for the methodology and methods I used and finish with implications for future areas of research. I appreciated how well post-intentional phenomenology (PIP) supported the ambiguous nature of the phenomenon I was exploring, critical consciousness. This methodology also supported the freedom and flexibility I needed while analyzing my data so that I could more confidently present the findings that most manifested themselves for me in an unscripted format. Because I gathered a lot of detailed data from many students, I was able to return to some of Vagle’s (2014) suggested methodological processes and ideas about
phenomenology whenever I felt overwhelmed by the data or stuck about where I should go next in my analysis and presentation of findings.

One of the biggest challenges I experienced in using PIP in this study was in how often I would move between trying to focus on individual students’ experiences given their intricate histories and various identities and the phenomenon of critical consciousness. For example, when thinking about units of analyses and how I would present the data, I had to constantly remind myself that, when using PIP, the goal is not to study the individual; rather, it is to study how a phenomenon manifests and appears across students’ experiences. Only when I was purposefully seeking intentionalities was I able to lessen my focus of analysis on any individual student and begin noticing ways that critical consciousness was taking shape for multiple students. In combining a theoretical borderlands approach with PIP, I thought it was important to thoroughly describe students’ experiences, while also acknowledging how I noticed the primary tentative manifestation of emotionality across their experiences. Because of this, aspects of my data analysis and presentation of findings took a lot of time. Thus, one implication of this methodology would be for researchers to be very purposeful in the number of participants they seek and how they rationalize such a selection. Unlike with quantitative methodologies, there are no prescriptive recommendations on the number of participants needed in a PIP study (and many other qualitative approaches). In totality, the 15 students who volunteered for my study provided unique data that influenced how I interpreted and came to recognize the manifestations presented. However, I recognize that other students and participant quantities may have contributed differently to my findings and implications.
Additionally, I want to share some thoughts on using reflection prompts as a way to capture phenomenological experiences. In my study, I encouraged students to record reflections over a two-week period. As I wrote on May 28, 2018, through my post-reflexive journaling, “a shared purpose of the written anecdotes was to encourage participants to ‘write specifically about their experience of the phenomenon as a re-telling’ (Vagle, 2014, p. 89).” Because phenomena are constantly shifting, Vagle (2014) recommended a less structured protocol to allow individuals to reflect upon their experiences freely. However, after my first few initial interviews with students, I quickly realized how much some students actually valued structure and how seemingly nervous they were about a lack of structure. I attempted to balance the amount of structure in the reflection prompts by offering definitions of key terms like worldview and social inequity, while encouraging students to reflect upon anything they experienced that they believed was relevant to the conversation (first interview) we had together. Though it is difficult to know why some students submitted none or minimal reflections, I wonder if it was a combination of the time limitations for reflecting and students’ historical understandings of worldview inequities.

Another implication of this methodology is the importance of staying true to Vagle’s (2014) recommendation of a “partial review of literature” when using PIP (p. 122). As an undergraduate Psychology major through my time as a doctoral student, I have been socialized to thoroughly review literature when conducting research. Many inquiries and paradigms of methodological approaches encourage researchers to conduct a thorough review of literature in order to present rationale for one’s research question or topic of research. While conducting research in order to inform past and future research is
an important effort, it is also important to recognize the challenges in over-saturating one’s understanding of a phenomenon before conducting new research. Vagle (2010) acknowledged, “I realize this runs counter to conventional norms, but the primary goal is to capture tentative manifestations of the phenomenon as it is lived—not use existing theories to explain or predict what might take place” (p. 10). On May 28, 2018, I reflected upon my use of literature through my post-reflexive journaling,

Vagle encourages researchers to conduct a “partial review of the literature,” to not spend a whole lot of time reviewing literature before the study. He realizes this runs counter to the conventional norms. “So, situate the phenomenon but don’t spend a lot of time building a literature case. However, you can and should bring literature in the field to bear as fully as possible when you craft your text.” (Vagle, 2010, p. 10). Well, crap, I’ve already done this.

By “done this,” I meant that I felt I had already built an argument for how I believed critical consciousness would take shape for students given my understanding of the literature I reviewed. I know that my partial review of literature and use of a figure in Chapter 2 to orient and organize my literature most definitely influenced my data gathering methods and analysis of the data. I am glad that I used post-reflexive journaling because it at least allowed me to remain aware of my balance between acknowledging the work others had done on my topic, while allowing students’ experiences to create new ways of understanding meaning-making and critical consciousness.

Many of my implications for future research stem from the topics I presented earlier in my discussion of findings. As Johnson and Quaye (2017) suggested in their article, and as further supported through my findings, how students make meaning can be
opened up and examined in more detailed and complicated ways. As a graduate student, and someone who had an opportunity to teach graduate students, I often hear complaints about how to put theory into practice. If scholars continue to produce student development theories and models that are too vague or introduce terminology without defining it, educators will continue to have difficulty applying concepts to their practice. How emotionality manifested in this study is just one way that meaning-making can arise; yet, the emotions that students grappled with and how their environments influenced their feelings was clearly evident. Emotionality did not serve as an undefinable filter through which students made meaning; emotionality was the tentative manifestation of their meaning-making. Future research on this phenomenon may benefit from applying emotionality as a framework from other fields of study.

In addition to more research that explores the role of emotionality in critical consciousness, my findings also point to the need to explore the nuances of how action manifests itself in conversations of critical consciousness. Just as students differ in how they understand their identities, how they make sense of their worlds, and how they develop relations with others, so too does their capacities to take action toward inequities. As I shared earlier, I struggled to understand how some students who participated in my study were taking action because I understood action to mean enacting a change. However, as nuanced as emotionality proved to be, I imagine that how action manifests is equally as nuanced. Freire (1970) understood that to think and act within conscientização was to problematize one’s realities. For Kumashiro (2002), raising one’s awareness of the complexities of privilege and oppression does “not necessarily lead to action and transformation” (p. 48). I agree that reflecting upon an issue will not directly create
change to policies or practices. However, students differ in their functioning of critical consciousness for many reasons, and while action for one student may mean writing a letter to the national headquarters of their sorority (like Alix), action for another student may mean reflecting upon what student organizations are represented at a college event and being curious about what that might mean for prospective students (like Peter). As with all aspects of development, operating in critically conscious ways is a constantly moving process where each student’s place varies widely. More research on how action manifests for students can provide more insight into how critical consciousness functions.

Another fruitful area of research would be on the applications of intersectionality theory in qualitative research that includes participants who live among and identify with marginalized and privileged spaces and identities. As I shared earlier, because students are the recipients of compounding systems of privilege and oppression, understanding how critical consciousness takes shape is a complex theoretical endeavor. As a critical and poststructural theory, intersectionality has the ability to push dichotomized perspectives on dismantling inequitable structures. It is not enough to say that marginalized populations like Muslim students should not be the ones asking for what they need; rather, if a student with a marginalized identity finds comfort and empowerment in taking action on their behalf, educators should respect those efforts and, at the same time, recognize their own roles in needing to address systemic inequities as advocates.

Finally, as Landreman et al. (2017) sought to do with multicultural educators, much more research is needed to understand the functioning of critical consciousness for educators across institutional departments and levels. As Jones and Abes (2013) noted,
there is not enough scholarship that addresses the need to dismantle the structural inequalities that influence students’ conceptualizations of themselves and their meaning-making capacities. I believe educators have a responsibility to be critically conscious about, not only their own practices, but how inequitable structures and marginalizing practices exist on their campuses. Future qualitative research could examine how critical consciousness manifests for university educators. Specifically, small-scale, contextualized studies like how critical consciousness takes shape for educators in specific areas like financial aid or academic advising could provide more directed implications for practice.

**Conclusion**

To expand upon research regarding pluralism and interfaith initiatives in higher education, I sought to explore how students recognize, make meaning of, and act upon social inequities. In my research question, I asked how critical consciousness regarding worldview inequities might take shape for 15 undergraduate students at William & Mary. Although increasing numbers of scholars within higher education and student affairs research are using critical consciousness as a framework, limited research is focused on how critical consciousness functions as a phenomenon.

Findings from this study suggest that critical consciousness took shape through multiple factors. Specifically, emotionality tentatively manifested in the form of several emotions (frustration, discomfort, guilt, fear, conflict, sympathy, and curiosity), which were interdependently related to environmental (e.g., context, classroom and co-curricular experiences, exposure to diverse worldviews, and campus climate) and systemic factors (e.g., implications of positional and systemic power, privilege, and
oppression). My findings reflect just one way that meaning-making can arise, such as through the concept of emotionality. Additionally, in recognizing students’ experiences intersectionally, my findings complicated the dichotomous perspectives of a pedagogy of the oppressed versus oppressor—suggesting that theories of intersectionality have the ability to push dichotomized perspectives on dismantling inequitable structures.

Scholars exploring future research in this area should be attuned to the complex and layered implications of conducting studies with students who hold combinations of marginalized and majoritized identities. Examining critical consciousness necessitates recognizing the complicated repercussions of asking or determining who should be critically-conscious and who holds the responsibility in upending inequitable structures. More research focused explicitly on how action takes shape within the functioning of critical consciousness might better inform who recognizes, makes meaning of, and acts upon inequities.
Appendix A: Call for Participation Image

Are you...
religious, or not?
spiritual, or not?
atheist, agnostic?
another worldview?

Seeking W&M Undergrads for Dissertation Study March 2018

Interested?
Learn more at:

[www.tinyurl.com/WMstudy2018](http://www.tinyurl.com/WMstudy2018)

$5 drawing for interest form
$50 for selected participants
Appendix B: Online Participant Interest Form

My name is Amanda Armstrong, and I'm a Ph.D. student studying Higher Education at William & Mary. By submitting this form, you'll be automatically placed into a random drawing for a $5 Visa e-gift card. 

*Submitting this form does not commit you as a participant in the study.*

**What am I doing?** I'd like to better understand how undergraduate students experience and understand social issues related to people's religious, nonreligious, spiritual, and other worldview identities on or around campus. Details regarding the study expectations will be shared with interested and participating students.

**What's this form?** This form will provide me with brief information relevant to my study. In the coming weeks, I may follow-up via email and ask if you'd like to participate. Students who participate in the study have an opportunity to receive up to $50. The information you submit here will remain confidential, but it is not anonymous so that I can contact you afterwards. Only I have access to these responses, and your form will be deleted if you do not participate in the study.

- What is your first and last name?
- What is your age?
- Which year are you?
- Are you currently enrolled in at least 12 credits? (Yes, No)
- Please select all of the following identities or worldview perspectives with which you identify:
  - (A worldview being your guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a particular religious tradition, spiritual orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these)
  - (Agnostic, atheist, Baha’i faith, Buddhism, Christian, Confucianism, Daoism, Evangelicalism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Mormonism, Native American traditions, None, Nonreligious, Nontheist, Orthodox, Other, Paganism, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Secular humanism, Sikhism, Spiritual, Spiritual and not religious, Unitarian Universalism, Zoroastrainism)
- If you selected "other" above, please indicate additional identities or worldview perspectives with which you identify.
- How would you describe your gender and/or gender identity?
- How would you describe your sexual orientation?
- How would you describe your race and ethnicity?
- Please indicate how important each of the following identities are for you, given your responses above. If you'd like, you may enter additional identities.
  - (Importance being defined by how meaningful these identities are for you, how often you think about them, or how often they play a role in your life or how you view the world)

[5-point Likert scale of not important to very important with the following]
identities to rate: worldview, religion, nonreligion, or spirituality; gender; sexual orientation; race and ethnicity; and two blank boxes to add identities
• Please provide your email.
Appendix C: Informed Consent

This informed consent was sent to selected student participants via an institutionally-supported online survey platform prior to our first interview together. Once students submitted the consent form, a copy was automatically sent to them. I also took a printed copy to our first interview to allow students to ask any follow-up or clarifying questions.

Research Participation Informed Consent
Educational Policy, Planning & Leadership Department
William & Mary
Protocol # EDIRC-2018-03-02-12671-jpbarber
Study Title: Critical Consciousness Involving Worldview Inequities Among Undergraduate Students
Principal Investigator: Amanda Armstrong

This is a consent form for participation in this research. This is to certify that I, (participant), have been given the following information with respect to my participation in this study:

1. **Purpose:**
   Through this study, I’d like to better understand how full-time undergraduate students (aged 18–24) experience and understand social issues related to people’s religious, nonreligious, spiritual, and other worldview identities on or around campus.

2. **Procedure:**
   As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following ways:
   (a) Interview #1—This interview will occur in-person at an on-campus location most convenient for you that has a quiet space and access to internet (most likely Swem library). It will last between 60–90 minutes. During this interview, I’d like to learn more about your own identities and we will discuss guidelines for your written reflections.
   (b) Reflections—You will be asked to write reflections on at least four experiences over the course of two weeks (we can adjust timing as needed given your schedule). Each reflection will probably range between 150–300 words, or up to one-page double-spaced. You will email the reflections to me and I will use them as discussion points in our second interview.
   (c) Interview #2—This interview will occur in-person at an on-campus location most convenient for you that has a quiet space and access to internet (most likely Swem library). It will last between 60–90 minutes. During this second interview, I’d like to learn more about the experiences you submit through your reflections, and discuss how those relate to your own social identities and relationships with others.

3. **Risks and Benefits:**
   By participating in this study, you will have the opportunity to share your experiences regarding your perspectives of social issues on campus related to your and others’ worldview, religious, and nonreligious identities. You will be able to reflect upon the experiences you deemed important through your written
reflections. The experiences you share can inform how institutional administrators and faculty influence campus environments and engage with future college students. There are no known risks associated with participation in this study beyond those associated with daily life.

4. **Duration:**
   This study will take place during the months of March and April of 2018. Together, we will arrange a convenient time for two separate interviews, each lasting up to 90 minutes. You will be asked to submit your four reflections over a two-week period following our first interview together. If needed, we can work together to adjust your writing period given your other responsibilities.

5. **Voluntary:**
   Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point in the process. If you decide to withdraw, you will be compensated based on the amount of procedures you complete as detailed below in the next section.

6. **Incentive:**
   If you agree to participate, you will be compensated $15 for each of the two interviews and $5 for each written reflection. You will only be compensated for up to four written reflections ($20), though you may submit more than four. Thus, your total compensation will not exceed $50 in the form of a Visa e-gift card, which you will receive via email upon completion of the second interview.

7. **Confidentiality:**
   Your participation in this study will remain as confidential as possible, meaning that any information you contribute will be stored on my password-protected laptop and Google Drive account. This information will be in the form of audio-recorded files and your submitted written reflections to my email account. All of your information will only be identifiable by a pseudonym (fictitious name) that you will provide. If you do not provide a pseudonym, I will provide one for you. Though the institution, William & Mary, will be disclosed in this study, we will work together to ensure your identity remains as confidential as possible.

8. **Questions:**
   This project was found to comply with appropriate ethical standards and was exempted from the need for formal review by the William & Mary Protection of Human Subjects Committee (757-221-3966) on 2018-XX-XX and expires on 2018-XX-XX. Please know that any questions or concerns you might have about the nature of this research may be reported to Dr. Jennifer Stevens, chair of the PHSC, at 757-221-3862 or jastev@wm.edu any time during this study.

- What is your first name?
- What is your last name?
- Do you understand the purpose of this study, are you at least 18 years of age, and do you agree to participate in this study?
  (Yes, No)
Appendix D: First Interview Protocol

Researcher prompt:

In the first half of our conversation, I’d like to learn a bit about what brought you to William & Mary and what things you’ve been involved with during your time here. Then, I’ll ask you to expand upon the information that you submitted online to learn more about your worldview identities and beliefs. And although my dissertation topic focuses explicitly on students’ experiences in relation to that aspect of identity, I recognize that we all hold multiple identities and so, I’m equally curious about the other ways in which you identify and describe yourself. In the second half of our conversation, I’ll ask more specifically about your worldview identity and experiences on campus. Finally, I’ll talk about the reflections that I’ll ask you to submit over the next two weeks.

Know that we can stop at any time or take a break. We’ll probably talk for up to an hour, and no more than an hour and a half. You submitted the online informed consent that outlined the study’s purpose and compensation, but I wondered if you had any questions at all before we get started?

[Confirm students’ pseudonym and describe audio-recording procedures]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics of Discussion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey Interest Form and Social Identities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Could you share with me what brought you to William &amp; Mary, and what things you’ve been involved with during your time here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Could you review the information you submitted and let me know if there’s anything you’d like to edit or add?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Before delving into this information you shared, I wanted to also share with you a bit about my own identities and what brought me to this research topic. [Share my own responses]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- When considering the information you shared here, I wondered if you could tell me more by elaborating on these aspects of who you are?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are there aspects of who you are that you find important or would like to share with me that didn’t necessarily show up through these questions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Worldview Identity and Beliefs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How would you describe [students’ worldview selected terms]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does your [students’ selected worldview terms] relate to or influence how you see or understand the world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How do these other identities that you shared relate, if at all, to your [students’ selected worldview terms] identity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context and Engagement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How would you describe your experiences on campus as someone who identifies as [students’ selected worldview terms]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How would you describe the worldview identities and beliefs of your friends or others on campus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In what other ways do you experience religion, or not, on campus?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Over the next two weeks, I’m going to ask you to spend some time reflecting upon and writing about some experiences that might come up for you. I’m curious to learn about times when you might notice or recognize social inequities between or among people of different worldview identities and beliefs. Here’s a hard copy of the prompt you can use for writing your reflections. I’ll also send you an electronic copy of this later today. For now, if you could review the prompt then I can answer any follow-up questions you might have.
Appendix E: Journal Prompt

I would like you to reflect upon potential experiences over the next two weeks [dates]. The purpose of these reflections is to capture moments that prompt you to recognize or think about social inequities between or among people of different worldview identities and beliefs on or around campus.

Remember, these experiences may happen very quickly on a small scale, such as hearing a comment or noticing something in a building as you’re traveling around campus. Or, it may be an experience that lasts longer, such as a conversation in a class that either you participated in or simply observed. These experiences could happen anywhere, including times you’re alone, with others, online/social media, at an event, or watching TV.

- A worldview is defined here as one’s guiding life philosophy, which may be based on a religious tradition, spiritual orientation, nonreligious perspective, or some combination of these.
- A social inequity is defined here as when one group, or groups, of people who identify with a certain worldview have less access to resources or opportunities than those of another worldview. Resources is defined broadly, such as access to space, ability to participate, time, or representation, among others.

Because you may not be able to fully reflect on your experience in the moment, I encourage you to write a note, make a quick voice recording, or snap a photo to remind you of what happened or how you felt. Preferably within 24 hours of your experience, consider the following suggestions as you reflect:

Think about the event chronologically.

Describe what you saw, what was said, what you heard, how you felt, what you thought.

Try to describe the experience like you are watching it on film.

Describe the experience as you lived through it. Try to avoid causal explanations (this happened because…), generalizations (this typically happens when…), or abstract interpretations (I wonder if…).

For your reflection, please use a format that you prefer. If you write about your experience, try and write between a half page to one-page, double-spaced. Then, email your typed reflection or scan a hand-written copy and any accompanying notes or photos you may have kept related to the experience to me, at [email address]. If you prefer to draw something, please also provide some text (at least one paragraph) describing what you’ve drawn, scan your drawing, and send me an electronic copy. You will be compensated $5 per reflection submission, and you may submit up to four entries for a total of $20. This incentive will be in addition to the $30 you will receive after completing both interviews.
Appendix F: Second Interview Protocol

Researcher prompt:

During our second and final interview today, we’ll go into more detail about the experiences that you reflected upon and sent to me. I have some follow-up questions, and I’m really interested in hearing more from you now that those experiences have passed. We’ll also return to some of the discussions from last time regarding your social identities, and talk about how you see yourself within these experiences. Again, know that we can stop at any time or take a break.

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<th>Topics of Discussion</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Catch-Up</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- When you think back to our first meeting, can you recall any initial feelings that you had when you left or were there any particular thoughts that remained with you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- When you left, I had given you the reflection prompt and asked you to keep some of our conversation in mind. When you think back over the past two weeks, was there anything particularly interesting or challenging about writing these reflections or knowing that I’d asked you to do them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal Submissions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I’d like you to review these experiences individually. First, re-read this reflection (either to yourself or out loud), and as you do, feel free to highlight any words or phrases that stick out to you for any reason.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What were some of the feelings that came up for you, or come up for you now when thinking back about these experiences?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Can you talk to me more about this experience, perhaps what led you to write about this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What things did you highlight and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Have you thought any more about these experiences since submitting them? If so, how?</td>
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VITA

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