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growth

ACSD 

Association for Christians
in Student Development

Mission and Introduction to The Association for Christians in Student Development:

The Association for Christians in Student Development (ACSD) is comprised of professionals who seek to bring their commitment to Jesus Christ together with their work in college student development. Through the exchange of ideas, encouragement of networking, regional and annual conferences, and application of scriptural principles to developmental theory, ACSD seeks to enable its members to be more effective in ministering to students.

The roots of ACSD go back to the 1950s with the formation of the Christian Association of Deans of Women and the Association of Christian Deans and Advisors of Men. The two groups merged in 1980, reflecting a commitment to work together with mutual respect. ACSD has grown and currently represents more than 1,100 individuals from more than 250 institutions. While membership originally centered in Bible institutes, Bible colleges, and Christian liberal arts colleges, the Association has committed itself to linking up with colleagues in all institutions of higher education, both public and private. In support of this emphasis, the Association has sponsored prayer breakfasts and workshops in conjunction with annual conferences presented by major student affairs associated organizations.

Membership in ACSD is open to all persons who have or are preparing for responsibilities in student development areas in higher education and who are in agreement with ACSD's doctrinal statement, constitution, and by-laws. Members receive the Association's newsletter, free access to placement services, reduced rates at annual conferences, and copies of *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*.

In keeping with the mission and goals of the Association, the purposes of *Growth: The Journal of The Association for Christians in Student Development* are:

- To provide a forum for members to publish original research.
- To encourage the membership to be active in scholarship.
- To provide members with access to beneficial resource material intended to inform good practice.
- To stimulate research in Christian student affairs.
- To promote the ideals of ACSD and Christian student affairs.



Dear Readers:

We are pleased to share with you this the fifteenth edition of *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*. For fifteen years Growth has strived to provide readers with relevant original research and pertinent professional development to aid in our work with college students. We trust that you have found this information useful to your work and that you will find the articles and book reviews in this current issue to be helpful in informing your work as educators.

This year, you will discover six feature articles including research on the first year experience as it relates to spiritual formation and best practices, the impact of technology, and the intersection of Christianity and racial justice. These articles are followed by a collection of book reviews that are intended to introduce us to new publications that will guide and shape our efforts as student development practitioners.

We are grateful to those who work to make *Growth* possible, including Dr. Jason Morris, Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Abilene Christian University who serves in the role of Book Review Editor, and Britney Graber, a graduate student from Taylor University who serves as the Assistant Editor. They, along with our peer review team, have put forth great effort to produce an edition that represents strong scholarship and is diverse in its coverage of topics.

We particularly want to encourage you, the reader, to consider submitting manuscripts for consideration for future issues of *Growth*; the next edition will be published in the spring of 2017. Publication guidelines are included in this issue on the inside of the back cover and are also available via the Association for Christians in Student Development web site: www.acsd.org/participate/write-for-growth-journal/. We are especially interested in manuscripts presenting original or basic research and encourage anyone who has recently completed a graduate thesis or dissertation to submit an article.

We as a publication team would like to thank you for your support of *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*. We hope your read will be both engaging and challenging.

Sincerely,

Dr. Skip Trudeau, Co-Editor
Dr. Tim Herrmann, Co-Editor

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A Cord of Three Strands Is Not Quickly Broken: Strengths of a Team

David M. Johnstone

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Abstract

The idea of “strengths” is a shift for the western world in how it looks at talents, skills, and weaknesses. The strengths paradigm is an assessment that universities are using to assist students in identifying their talents and strengths. Many have written about strengths and the individual; few have written about or researched the impact of the paradigm on team development. Discussing how disparate strengths can work in relationship to one another is important. Moreover, understanding that improper use of strengths can lead to the “shadow” side of strengths creating dissonance and conflict in a team is also important. This article reflects on what is necessary for a team to provide space for a beneficial exploration and facilitation of strengths. Using literature, student interviews, and personal observations, this article intends to prompt further discussion and the production of literature as it pertains to how strengths work with college teams.

Introduction

The StrengthsFinder assessment, as a lens through which talents, aptitudes, and skills are viewed, is a powerful corrective in a culture that tends to focus on strengthening weaknesses, rather than on identifying strengths and making them effective. The assessment tool is a powerful means of increasing an individual's self-awareness. It can inform current situations and future dreams. It helps to identify the things that a person loves and will most likely do well.

Our university has been using the StrengthsFinder with student-leaders for more than a decade. In the past six years, we have become increasingly aware of the implications of this tool for how we craft and supervise them into their distinctive teams. Many researchers have reflected and studied how strengths work with individuals. Less available is material that expands our understanding of how strengths inform the development of teams, specifically teams of college students. Questions arise, such as, how do strengths evolve in relationship to other team members? What role do strengths play within team conflict? As we have wrestled with these and similar questions, we have discovered details that need to be considered as teams are formed. The following is a compilation of those observations, interviews, and literature that informs how strengths as a tool interact and affect teams.

I will examine why a strengths paradigm has value for the individual in discerning his or her strengths. Then I will explore why the notion of strengths has the potential of shaping a team's effectiveness. My contention is that the StrengthsFinder paradigm is immensely valuable for team development and effectiveness, but that this development must parallel a growing understanding of how strengths function in each person.

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Benefits of Strengths

The StrengthsFinder as an assessment tool measures “talent, not strength” (Rath, 2007, p. 17). This talent “represents a capacity to *do* something” (Clifton & Anderson, 2002, p. 6). The assessment helps identify the things that an individual does well. Unfortunately, many “are either unaware of, or unable to describe, their own strengths” (Rath, 2007, p. 13). It has become increasingly important for an individual to identify and develop his or her strengths in order to understand how he or she “fit[s] in” (Rath, 2007, p. 11) to any organization. One's talents are not static:

Each of us begins with a talent (something we are predisposed to be good at) and multiply it by the effort we put toward that talent. As we exert effort to gain knowledge and skills, our talent is transformed into strengths. (Hulme & Oliver, 2008, p. 23)

While transformation of strengths is possible, “scientists have discovered that core personality traits are relatively stable throughout adulthood” (Rath, 2007, p. 18).

The strengths paradigm provides individuals with insight into how they understand their journey through life. In an ideal situation, awareness of strengths would allow the individual to focus on the best and most helpful manner by which they process information and interact with the world around them.

How do Strengths Function for Individuals?

The strengths approach works under the assumption that individuals have in their personal genetic code the essential talents to be successful. Further, when dealing with teams, leaders have the responsibility “to recognize, nurture, and build on those internal strengths” of their team members (Hulme & Oliver, 2008, p. 23). The functional side to the StrengthsFinder is that it provides an individual with their top five identified talents. However, it is important to remember that these talents “do not become strengths until one has added knowledge and skill to the equation” (Henck & Hulme, 2008, p. 8). Identifying and developing one’s strengths, in conjunction with being in an environment that permits their use, increases the individual’s engagement with his or her vocational role and contentment with life. My observation, also noted in the literature, is that when students function within their strengths, not only are they more successful, but they often attribute a greater sense of significance to their task or responsibility (Shushok & Hulme, 2006).

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Scholars and practitioners who write and teach on leadership affirm that “we know that believing what you do is important, and doing work that is congruent with your value system leads to engagement at work” (Hulme & Oliver, 2008, p. 22). Engagement or motivation is tied to the freedom to use one’s strengths. Some of the constant variables of our lives are our talents and strengths; often our success is tied to whether we are permitted to use and develop them. For a team leader, one of his or her roles is to “create... an environment where we could do what we do best” (Hulme & Oliver, 2008, p. 22). This environment permits team members to build their strengths, and as a result, become increasingly engaged in their tasks and goals.

Teams as a Valuable Approach

American culture tends to affirm the value of individual action and achievement. However, many areas (athletics, business, ministry, and education) do affirm the value of a team (Michaelson, Knight, & Fink, 2004; Pellerin, 2009; Samuels & Hoxsey, 2010). As a strategy for efficiently accomplishing tasks and projects, a team approach is recognized as beneficial. “Although individuals can complete some tasks effectively, groups have been found to accomplish tasks, especially complex ones, more effectively than individuals working alone under a wide range of conditions” (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, p. 293). A team helps move a group of individuals into a collaborative and complementary venture (Linley, Woolston, & Biswas-Diener, 2009).

A team is more than just a grouping of individuals tasked with a certain objective: “If handled appropriately, [it] is an important vehicle through which the work of organizations gets accomplished” (Nicotera, 1995, p. 4). This is particularly true when a team is diverse in experience, heritage, and culture: “Culturally diverse team members can strengthen their capacity for innovation by developing a common understanding and methods for how they are to negotiate their differences” (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, p. 292). In order for teams to flourish, they must recognize and be committed to the idea “that the success of one promotes the success of the other” (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, p. 298).

For their mutual success, it is helpful for team members to focus on cooperation rather than on competition. Tjosvold and Wong (2004) noted:

Cooperators want each other to perform well so that they can both achieve their goals. Competitive goals produce a desire to obstruct the others’ effective action so that one achieves one’s goal while the opponent does not. Competitors want to win, see the other lose, and engage in oppositional interaction. (p. 297)

The success of a team is tied to the collaboration of two or more individuals pursuing a goal. Many schools, businesses, and organizations are committing resources to the development of teams because they understand that “the *purpose* of a team is to accomplish one or more necessary tasks or responsibilities that cannot be accomplished by individuals working alone” (Rees, 2001, p. 18).

In discussing work teams, Rees (2001) observed, “The *focus* of a team is to get work done that supports the goals of the organization” (p. 18). Beyond that, there is an understanding that “*teams are the structure; teamwork is the process*. Teams are the ways to organize. Teamwork is the way a person thinks and works. Teamwork is more than skills. It is more than structure. It is more than forced group cooperation” (Rees, 2001, p. 21). Teams are recognized as significant strategies for effectively accomplishing their goals, objectives, and mission. Within the context of teams, personal awareness of strengths allows the individual to discern his or her ability to tackle challenges and to be aware of when he or she needs assistance or the skills of others. A supervisor or team leader assists in the shaping of a team culture where this discernment is understood and valued.

Strengths as a Paradigm for a Team

Using myself as an example, I can illustrate the ways strengths interact harmoniously within an individual and with others. Using the assessment terminology, my top five strengths area identified as *context*, *intellection*, *input*, *belief*, and *connectedness*. While Gallup provides descriptions for each strength (www.gallupstrengthscenter.com), they are defined in my life in the following manner: *Context* clarifies that to fully understand the world and the events around me, I need to understand as many of the details and

nuances which might be relevant to situations revolving around me. *Intellection* indicates that I love to muse, reflect, and study the things in my life. I function easily in the life of the mind. *Input* reflects the importance I place on gathering the reflections, thoughts, and opinions of others before I act or speak. *Belief* explains that standards such as integrity, justice, and congruity are important to me; these standards work out in my actions being consistent with my convictions. *Connectedness* affirms I believe that little in this world is random. I believe there is a reason for most things existing or acting. There is significance in the world reflected in how things are connected. It is not difficult to see how these strengths interact in my own life. Context, input, and connectedness dovetail and reinforce one another, bringing details, ideas, and observations into a holistic picture. Belief and connectedness reflect my worldview which affirms that God is active in his creation.

As individuals begin to discern and understand their own strengths, they become attuned to how these strengths interact and reinforce each other. It is also possible to see how these strengths can potentially interact with the strengths of others. My team members who have the strength of *activator* are men and women who want to start implementing tasks or challenges. They function well in tandem with my input, which wants to gather data before action. We function as strong counterbalances to one another. My colleagues with the strength of *empathy* provide relational mercy and grace to those who do not meet the standards expected by my strength of belief. My co-workers who have the strength of *relater* round out my *intellection*; when I focus too much on the mind, they are able to draw in and strengthen the relationship. Even from these few examples, it is possible to see how strengths can function in tandem with one another. They can become counterbalances to one another augmenting each other's abilities and aptitudes.

At the same time, it is possible to discern some of the potentially less helpful aspects of strengths in a team. These negative manifestations of the strengths are informally referred to as the *shadows*; I will explain below. However, in order for the influence of shadows to be minimized, certain things must be present within a team's culture.

Conditions for Discussing the Shadows

One of the important elements to consider when discussing strengths is the level of trust that exists among team members. This is particularly important when discussing the shadow or *dark side* of strengths, which are the less positive elements of strengths. Without trust, a team starts to fall apart. A supervisor or team leader must discern if there is any value or safety in identifying shadows when trust is minimal or non-existent.

Therefore, in order for a team to engage itself fully in the conversation about the shadow side of strengths, there must be trust among its members. At the same time, there must also be a sense of hope that permeates the team culture. There must be hope that any discussion about shadows will strengthen the team's functionality and effectiveness. This environment of trust and hope does not happen haphazardly. Team members must understand and acknowledge that "a common mistake in communication is the belief

that one person interprets the spoken words of another exactly as intended by the speaker” (Hulme & Henck, 2008, p. 1). Team leaders must be at the forefront in understanding the need for clear communication: “they must be concerned not only about what is said, but also about what is heard” (Hulme & Henck, 2008, p. 6). As a team grows and strengthens itself, it finds that “trust is built when an individual perceives that another person is attempting to believe the best about the individual” (Hulme & Henck, 2008, p. 6). Trust also compels an individual towards greater effectiveness and excellence: “Trust is one of the most powerful forms of motivation and inspiration. People want to be trusted. They respond to trust” (Covey, 2006, p. 29). Trust is an essential part of what leaders are trying to do in seeking to encourage and build their teams. They realize that for most people, “if we’re going to make it to the summit, we need someone shouting in our ear, ‘Come on, you can do it, I know you can do it’” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. xiii).

Encouraging and demonstrating care reflect a leader’s role in developing a team’s ethos and culture. Team leaders “keep hope alive when they set high standards and genuinely express optimism about an individual’s capacity to achieve them” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. xx). When trust permeates optimism, it evolves into hope. The hope those leaders and their teams have for each other is tied to high standards. The hope of these standards is “aspirational and bring[s] out the best in us” (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 20). Therefore, with hope and trust being present, a team seeks the best for one another and strives to increase its effectiveness. In this environment, acknowledgement, reflection, and hard conversations about shadows are possible.

Understanding Strengths and Shadows as Beneficial for Teams

Shadows are not similar to weaknesses. Shadows “might be considered as the ‘too much of a good thing’ element of strengths” (Hulme & Oliver, 2008, p. 23). In order for the shadow side of strengths to be acknowledged, “we must recognize when strengths are hindering excellence and develop techniques to utilize strengths in positive ways” (Hulme & Oliver, 2008, p. 23). Some writers suggest that the shadow side is fundamentally tied to the overuse of a particular strength (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009). Some examples of shadows manifesting themselves include: (a) the disdain individuals with the strength of *belief* might have for others who do not share the same values as themselves; (b) the disregard that someone with *activator* might have for someone who needs to process the information they need to gather before acting; and (c) the paralysis someone with the strength of *empathy* might feel when encountering the significant trauma of others. Theorists note, “Once you overplay a strength, you’re at risk of diminished capacity on the opposite pole” (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2009, p. 101).

In relationship to others, shadows can create tension and stress; “conflict with and among staff members is often a result of strengths conflict” (Hulme & Oliver, 2008, p. 24). In light of this, it is very useful for a team to take time to discern the origins of a misunderstanding or conflict. Admittedly, some conflict is connected to malice, ill

will, and evil. However, many misunderstandings are tied to different approaches and emphases rising out of an individual's strengths. The challenge for a team is to maintain patience, trust, and a commitment to resolving these situations:

As human beings, we need teams, relationships, and community. We do not do our best in isolation. We don't get extraordinary things done by working alone with no support, encouragement, expressions of confidence, or help from others. (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 8)

Teams need leaders who are able to discern the strengths, talents, and aptitudes of their team members. Teams need leaders committed to the team's well-being, who are willing to function in the dual role of advocate and challenger. When a leader encourages his or her team, the team members are often inspired "to become more than they ever thought possible" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, pp. 11-12). A team has the potential to be more than the sum of its members when a leader identifies their strengths, understands the shadows, and helps develop the strengths in relationship with one another.

Students and Strengths

Up to this point, we have reflected on strengths and teams in a general way. However, I am primarily interested in how strengths might be of value within teams of college students. In order to understand the power of strengths, it is beneficial to look at American college student culture.

One of the striking features of the current college generation is its use of technology. Turkle's (2011) research focused on the impact of technology on culture and young adults, in particular. She tried to understand the character of digital natives, a group including emerging adults and traditional-aged college students. She observed that technology tended to have a seductive side that drew people into its sphere, often responding to "our human vulnerabilities" (Turkle, 2011, p. 1). For instance, a young man may be lonely, even while he can state that he has 800 Facebook friends; the Facebook perception suggests that he is not isolated and lonely due to so many friends. Yet many of those electronic relationships are illusory. While some have genuine relationships, many Facebook friends have no lasting presence or resilience that one might expect in friendship. The false sense of community created by social media prompted Turkle to observe that many emerging adults feel isolated but also fear anything but surface-level relationships (Turkle, 2011). As electronically connected as they are with one another, they had a feeling that they lacked intimacy. They desired—but feared—intimacy. Others have noted a growing narcissism, self-focus, and diminishing empathy among the current American college student (Smith, Christofferson, Davidson, & Herzog, 2011; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). However, student culture is more complex than just simple selfishness. A growing sense of loneliness and fear of intimacy add to the sense that "all is not well among emerging adults..." (Smith et al., 2011, p. 193).

Practitioner and scholar Dalton (2006) spent several decades studying and writing about the importance of values and character in the education of college students. In writing about the role of a campus culture for students, he stated, “The forms of connections they create reveal the substance and meaning of community life on campus” (p. 165). More specifically, he observed that the spiritual life of students provides a way for them to make meaning of their experiences and studies. Their faith establishes a foundation that provides them with the psychological and emotional safety to connect their learning with their lives. Dalton observed that for college students, “the spiritual journey almost always involves traveling companions” (p. 171). One of the significant elements of the journey is that it becomes a “quest for meaning and purpose,” which “leads students beyond themselves in ways that help them appreciate and connect with others and experience a greater sense of responsibility for helping and understanding them” (p. 171). This appreciation and connection shapes and encourages their sense of empathy for others (Shore, 1997). At the same time that students are looking for the “transcendent and sacred,” they are led “inevitably to the desire to connect with others” (Dalton, 2006, p. 172). The needs that students have for both meaning and relational significance will often come together at the same juncture.

For college students, connection with a community creates a sense of belonging, intimacy, and security (Dalton, 2006; Parks, 2000; Purdy, 1999). Students gain tremendous support from each other during a time of their lives that is full of transitions (Phillips, 2002). Boyer (1990) linked the depth of a student’s educational experience with the quality of his or her campus community. Parks (2000) noted the importance of community in the development of college students’ maturity and spirituality. She recognized that the process of growth “depends upon the quality of interaction between the person and his or her social world” (Parks, 2000, p. 89). Maturation begins in a solo environment, but the presence of a community around the student enables and facilitates that growth, especially where a community “poses a trustworthy alternative to earlier assumed knowing” (Parks, 2000, p. 93). Parks observed that development and growth of young people are most significant within the context of a community where truth is told and grace is extended.

However, it is not just the value of the community for the individual; sometimes it is the value of the individual for the community. Encouraging new students in the Yale community, the university’s dean suggested, “Self-withholding shyness, a relatively sympathetic vice in the world at large, is a disaster here, since when you hold back you deprive the rest of us of what you could have taught us” (Brodhead, 2004, p. 19). He challenged students to view their education as a mutual investment where they give as much as they receive. He particularly encouraged them by saying that they possess the means of providing great value to others regardless of background or aptitude.

Findings: Student Reflections

In seeking an understanding about community, teams, and strengths, we approached 30 current or recent (in the previous 20 months) student leaders (SL), who were easily accessible, for their reflections upon the assessment tool and implications they had personally observed. The reflections below are a sample of them. Their reflections illustrated a growing self-awareness and the value of working in teams, along with the challenges they encountered.

After taking the on-line assessment and reflecting on it with peers, teams, and supervisors, students developed greater self-awareness about their capabilities and challenges. These students began by acknowledging the value of being able to discern their own strengths: “Knowing our strengths helped us know how to best work together in order to make things amazing” (SL5). Another observed, “One way I have noticed that I gained a deeper understanding of my strengths is by relating, comparing, contrasting, and communing with other people’s strengths” (SL1). The student also noted,

I have learned that it is important to risk testing out the limits of my strengths (this has led to more embarrassing moments than I would like to admit), because without understanding a strength’s boundaries, it is hard to become completely self-aware. Self-awareness is not only about using my strengths, but also learning how to not use it. (SL1)

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Often the understanding of their own strengths tied to their understanding of the strengths and talents of their peers.

Students observed the benefit of understanding their strengths within a team setting:

My strengths sounded like they were really good ones and I was proud of them but it wasn’t until working through the year that I realized the importance of all strengths working together...similar to the illustration of the body of the church. I learned to rely on the relational people for encouragement and advice, the influencing people for bringing our team together, and the executing people to get work done and keep everyone on track. (SL4)

Others discerned the ways in which their own strengths were augmented and complemented by others:

[We] were able to see how very different people with very different gifting can learn to appreciate and support one another in ways that are sometimes better than similar people are. I am ‘woo’ and ‘positivity,’ and once I found a ‘strategic/focus’ person on the staff, we were able to take great ideas, and work out the details to make them amazing while getting others excited about them. (SL5)

I think if I took my strengths test again my strengths will have shifted quite a bit since I began my RA journey. The majority of what I know about relationships and community I learned being an RA, not because of my strengths, but because of my teammate's strengths. (SL4)

While they noted the benefits and values of teamwork, they were also candid with the challenges they encountered.

One student acknowledged the dissonance that occurred when different strengths were manifested. Reflecting on how her strengths interacted with others, she wrote:

The personalities or strengths I have experienced the most tension with are the ones who range higher on attributes like 'responsibility' and 'focus.' The reason for the conflict [is] that I see the idea of responsibility as *a means to an end* in the context of a relationship, while some people I know view it as more of an ultimatum. I dislike when relationship becomes secondary to responsibility. (SL6)

Another one of the participants noted the challenges of differing strengths, but acknowledged the value of particular strengths that were not common in a team: "Overall, our staff scored low in the strategic strengths, but the few people that had those ideation or analytical strengths were very influential" (SL3). Another observed, "Four-fifths of [my strengths] are in strategic thinking. This often put me on the opposite side and sometimes at odds with my more relational staff mates" (SL4). Students developed an understanding of the benefits and values of a diversity of strengths.

One student noted our use of strengths as a tool for our training of student leaders: "I appreciated the emphasis on developing and identifying strengths rather than trying to build teams that were mediocre...by developing weaknesses; I saw the complementarity of our teams' strengths when each moving part was working optimally" (SL3). Students developed a growing appreciation for how their strengths worked in relationship to one another.

Further Research

One of the steps we have resisted has been hiring based on student reported strengths. We will consider strengths as part of the placement (teams and locations) of candidates. However, using strengths as the principal or sole reason for hiring new staff leaves us a little unsettled. Exploring the benefits and challenges of this strategy might be beneficial, as this would inform our hiring practices.

Implications and Conclusion

Essentially, this article asks the question whether the notion of strengths has relevance for the development, function, and supervision of student teams. If strengths are relevant,

how do they evolve in the relationship of one team member to another? Furthermore, can strengths cause conflict or will they naturally provide harmony? My observations and practice suggest that they have tremendous relevance to all aspects of development, supervision, and the working of teams. Being aware of the dynamics of individual strengths generally allows each member to work in cooperation and in harmony with one another. However, the strengths paradigm is not a magic pill for team development. The shadow side of strengths has the potential to wreak havoc. The team leader has a protective role in being vigilant, encouraging trust, and facilitating reconciliation. It is important to remember that the strengths assessment is only a tool, yet it is one that can increase self-awareness, enabling a team to fulfill its mandate. Strengths awareness allows team members to discern the role and significance that they might find in what they are doing. The StrengthsFinder helps us give words to our beliefs and discern our fit.

The uniqueness of the strengths approach for traditionally-aged college students is linked to their personal development. Traditional undergraduates are in the midst of significant transition and development. The StrengthsFinder becomes a means to understand their values, heritage, and priorities. Using it in relationship with others will often lead the student to greater collaboration, increased grace, and a greater tolerance for ambiguity.

My personal goal in writing this article is the desire to see more scholars and practitioners engage in this dialogue. Many use this tool in their practice, so I would invite my peers to participate in the conversation. *Soli Deo Gloria.* 

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The First-Year Experience Movement: History, Practice, and Implications for Student Development Professionals

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Abstract

This article explores the First-Year Experience movement's origins and influence on curricular and co-curricular practice in higher education. The First-Year Experience movement is historically based in the civil rights era of the 1960s and early 1970s. In response to the social unrest on college campuses, administrators at the University of South Carolina sought to humanize the college experience, particularly for first-year students. The resulting first-year seminar course led to the development of a national resource center which has provided models of practice for excellence in teaching, assessment, and training for many universities in the United States, as well as internationally. The implications resulting from the accomplishments of and continued challenges for the First-Year Experience movement are described. Additionally, the First-Year Experience movement values holistic education, particularly through the convergence of academic and student affairs. Therefore, discussion surrounding the work of student development professionals with first-year students is presented.

Introduction

The history of the First-Year Experience movement dates back to the 1960's Civil Rights Movement. The decade of the 1960s brought increasing social and political unrest, which was often expressed on college campuses (Gardner, 2006b, 2015; Hunter, Keup, & Gardner, 2015; Watts, 1999).

In May of 1970, following the Kent State shootings associated with the Vietnam War protests (Watts, 1999) and discipline proceedings against students at the University of South Carolina (USC) for their involvement in protests against the invasion of Cambodia, a peaceful student protest began outside of the USC administration building (Gardner, 2006b). The Governor of South Carolina called the National Guard to the campus which resulted in tear gassing the students. A riot began with students raiding the administration building and barricading the university president, Thomas F. Jones, in his office for 24 hours (Gardner, 2006b, 2015; Hunter et al., 2015).

President Jones reacted to the riot of his students by forming a committee tasked with program design intended to build personal relationships between students and the institution, hoping that these humanistic efforts would build unity on the campus of USC (Watts, 1999). One of those programs was the creation of an extended orientation course for new students called University 101. Jones believed that if students met in small groups with faculty to discuss engaging topics, a more humane and holistic education would occur and, subsequently, the university would be humanized (Gardner, 2006b). Essentially, University 101 began as an effort to "...re-engineer the beginning college experience [which would then] teach students to love the university [and would] therefore, prevent riots" (Gardner, 2015, slide 15).

John N. Gardner was appointed the first faculty director of the University 101 program, and the first course was launched in 1972 (Gardner, 2006b). According to Watts (1999), "In addition to his humanistic academic orientation, Gardner possessed administrative ability, political smarts, perseverance, and an entrepreneurial spirit" (p. 4). Gardner also invited student affairs professionals to join the University 101 endeavor to provide a more holistic education (Watts, 1999). University 101 was a success and is one of the few surviving programs that President Jones began following the USC riot (Watts, 1999).

In 1982, Gardner decided it was time to share the scholarship of University 101 and offered a conference in South Carolina for professionals interested in improving the first-year seminar; that conference grew into a conference series on The Freshman Year Experience, an attempt to consider all factors related to first-year students (Gardner, 2006b; Hunter et al., 2015). Later, in 1986, the National Resource Center was established at the University of South Carolina and in the same year, the first International Conference on the First-Year Experience was held in the United Kingdom (Hunter et al., 2015). In 1998, the center changed its name to the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition to more accurately represent the scope in which the center had developed (University of South Carolina, n.d.). Over the past forty years, the

efforts of one university president to improve the relationship between his institution and his students have led to a national movement that continues to advance the field of study and practice known as The First-Year Experience®.

Practice

Because of the work of Gardner and his colleagues with first-year students, there have been significant influences on how colleges and universities now understand and interact with new students. Full volume works have been authored by these experts to address how to build a comprehensive experience for freshmen (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). They advise how to challenge and support first-year students (Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005), and how to achieve excellence for the entire institution by addressing first-year student needs (Barefoot et al., 2005). Additionally, there is a plethora of information directly related to the practice and implementation of the first-year experience from the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (<http://www.sc.edu/fye/>).

There are many ways to describe the practice of the First-Year Experience. Most practices translate to programs. Some of the most common programs include a first-year seminar, orientation program, advising, learning communities, service learning, and support services (Upcraft et al., 2005). These all have developed as fields of study and practice, with professional standards and supporting organizations. Barefoot et al. (2005) highlighted twenty practices which contribute to excellence in the first year and have become the hallmarks for “Institutions of Excellence” for the high priority placed on the first-year experience (p. xvi):

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- Advising
- Central Advising Center
- Common Reading
- Convocations
- Core Curriculum / General Education
- Electronic Portfolios
- Experiential Learning
- Faculty Development
- First-Year Seminars
- Leadership Programs
- Learning Centers
- Learning Communities
- Liberal Arts
- Mentoring
- Orientation
- Peer Leaders/Advisers
- Residence Life
- Service Initiatives
- Summer Academic Programs
- Supplemental Instruction

The variety of services and programs designed for first-year students across curricular and co-curricular lines is evidence of excellence regarding an institution's value of the first-year experience.

Furthermore, Barefoot (2000) described the practice of the First-Year Experience as:

...programs and activities that have the following overall research-based objectives:

- Increasing student-to-student interaction
- Increasing faculty-to-student interaction, especially out of class
- Increasing student involvement and time on campus
- Linking the curriculum and the co-curriculum
- Increasing academic expectations and levels of academic engagement
- Assisting students who have insufficient academic preparation for college. (p. 14)

Additionally, Cuseo (2013) described ten evidence-based target areas which are critical in the practice of a comprehensive first-year experience program. These include (1) program mission; (2) new student orientation; (3) classroom teaching and learning; (4) academic advisement; (5) the curriculum; (6) academic support services; (7) the co-curriculum (student support services); (8) faculty-student contact outside the classroom; (9) administrative leadership, policies, and practices; and (10) program assessment. He also added that successful first-year programming must be intentional and purposeful, mission-driven, student-centered, intrusive, proactive, diversified, holistic, developmental, collaborative, systemic, durable, and empirically based (Cuseo, 2013).

Finally, the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education (2005) established an externally guided self-study process by which institutions evaluate programs and practices related to first-year students. The evidence-based criteria used for evaluation are known as the "Foundational Dimensions," which for four-year colleges include:

Philosophy: programs and processes informed by a philosophy of the first year

Organization: organizational structures and policies reflect a complete, cohesive, and organized practice of the first year

Learning: curricular and co-curricular learning experiences that engage students to develop holistically, associated with institutional outcomes

Faculty: high priority placed on the first year of college for faculty

Transitions: intentional policies and practice which facilitate student transitions

All Students: attend to the various needs of all first-year students

Diversity: all first-year students explore and evaluate the beliefs, philosophies, and ethos of others

Roles and Purposes: communicate to students the roles and purposes of higher education for the individual and broader culture

Improvement: ongoing, continuous quality improvement efforts related to first-year programs and practices

While practices related to first-year students entail a variety of programs and departments, there are common elements which address the transitional needs of first-year students: co-curricular and curricular offerings for first-year students, relationships between students and faculty in and out of the classroom, orientation services, academic advising, academic and student support services, and collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs. However, support and advocacy of leadership for institutional priority of the practice of First-Year Experience is essential for success (Gardner et al., 2005).

Implications

According to Gardner (2006b), the many years of practice within the First-Year Experience movement have yielded much success. The accomplishments of the movement which were begun and championed at the University of South Carolina include:

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- Credibility has been established for the uniqueness of first-year student needs and is valued within student affairs and academic affairs.
- Ideas and practices related to the First-Year Experience are well-established in higher education. Thousands of institutions now have signature first-year initiatives (e.g., first-year seminar, learning communities, service learning) and an all-inclusive First-Year Experience program.
- A professional focus has developed within higher education for work with first-year students, resulting in dedicated positions and departments, professional organizations, graduate courses, scholarship and research, dedicated funding through foundations and grants, and related material developed by the for-profit industry.
- The impact of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has increased related to (1) the expanded application to other critical transitions during the undergraduate years (e.g., sophomore and senior year experiences), (2) accreditation reaffirmations through work on the first year (e.g., PEAQ or AQIP), (3) a set of standards for excellence for two- and four-year colleges regarding first-year initiatives, and (4) a national and “...international set of partnerships, scholarly works, convenings, and movement” (Gardner, 2006b, p. 10).

While the accomplishments of the First-Year Experiment movement are commendable and noteworthy, there continue to be challenges facing those working in higher education. According to Barefoot (2000),

A pervasive and central problem is that many of the programs and activities that constitute the “first-year experience” are in a continuous battle for status within the academy. Generally, they are housed in marginal facilities and managed by entry-level employees, never becoming a central, sustainable part of the institution’s fabric. First-year programs often have a single champion rather than broad-based institutional support and frequently operate with a minimal budget or no budget. With the exception of a few innovative strategies used in discipline-based courses, these activities are most often centered in student affairs and involve few faculty (the ultimate determinants of legitimacy in the academy). (p. 17)

Gardner (2006a) supported this view and additionally acknowledged other challenges for first-year initiatives including lack of engagement of students, instability of first-year programs and leadership, program versus comprehensive institutional response, lack of and/or competition for resources, and purposes which are not academically compelling (retention).

Another challenge is that institutional support for first-year experience programs often centers on retention (Barefoot, 2000; Gardner, 2006a, 2015). While various agencies are demanding evidence of improved education and thus retention, Gardner stated, (2006b),

Retention is not really the end(s), the goals of higher education. There is nothing fundamentally, intrinsically academic about retention. Retention is a measurement, a benchmark, of educational attainment. And I would argue, often a minimum one at that. Retention is a C minus and a pulse, the ability to fog a mirror. This is not sufficiently aspirational. (p. 8)

Furthermore, Gardner (2006b) asserted that by focusing on retention, institutions become self-serving versus serving students and that faculty are less likely to invest in first-year initiatives if the focus is retention because that focus is more closely associated with the business model of higher education.

Some of the challenges can be addressed by focusing efforts toward current trends in first-year initiatives. According to Hunter et al. (2015), orientation programs, peer leadership, and learner-centered teaching can foster early student engagement. Additionally, attention to student mental health and family programs can create support networks for student success. Finally, partnerships, collaboration, and data-driven decision making can also build institutional support.

Assessment is another implication of the continued success of the First-Year Experience movement. Barefoot (2000) contended that institutions must go beyond simply measuring retention since the primary outcome of education is learning. She further stated:

We need more information about what works, as well as tested models and tools for assessment. We need evidence—not assumptions and not tightly held beliefs based on our own experience. Even classic student development and retention theories, which many of us seem to believe are timeless and irrefutable, need to be reevaluated in light of the changing characteristics of today’s students: the way these students conceptualize involvement, the degree to which they want or need to be assimilated into “the college way,” and their many options for learning environments in addition to the traditional college classroom. (Barefoot, 2000, p. 18)

Upcraft (2005) recommended assessing first-year student needs and satisfaction of collegiate experiences, the campus climate for first-year students, and intended outcomes. He also suggested benchmarking with comparable institutions and using nationally-accepted standards (Upcraft, 2005).

The implications specific to student development professionals are best described by Skipper (2005), who encouraged all faculty and staff charged with supporting first-year students to “...intentionally consider developmental processes as they design individual courses, programs of study, and support services for students so that students might leave college having achieved the critical competencies needed...” (p. 107). Student development professionals have much to offer to the first-year experience efforts because of their unique role within the institution to see the integrated learning that occurs for students both in and out of the classroom. One of the reasons for the focus on the first year of college in higher education is due to the nature of the developmental milestones that occur during the transition (Skipper, 2005). Student development professionals can give voice or language to the academy by providing information and insight into the psychosocial development of first-year students and the developmental impact on learning (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989). Attention to students’ developmental needs in the curricular and co-curricular design can increase overall student learning both in and out of the classroom. First-year seminars, learning communities, and service learning are examples of curricular experiences which benefit from incorporating developmental needs in course design. Furthermore, involvement in residence life, service experiences, diversity experiences, and leadership experiences are examples of co-curricular programs which can increase student learning when combined with developmental aspects of college students (Skipper, 2005).

Furthermore, student development professionals can create collaborative partnerships with academic affairs faculty to promote student success, provide academic support,

increase multicultural awareness, increase effectiveness of advising, improve general education courses for first-year students, and expand university assessment to include mastery of skills beyond content (Schroeder, 2005, pp. 212-213). Additionally, collaboration between academic affairs and student development related to first-year experience initiatives can occur through the following campus partnerships: cross-representation on committees, mutual institutional change projects, faculty workshops, faculty invited to student development meetings, direct involvement of faculty in student development programs and services, cosponsor campus events, and new organizational patterns and physical arrangements (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989).

Although the First-Year Experience movement has contributed significantly to fostering relationships between academic affairs and student development, there is still much to be done in higher education to accomplish the unfinished business of helping students succeed during their freshmen year of college in ways that will equip them to take "... advantage of the collegiate experience by growing and developing to one's maximum potential" (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989, p. 4).

Discussion

Discussion Questions for Student Development Professionals:

1. Does your institution have a philosophy and design for the first-year experience?
2. How does your department contribute to the first-year student initiatives on your campus?
3. In what ways can you contribute to the practice of the first-year experience at your institution?
4. What is a specific area in which you can collaborate with academic affairs faculty to address the developmental needs of first-year students?
5. How can you contribute to the body of scholarship related to the first-year experience?

Conclusion

This article has examined the First-Year Experience movement's origins and influence on curricular and co-curricular practices in higher education. In 1972, when University of South Carolina's (USC) President Jones introduced the idea of a first-year seminar designed to build a positive relationship between students and the institution, he did not realize that the resulting course would change the trajectory of higher education's response to the needs of first-year students. That first-year seminar course led to a national conference, which led to the development of a national resource center to provide information and training related to the collegiate first-year experience. What began at USC as a new course design developed into a national and international field of study and practice, now known as the First-Year Experience movement.

The practice of the first-year experience is often linked with programs, most notably the first-year seminar, orientation, learning communities, support services, and advising. However, practitioners, including Cuseo (2013) and the John N. Gardner Institute for Excellence in Undergraduate Education (2005), advocate for institutions to go beyond specific programs and to consider a comprehensive, institutional approach to the first-year experience.

Accomplishments of the First-Year Experience movement include achieving credibility to the practice and field of study, thus establishing a professional focus within higher education. Challenges related to the practice of the first-year experience continue to exist, particularly limited institutional resources and lack of support by administrative leadership.

However, a hallmark of the First-Year Experience movement is the value placed on holistic, developmental education as executed through collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs. Student development professionals can provide expertise related to the developmental needs of first-year students and offer innovative partnerships with academic affairs faculty on their respective campuses. As the First-Year Experience movement continues to adapt to the changing needs of students, student development professionals play an essential role in leading this established field of practice and study toward a future that also pays homage to the past with the ultimate goal of helping first-year students succeed in their transition to college. 

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The Intersection of Christianity and Racial Justice Advocacy

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Abstract

Those working toward institutional social change and supporting students from diverse background are considered social justice allies (Edwards, 2006). Patton et al. (2007) describe these individuals as knowledgeable and aware of how their own racial identities influence their interactions with others, understanding of racism, as well as their decisions, policies, and interactions with students of diverse backgrounds. There are several studies that have examined the development of White college students as social justice allies, but the development of White administrators as social justice allies is under-studied (Broido, 2000; Eichstedt, 2001; Reason, Roosa Millar, & Scales, 2005). Additionally, there is limited research related to social justice advocacy and Christian higher education. Through examining the experiences of White administrators who are active in leading social justice efforts at their Christian institutions, our findings demonstrate the influence of the participants' Christian beliefs in the development of becoming social justice advocates.

Introduction

Christian higher education is often perceived by some in the broader higher education community as lagging behind in areas of social justice. Whether or not this is true, the negative perception of Christian higher education no doubt influences the decisions of prospective students, staff, and faculty. Ironically, Christians ought to be invested in the work of justice, as it is a biblical mandate that ushers in the Kingdom of God on earth as it will be in heaven. Therefore, a new narrative must emerge that closely ties together faith and social justice, especially as it concerns the unfinished work of racial and ethnic diversity, equity, and awareness. A new narrative ought to be one that is actualized and formed within the realm of Christian higher education. Social justice, broadly interpreted, covers a range of issues and concerns in society and might often be understood by evangelical Christians as morally relativistic or perhaps too trendy of a term in an ever-pluralistic culture. In this article, we intend to address the intersection of grace and race. While we use social and racial justice interchangeably, we define social justice as a focus on racial identity and justice as it relates to Christian faith. To that end, we examine the identities and consciousness of White administrators at Christian faith-based institutions who were identified as advocates for social justice on their campuses.

Review of Literature

In the United States, approximately 900 colleges and universities are described as religiously-affiliated according to the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU, 2015). These 900 institutions include Bible colleges, Catholic institutions, and those that assert faith at the center of their mission and values. Churches of various denominations founded many of the first colleges and universities in the United States in order to provide faith-based education for their youth (Lambeth, 2012). The mission, values, and identities of these institutions were shaped by the practices, traditions, and culture of their founding denominational churches. Some might ask how social justice became part of any given faith-based institution's mission. As stated previously, perhaps much depends on how social justice is defined and by whom, as epistemological differences among secular and faith-based scholars may influence the interpretation of the work of social justice.

Secular scholars Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007), for instance, writing to a general audience, described social justice as both a process and a goal. They defined social justice as:

full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision for society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. (p. 1)

The ongoing process of achieving the goal of social justice includes dialogue, social responsibility, and agency for the role that all individuals play in perpetuating systems of injustice. Davis and Harrison (2013) asserted that higher education is an appropriate setting for exploring social justice despite that fact that colleges and universities intentionally and unintentionally perpetuate systems of injustice. Christian scholars might view the role of higher education as that of shepherding students not only to a greater understanding of their faith and relationship with God, but also to addressing issues of inequality, oppression, and injustice (Jun & De La Rosa, 2013; Nussbaum & Chang, 2013). However, there continues to be limited research addressing the relationship of faith, diversity, and social justice within Christian higher education (Jun & De La Rosa, 2013).

Nieves (2012) and Perez (2013) discussed the positive progress Christian higher education has made toward valuing diversity and living out social justice principles and values. Perez described this progress as the “belief that trying to make change in the area of diversity was a biblical mandate” (p. 32). Thus, social justice education and giving a voice to the voiceless are found in Scripture, two of the many guiding foundations and principles for Christian higher education. If social justice is a biblical mandate, it is important for Christian colleges and universities to utilize diversity and social justice frameworks that include recruiting, retaining, and supporting students, staff, and faculty from underrepresented populations. Additionally, these institutions should ensure that curriculum is updated with contributions from minorities and women and cultivate campus climates that are welcoming to all students. Employing this view of social justice as a mandate, the entire institution, and not merely a few individuals from underrepresented populations, ought to be responsible for working toward justice and systemic change.

One way in which Christian and secular higher education administrators are progressing toward justice is by encouraging White administrators to engage in social justice activities and initiatives that challenge inequality. Broido (2000) defined social justice allies as “members of dominant social groups (e.g., men, Whites, heterosexuals) who are working to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their social-group membership” (p. 3). To this end, White allies take personal responsibility for the changes needed in society, which are often ignored and left to others to handle. Kendall (2012) further described one of the most effective ways for Whites to levy their dominant identity status and privilege: “to become the ally of those on the other side of the privilege seesaw” (p. 172). Patton et al. (2007) submitted that White administrator allies ought to be individuals who are knowledgeable about and aware of how their own racial identities influence their interactions with others, their understanding of racism, as well as their decisions, policies, and interactions

with students of diverse backgrounds. All of these types of alliances require a great deal of self-examination and reflection, as well as a willingness to initiate change toward personal, institutional, and societal justice and equality (Kendall, 2012). We employ the literature cited above to frame a lens of identity for White Christian administrators who engage in advocacy with the intentionality of applying biblical truths to the work of justice and change.

Design and Methodology

By utilizing an eclectic qualitative methodology with narrative inquiry approaches, we explored the experiences of White administrators who choose to engage in social justice work at faith-based institutions. We defined social justice according to Thompson, Hardee, and Lane (2011), who stated that social justice intends “to move beyond mere appreciation or celebration into active efforts to examine and dismantle oppressive structures and policies and move toward a more equitable vision for the institution and its members” (p. 112). The present article resulted from several studies related to a research project on racial justice and advocacy for White evangelical administrators working in faith-based institutions. The research question that drove the study was as follows: “What are the experiences of White administrators from Christian institutions of higher education within the United States who choose to engage in social justice programs, activities, and initiatives?”

Members of the research team contacted various colleagues in higher education to solicit possible participants for the study through a letter of invitation. Borrowing from grounded theory research methodology, the researchers employed purposeful sampling techniques to identify an initial pool of potential participants, which included a sampling process that invited nominations from around the country via various faith-based higher education email lists. The selection criteria included the following: (a) participants must self-identify as White; (b) participants must have administrator roles at a Christian colleges or universities in the United States; (c) participants must have strong commitments to social justice and have played significant roles in creating or sustaining programs, activities, or initiatives with social justice foci; (d) participants must be nominated by a colleague; and (e) participants must have demonstrated strong commitments to social justice during initial screening of potential participants. The researchers did not specifically seek Diversity/Inclusion Officers, rather, they sought participants who were nominated based on having a strong commitment to social justice pedagogy, policy, and/or programming for the betterment of their campus communities. The research process often utilized gatekeepers as referees for potential participants whom the gatekeepers believed met the above criteria.

The research team explained to potential participants the purpose and importance of the study and invited them to participate in a 60- to 90-minute, semi-structured, open-ended interview at the location of his or her choice. Along with taking and assessing field notes, each interview was audio-recorded (with the participant's permission) and then later professionally transcribed verbatim.

Participants

All nine participants were White administrators from faith-based institutions of higher education within the United States who were nominated by gatekeepers for having demonstrated commitment to social justice and who choose to engage in social justice activities, programs, and initiatives. Of these nine administrators, four were male and five were female, with participants ranging from an administrative faculty member, to mid-level administrators, to upper or chief administrators. Eight of the participants were from West Coast institutions and one was from the South. The participants' colleges and universities were predominately White institutions that varied in faith orientation, such as mainline Protestant, evangelical, and Catholic.

The research team examined the transcripts to determine the common threads and emerging themes from the participants' stories. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings as well as to be able to saturate the findings, the researchers conducted follow-up interviews with the participants by providing the preliminary findings and themes (member checking) and asking further clarifying and probing questions.

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Findings

The themes that developed through the analysis process allowed the team, as narrative investigators, to unfold the stories of White administrators doing social justice work at faith-based institutions. The following three themes emerged from the time with participants: the centrality of theology to issues of justice, the role of faith traditions that helped or hindered growth, and the role of Christian higher education as an institution to foster change.

Centrality of Social Justice to Theology and Ecclesiology

One of the most prevalent and overarching themes that emerged for these administrators was the centrality of social justice to their theological and ecclesiological beliefs. Participants cared deeply about the work of social justice because of their understanding of God, the universal church, and the consistency of living out one's Christian faith, which necessitated that they serve as advocates for justice in their current spheres of service. Specifically, these administrators' views on Scripture and the actions that should mark their lives as followers of Christ were central to their commitment to social justice.

Interpretation of Scripture. Many of the participants pointed toward their understanding of Scripture as an important influence in their calling to be caring about and working toward social justice. When they read the Bible, it was clear that God cares about social justice and called them to do the same. One participant described the influence of Scripture in terms of calling and personal mission:

I read the Scriptures, and when I read what Jesus said in Luke 4 about what his mission was, I want to be what Jesus was about. Because he talked about the widows, and the orphans, and the oppressed, and the prisoners, and that is what Jesus said He was about.

This individual observed that the person of Jesus described in the Bible is one who cared deeply for people on the fringes of society—people who are facing oppression or injustice—and cared deeply to see these wrongs righted. One female participant described her understanding, from Scripture, of the Kingdom of God as one of equity and equality:

It's about being, about giving everybody opportunities to succeed, recognizing that we're all created in the image of God and that's how we should live in the Kingdom. And so for me, social justice is as much a Kingdom principle as it is a political or social issue.

Each participant's understanding of Scripture affirmed that God's heart leans toward social justice and a personal calling for Christians to take up this work. One participant pointed out that even the Old Testament often reserved the strongest condemnation for people who ignored the needs of the poor and turned a "deaf ear to those in need." For White administrators in the present study, their understanding and interpretation of Scripture was a crucial foundation that compelled them to a life committed to social justice and intricately tied to daily Christian living.

Active life of justice. Another common theme among participants was about the Christian mandate of a commitment to action toward social justice. This belief went beyond acknowledging social justice as simply another component of being a Christian, but rather elevated social justice as a core belief and central practice of Christianity in and through their lives. One participant described the centrality of social justice to Christianity as a consistent state of action:

I don't know how you call yourself Christian if you're not actively serving those around you and serving the least of these and looking

out for... the orphans and the widows and that whole concept... So all of that to say, we absolutely need to be able to be leading the way and I hate that we're not.

It is clear that, for the participants, social justice is at the center of living out the Christian life, and calling oneself a Christian necessitates a commitment to working toward social justice.

An important part of the idea of social justice being a fundamental part of the participants' Christian beliefs was acknowledging the "blessings" that they had received and returning blessing to others. One participant described the need to actively respond by saying, "We are so blessed... and we need to use that blessing to bless others and to, as best we can, recognize that we are stewards and we have a responsibility as Christians..." The participants believed that their efforts toward social justice were not simply another aspect of their faith, but instead was the natural response to what God had done for them. Another participant concurred, relating the work in familial terms:

We are supposed to take care of those who are on the outside and to bring them in, to treat them as family, as Christ did for us. He treats us as family. He treats us as children, when we're anything but that, you know? We are of Creation and we're flawed, but He has been so inclusive.

Several of the participants shared the perspective of inclusivity, expressing a sentiment that God had included them in His Kingdom and had called them to be inclusive of others in return. They emphasized the importance of God inviting all people to take part in the Kingdom and the need for work to be done to ensure that all people are included in this invitation.

Impact of Faith Traditions

It is interesting to note the significant impact that faith traditions or specific denominations had on the participants' development toward valuing social justice. Exposure to traditions which emphasized the work of social justice encouraged individuals to value social justice. One participant described the growth that he experienced because of his wife's faith tradition as a Quaker:

My wife was raised from a Quaker tradition and through her, since I got to meet a bunch of Quakers, I started to learn about things that Quakers had done in terms of social justice over the years...everything from the Abolitionist Movement, to ministries, to testimony work that they've done, and I think it's through those interactions that I probably

developed the largest part of my sensibility around what does it mean to be a society for social justice.

Another participant, who grew up in the Roman Catholic tradition, described the importance of receiving education emphasizing social justice directly tied to the Gospel. This participant described some essential theological tenets of the Catholic faith:

The Catholic faith has a wonderful tradition of social justice from the Gospel and from the life of Jesus. Um, so care for people who are more vulnerable than you, care for the Earth, care for all of God's creation, um, issues of austerity, issues of really being caring and compassionate for people who don't have a voice....So, how I define social justice would be really being a voice for people to have a voice, being aware of your privilege, specifically mine as a white male, and making decisions that help promote the teachings of Jesus.

The participants consistently described the impact of faith traditions and the people walking alongside them in their faith traditions along with the importance of participating in a community that values social justice and works together to encourage it in the world around them.

The Role of Christian Higher Education

The final theme that emerged in the study was a common perspective on Christian higher education among the participants. Most participants described a hope and aspiration for Christian higher education to lead the way on issues of social justice. As described above, the participants firmly believed that promoting social justice and educating students to be agents of change were central to the Christian mission of their institutions. There was a real sense that Christian higher education has the potential to lead the way on issues of social justice and that it was central to the purpose of these institutions. One participant best described this belief, saying:

Well, for me, the reason why I'm in Christ-centered higher education is because that's where my heart and my passion is and the whole faith learning and integration is huge, and from my perspective...if there's anybody who should care about things that matter from a social justice perspective it's believers, and we should leave things better than we find them...and our students should leave things better than they find them, wherever they are and whatever field that they go into.

Most of the participants described a similar belief regarding those involved in Christian higher education, that they should be leaders in social justice movements across the country and that they were uniquely positioned to do so because of the centrality of faith at their institutions.

The participants were inspired by the possibility of Christian higher education leading the way in social justice; however, the participants expressed frustration with the reality that their institutions, colleagues, as well as they themselves were not doing enough to fulfill this calling. Much more prevalent among them was a sense of apathy about social justice on their campuses. Even though the participants understood social justice to be central to their institutions' purpose, they felt that it was difficult to build momentum and see these issues become central to their campuses. One participant's frustration was best captured in the following:

Why aren't Christians out there being the change and being out there bringing change and service and giving care with what we have? I mean, I think there's no better calling, and it's Scripture, it's all right there.

While participants expressed hope and aspiration, many felt a sense of frustration that Christian higher education was simply not doing enough to emphasize social justice. These administrators wanted a deeper institutional commitment to the work of social justice, but the change that they sought never seemed to fully materialize.

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Discussion

Limited research exists regarding the development of Christian White administrators as social justice allies. Christians engaged in social justice and advocacy work and scholarship have been under studied, with some considering it an irrelevant academic category (Kellogg, 2012). Furthermore, they are criticized for hypocrisy for purporting social justice while being part of an institution that has historically oppressed others and acted in homophobia. The findings from the current study offer implications for (a) helping students, staff, and faculty understand that one's faith and social justice are strongly connected; (b) creating opportunities for social justice advocates to influence and change campus cultures; and (c) leading by example to help conceptualize long-held assumptions about the role of religiously-affiliated institutions.

According to Edwards (2012), "...social justice is a mandate of the Christian faith" (p. 12). This is evident in the Bible, Christian theology, and through the teachings of Christ (Edwards, 2012). The Bible is clear regarding the expectation of taking action as believers instead of simply discussing justice:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possession and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be that person? I John 3:16-17. (Edwards, 2012, p. 12)

Furthermore, equity is an important aspect of the Christian faith and is validated in Paul's epistle to the Corinthian church:

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. That is equality. (2 Corinthians 8:13-14)

Understanding that social justice principles form the foundation of the Christian faith, students and practitioners would benefit from further exploring this connection, "as they consider their faith as an added dimension of their own worldview" and how their worldview informs their personal interaction and professional practices (Edwards, 2012, p. 15).

The participants discussed the history of and commitment to social justice and equity as defined in institutional missions, Scripture, and faith traditions. However, many of the participants felt isolated in their efforts toward infusing social justice work, which felt countercultural on their respective campuses. Many expressed a sense of disconnect between institutional beliefs and broader social justice issues. Christian higher education, according to one participant, is "miserably behind and we should be the leaders" in cultivating a community that discusses, educates, and advocates for the equity of all.

Overall, the Christian faith, which is the foundation for Christian higher education, is "based in the history of and commitment to social justice as evidence through the Bible" (Edward, 2012, p. 10). Conversations about social justice may not always be easy and may even be messy at times, yet they are important for the growth of the institution as well as for the many stakeholders. It is imperative for administrators at faith-based institutions to cultivate and support those engaged in social justice education and initiatives as well as to have a personal commitment to creating change.

Limitations and Further Research

A limitation of the current study was that the participants were located predominantly on the West Coast of the United States. Expanding the study to include more participants from the South, Midwest, and East Coast could reveal differences in how faith-based institutional missions, values, and faith explore issues of social justice and equity.

Future research should examine the impact of specific denominational or faith tradition backgrounds on commitment to and perspectives of the work of social justice. Do certain faith traditions tend to create members that care deeply about social justice? How does this development occur? Future research should also study students who are leading efforts toward social justice on their campus. Understanding what has fostered the passion and drive to affect change at the participants' institutions could help to encourage the same interest in other students. Finally, it would be interesting to understand the resistance to social justice on religiously-affiliated campuses, which many of the participants described. A better understanding of such resistance could lead to alleviating the fears and frustrations that often limit institutional growth in these areas.

Conclusion

Concerns of ongoing and unfinished racial divisions in society, in churches, and certainly within faith-based colleges, have motivated the researchers' pursuit of white identity awareness and anti-racist engagement among evangelical administrators. We submit that most of the findings among participants cannot merely remain within a silo of white identity, but ought to return to the larger pressing issues of dismantling systems of oppression and privilege in Christian educational spheres. The findings underscore the importance of understanding one's own individual positions within social and educational systems, as well as a need for a heightened sense of critical consciousness which is so necessary to continue the task of intentional and meaningful change. 

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Relationships with God, Relationships with Others, and Health: Associations Among First-Year College Students

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Abstract

When students transition away from their homes and into higher education, they enter a social environment where they are free, if not encouraged, to question and explore their values and beliefs, including their beliefs of God. Practicing Christians often report having a relationship with God, a conception that implies a dynamic and social process at work. This longitudinal study had two goals: (a) examine collegians' relationship with God in terms of their God image, His involvement in their lives, and the importance of their faith, at two time points in their first year of college; (b) examine how these God relational dimensions interplay with student relationships and health. Results suggest that not only do a majority of students hold a strong relational view of God, but that their views are increasingly associated with their health over time. The implications of these findings as well as future research directions are discussed.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”
Matthew 22:37-40

It is widely accepted that we love people better when we love God well. Could it also be that God teaches us to love Him better when we learn to love others well? As it is in the faith vs. deeds discussion highlighted through comparisons of Romans and James, we live with a symbiotic relationship between loving God and loving others.

God began to show us this truth at Pepperdine University in the fall of 2005, when the first ever Relationship IQ event was held. In the years that followed, we noticed an exhilarating trend: As we gave young adults tools and information to improve their relationships with others, we saw that they also improved their relationships with God. Individual after individual, whether they were close to or far from God, would draw closer to Him after they learned more about how to love each other well. We decided to learn more. And so, what do universities do when we get curious – we research. The current study aimed to examine these associations. Our central question is: How are relationships with others connected to our relationship with God?

Young Adulthood

Young adulthood (YA), a term often interchangeable with emerging adulthood, refers to a distinct developmental stage or period that “18- to 29-year olds in industrialized societies [undergo]” (Arnett et al., 2011, p.14). Typically beginning with their launch away from their context of dependence, individuals within this period are characterized by their independence from committed adult roles “such as marriage, childbearing, and establishing a new career” (Amato, 2011, p. 27). For the many young adults who enroll in higher education, they enter into an environment that is ideal for adult role moratorium. On one hand, many higher education practices are grounded in philosophical and literary traditions that promote the journey toward learning about oneself (Astin et al., 2011). On the other hand, higher education offers a plethora of majors, courses, career choices, relationship opportunities, and worldviews from which to choose. In response to these incentives, many young adults sample a variety of adult roles and life experiences in a self-focused identity quest. From a developmental standpoint,

the outcomes of this exploratory process for better or worse are social in nature; in addition to connecting with faculty and staff members that care about the student's development and well-being, other tasks include reorienting their relationship with parents (Arnett, 2004; McGoldrick et al., 2011) while moving toward their peers, friends, dating or intimate partners, and new communities with greater intimacy and relational reciprocity (Chow et al. 2011; Fincham et al., 2011; Smetana et al., 2006).

God-Image

Given the developmental and relational shifts during this period, researchers have been interested in the nature of spiritual growth during this time. One focus of this line of research is on God-image in young adults (e.g., Froese & Bader, 2007; Hoge, Johnson, & Luidens, 1993; Maynard, Gorsuch, & Bjorck, 2001; Wong-McDonald, & Gorsuch, 2004). God-image refers to the "personal schemas people hold about the nature and characteristics of God" (Steenwyk et al., 2010, p. 86). Most researchers who have studied God-images for the past 50 years observe that people often describe God in parental and relational terms such as nurturing, controlling, judging, and loving (Dickie et al., 2006; Dickie et al., 1997). A body of literature suggests that in addition to religious teachings, God-image is initially developed from parent modeling, a process that builds an image of God on parental qualities (Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008; Dickie et al., 2006; Gnaulati & Heine, 1997; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007). According to Bowlby (1973), individuals form mental representations of themselves and others based on repeated experiences with their caregivers. These representations or internal working models are a template for later relationships including ones with God. It is presumed that in addition to guiding the interpretation and anticipation of others' behaviors, internal working models include information of the "characteristics of the attachment figure, particularly characteristics relevant to interactions between the attachment figure and the self" (Zhal & Gibson, 2012, p. 218).

God-Image and Young Adults

Dickie and colleagues (2006) suggested that as young adults physically and emotionally separate themselves from their parents, God may become an important figure, particularly as they engage in a self-directed process of exploring and building their personalized worldview, a critical identity-related task during this period (Arnett, 2004). Along the same vein, Dickie et al. (2006) further suggested that God-image and other related God concepts shift away from parental relation etiology and toward the self. In support of the latter argument, a body of literature documents God-image as being more strongly associated with

young adults' self-esteem, commitment to religion (Spilka & Mullin, 1977), and self-regarding attitudes (Joey & Taulbee, 1986) rather than the quality of their relationship with their parents.

Researchers investigating God-image have primarily focused on understanding the relationship between God-image and a variety of outcome variables (Miller & Kelley, 2006). In order to further develop the study of God-image, investigations need to pursue two underexplored yet promising frontiers: (a) the cognitive structure of God-image, and (b) how it changes or matures across the lifespan. Presently, there is semantic ambiguity surrounding God image-related terms in empirical literature (Davis et al., 2013). The confusion stems from the many competing definitions of God-image, which have ranged from human attachment (Davis, 2010) to theological grounding (Gibson 2006; Hall, 2004). Practicing Christians often report having a “relationship” with God (Pew Research Center, 2008) rather than just a particular view of Him. For instance, in factor analytic studies (e.g., Granqvist & Kirkpatrick, 2008), researchers found that practicing Christians tended to view God in relational terms rather than doctrinal ones (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Gorsuch, 1968; Lawrence, 1991; Schaap-Jonker, Eurelings-Bontekoe, Zock, & Jonker, 2008). It may be strategic for higher education researchers and practitioners to adapt a relational-cognitive framework of God-image. Doing so would address the social nature of the home to college transition as well as help bring conceptual clarity and definitional consensus to the term; important semantic milestones that will help grow and mature God-image research among collegians and young adults (Davis et al., 2013). Furthermore, it is assumed within the God-image and God-concept literature that God-images are “context-sensitive, belief-laden mental/neural representations” (Davis et al., 2013, p. 52). Studying how young adults' God-images grow and change in relation to the many relational confluxes during the transition between social contexts will provide vital information on the unfolding needs of collegians for higher education institutes and churches.

Religion and Health

An important development in the study of religion over the past two decades is its connection with health (Oman & Thoresen, 2006). For example, in their meta-analysis of 40 independent samples, McCullough and colleagues (2000) found an association with religious involvement and longevity. Although physical health and mental health are dichotomized in research and in practice, they are interrelated constructs. Further, there is documentation that “physical health benefits from religion are often mediated by gains in mental health correlates such as improved social relationships, coping ability, and health behaviors” (Oman & Thoresen, 2006, p. 435).

Researchers that have examined the effects of religion and spirituality on health often find themselves forced to tease out narrow dimensions of religion or spirituality (i.e., God-image) in order to examine its connection with a range of clinical symptomatology and health indicators. Although this body of work has uncovered many important connections, it also brings into focus a chronic methodological problem of oversimplifying faith for research purposes (Miller & Kelley, 2006). This is problematic when examining faith over time, especially during young adulthood where it is expected that many will be reexamining and exploring their worldview. A review of the literature finds no longitudinal studies that examine the interrelation between faith and health outcomes for young adults.

God Relationship and Interpersonal Confidence

It is widely recognized that social relationships have a powerful influence on physical and mental health (Merino, 2014; Oman & Thoresen, 2006). Social belonging, a key variable in well-being, has been found by researchers to be mediated through individuals' perceptions of their social network and their relationship with God (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015; Oman & Thoresen, 2006). Evidence of the interplay between social relationship, God, and health can be found in the literature that documents religion playing an important role in networking and garnering social support among adolescents and adults (Merino, 2014; Miller & Kelley, 2006). Relatively few studies exist that have examined the associations between young adults' relationship with God, their confidence in their social skills, and their perception of their interpersonal or physical well-being. What can be drawn from the limited literature is that positive views of God have been linked with more positive coping and self-confidence, implying a similar association between God-image and interpersonal health and confidence (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Newton & McIntosh, 2010; Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, & Olsen, 1990; Weigand & Weiss, 2006).

The Present Study

Although the existing literature suggests that a majority of young adults see God as important in their lives (Astin et al., 2011; Foubert et al., 2015), few studies have examined this variable longitudinally in young adulthood. In addition to examining how young adults' relationship with God changes over the course of their first year in college, this study seeks to understand how these changes interplay with a variety of outcome variables related to successful student development. The questions that the study aims to answer are the following:

1. What are students' views of God?
2. How much do students see God being involved in their lives?

3. How important is faith to students while they are in college?
4. How are young adults' relationships with God related to their relationship quality, relationship confidence, and several dimensions of health?

Methods

Procedures

For two consecutive years (fall semester 2012 and 2013), incoming university students were invited to complete a survey at their new student orientation. Students completed the survey again toward the end of their first year of college. These two successive cohorts of first-year students were combined into one sample.

Participants

The sample consists of 268 university students at a private Christian university in southern California who completed the survey at both time points, beginning and end of their first year of college. There were 175 females (64.6%) and 97 males (35.4%) (the college gender split is 60% female and 40% male). Mean age was 17.92, $SD = 0.45$ at orientation and 18.61, $SD = .69$ at spring. There were no significant differences between the two cohorts in gender composition or age. The university has a racial/ethnic composition of 45.1% White, 15.1% Hispanic/Latino, 12.4% Asian, 8.4% Non-resident alien, 6.8% Black/African American, 0.6% American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.5% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 4.9% two or more races, and 6.3% Unknown. Student-reported religious affiliations at the university consist of 57.4% Christian, 1% Sectarian, 1.1% Eastern Religions, 3.2% Non-Christian Monotheist religions, 4% no religious affiliation, and 33.1% not reported.

Measures

The survey was constructed specifically for this project based on the research questions, available literature on each construct, and the content and mission of Relationship IQ. The survey items used in the current study, and the constructs they were designed to measure, are described here.

View of God. Students were asked to indicate "Which of these statements most closely describes your view of God currently?" Choices included Respected voice to consider, Close/personal friend, Distant/ powerful authority, God doesn't exist, I'm trying to figure it out, I don't know, and Other (please describe).

God's Influence. Students were asked "How do you rate God's influence in your life currently?" Choices included Very involved, Somewhat involved, Rarely involved, and Not part of my life.

Health. Students rated their physical, mental, and spiritual health, separately on 4-point scales of Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent.

Relationship Quality. Students rated their relationships with father, mother, and friends separately on 4-point scales of Poor, Fair, Good, or Excellent.

Relationship Confidence. Students used 4-point scales of Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Somewhat agree, and Strongly agree to rate their confidence in three areas: conflict and communication (4 items), having models of healthy relationships (2 items), and choices and abilities (4 items). Examples of items include “It is hard for me to resolve conflict in friendships” (reverse-scored), “I choose friends that help me be the best version of myself,” and “I feel confident in my ability to form healthy romantic relationships.”

Results

The results were organized around four major themes (1) changes in relationship with God, (2) overall health, (3) relationship quality, and (4) relationship confidence.

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Change in Relationship with God

Students’ relationship with God was operationalized to have three separate yet interlocking parts: God-image, God involvement, and importance of faith. Descriptive data for each of these variables are presented in table 1.1

Table 1.1 God Image, Involvement, and Faith Frequencies

Variable	n	At Orientation		End of First Year	
		n	%	n	%
God image	Respected Voice	53	20.2	50	18.4
	Close & Personal Friend	150	55.1	144	52.9
	Cultural Myth (Atheist)	8	2.9	12	4.4
	Powerful Yet Distant	18	6.6	20	7.4
	TryingFigure it Out	31	11.4	34	12.5
	I Don't Know	3	1.1	5	1.8
	Missing	9	3.3	7	2.6
	Total	272	100	272	100
God Involvement	Very Involved	130	47.8	138	50.7
	Somewhat	105	38.6	92	33.8
	Rarely	18	6.6	18	6.6
	No Part	7	2.6	11	4
	Missing	12	4.4	13	4.8
	Total	272	100	272	100
	Importance of Faith	Very Important	152	55.9	168
Somewhat Important		99	36.4	80	29.4
Not Important		21	7.7	24	8.8
Total		272	100	272	100

At orientation, a majority of students reported seeing God as a close and personal friend (55.1%), very or somewhat involved in their lives (86.4%), and considered their faith as very or somewhat important to them (92.3%). Similarly, at the end of the spring semester, 52.9% viewed God as a close and personal friend, 86.4% saw God as somewhat or very involved in their lives, and 91.2% reported that their faith is very important to them. A closer examination found a reduction in those who saw God as somewhat involved (-4.7%) and faith being somewhat important (-6.99%), but a rise in those who saw God as very involved (+2.9%) and those reporting faith to be very important (+5.9%). These results fall in line with emerging literature finding that over half of young adults value their religious and spiritual lives while in college and felt more committed over time (e.g., Astin et al., 2011; Levenson, Aldwin, & Mello, 2006).

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the differences between orientation and the end of the first year in the frequencies of each variable. Frequencies of perceived involvement of God were significantly different at the two time points $\chi^2(9) = 175.71, p < .01$. Frequencies of the importance of faith also showed a significant difference across time, $\chi^2(4, N = 272) = 140.20, p < .01$, suggesting that students experienced a change in God involvement and their importance of faith over the course of their first year. In our study sample, the number of students reporting God to be very involved and faith as important in their lives increased over the first year. Although statistically significant, the analysis of changes in God-image remained inconclusive given the large differences in group sizes and that view of God barely changed over the course of the year. The size of the student groups reporting a nonexistent God-image were so small compared to the groups reporting Close and personal friend and Respected voice that it is difficult to make statistical comparisons between the groups.

Health

Each of the three dimensions of God relationship (God-image, God involvement, and Importance of faith) were examined separately to examine main effects on health, relationship quality, and interpersonal confidence. An analysis of variance showed that at orientation differences in God-image were associated with differences in overall health $F(5, 256) = 4.02, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 9.77, SD = 1.46$) scored significantly higher in health than those who saw God as a Respected voice ($M = 9.0, SD = 1.71$) and those who were Trying to figure out who God was to them ($M = 8.73, SD = 1.5$). It is worth noting that those who were trying to determine who God was to them, but who were not atheists, reported the lowest health among the group

God's involvement was also associated with differences in health at orientation, $F(3, 255) = 14.87, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that the group reporting God as Very involved ($M = 9.97, SD = 1.31$) scored significantly higher in health than the Somewhat ($M = 9.09, SD = 1.59$) and Rarely ($M = 7.78, SD = 1.77$) groups.

There was also a statistical difference in health between participants reporting differing levels of the importance of their faith, $F(2, 268) = 15.59, p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that those reporting their faith as Very important ($M = 9.89, SD = 1.44$) scored significantly higher in health than the Somewhat important ($M = 8.88, SD = 1.63$) and Not important ($M = 8.68, SD = 1.76$) groups.

At the end of the first year, analyses of variance found collegians' God-image, $F(5, 257) = 6.76, p < .01$; God involvement, $F(3, 253) = 6.90, p < .01$; and Importance of faith, $F(2, 267) = 10.52, p < .01$ were still associated with

differences in their overall health. For God-image, post-hoc analyses indicated that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 9.52$, $SD = 1.75$) or a Respected voice ($M = 9.47$, $SD = 1.77$) scored significantly higher in health than the group who was Trying to figure out who God is ($M = 7.81$, $SD = 2.24$). In terms of how influential or how involved God was in their lives, those who reported God as Very involved/influential in their lives ($M = 9.51$, $SD = 1.72$) scored significantly higher in health than those who saw God as Rarely involved ($M = 7.39$, $SD = 2.33$). Those who reported their faith as Very important ($M = 9.58$, $SD = 1.63$) scored significantly higher in health than the other two groups.

Relationship Quality

Analyses of variance found no main effects of the three God relationship dimensions on participants' relationship quality at orientation. In the spring, the analysis of variance found only a main effect of God-image on relationship quality, $F(5, 231) = 3.23$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc analyses found that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 10.93$, $SD = 1.33$) and Respected voice ($M = 10.98$, $SD = 1.49$) scored significantly higher in relationship quality than those who were Trying to figure out who God was to them ($M = 9.86$, $SD = 1.62$).

Relationship Confidence

Analyses of variance at orientation detected no significant main effects of the three God relationship variables on relationship confidence. Analysis of variance at the end of the first year detected that God-image, $F(5, 252) = 4.43$, $p < .01$; God involvement, $F(3, 248) = 4.51$, $p < .01$; and Importance of faith $F(2, 262) = 5.04$, $p > .01$ had main effects on relationship confidence. For God-image, post-hoc analyses found that those who saw God as a Close and personal friend ($M = 21.09$, $SD = 2.50$) scored significantly higher in relationship confidence than those who were Trying to figure out who God is ($M = 19.10$, $SD = 3.27$). The group who reported God as Rarely involved in their lives ($M = 18.83$, $SD = 2.85$) scored significantly lower in relationship confidence than the Somewhat ($M = 20.04$, $SD = 3.03$) and Very involved ($M = 21.00$, $SD = 2.62$) groups. Post-hoc analyses found that the group who reported their faith as Very important ($M = 20.86$, $SD = 2.69$) reported significantly higher relationship confidence than the other groups.

Table 2.1a Descriptives of God Relationship Variables Across Health, Relationship Quality, and Relationship Confidence at Orientation

Grouped Independent variables		Health				Rel. Quality				Rel. Confidence			
		n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F
God Image	Respected Voice	53	9	0.23	4.02**	47	10.5	0.18	1.41	52	19.88	0.44	0.22
	Close & Personal Friend	150	9.77	0.12		136	10.67	0.12		149	20.06	0.28	
	Cultural Myth (Atheist)	7	8.71	0.97		6	11.5	0.34		8	21.63	1.22	
	Powerful but Distant	18	9.56	0.42		18	10.94	0.3		18	20.44	0.64	
	Trying to Figure it Out	31	8.73	0.27		30	10.3	0.29		31	20.32	0.45	
	Don't Know	3	9.43	0.33		3	9.67	1.45		3	20	2.52	
God Involvement	Very	130	9.67	1.14	14.87**	118	10.84	0.12	2.32	128	20.39	2.8	1
	Somewhat	105	9.09	0.42		98	10.38	0.15		105	19.87	0.31	
	Rarely	18	7.78	0.16		15	10.4	0.39		18	19.44	0.57	
	No Part	6	8.83	0.12		5	11	0.77		7	21	1.43	
Importance of Faith	Very	152	9.89	0.12	15.59**	135	10.7	0.11	0.78	150	20.1	0.27	0.39
	Somewhat	99	8.88	0.16			10.51	0.15		99	19.99	0.3	
	Not Important	20	8.67	0.39			10.83	0.29		21	20.67	0.64	

ANOVA = analysis of variance.

** p < .01

Table 2.1b Descriptives of God Relationship Variables Across Health, Relationship Quality, and Relationship Confidence at Spring

Grouped Independent variables		Health				Rel. Quality				Rel. Confidence			
		n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F	n	M	SE	F
God Image	Respected Voice	50	9.47	0.25	5.76**	42	10.98	0.23	3.23**	48	20.42	0.42	4.43**
	Close & Personal Friend	144	9.52	0.15		133	10.93	0.12		142	21.09	0.21	
	Cultural Myth (Atheist)	10	8.3	1.06		11	10.18	0.66		12	18.41	0.98	
	Powerful but Distant	20	8.25	0.5		18	10.67	0.36		20	20.15	0.62	
	Trying to Figure it Out	34	7.81	0.38		29	9.86	0.3		31	19.1	0.59	
	Don't Know	3	9.4	0.81		4	11.25	0.48		5	20	1.1	
God Involvement	Very	138	9.51	0.15	6.9**	123	10.95	0.12	1.93	134	21	0.23	4.51**
	Somewhat	92	8.91	0.22		82	10.62	0.18		89	20.04	0.32	
	Rarely	18	7.39	0.55		17	10.35	0.42		18	18.33	0.67	
	No Part	9	9.11	1.02		11	10.18	0.57		11	19.91	0.84	
Importance of Faith	Very	168	9.58	0.13	10.52**	152	10.91	0.11	2.38	165	20.86	0.21	5.04**
	Somewhat	80	8.49	0.26		69	10.59	0.19		76	20.07	0.34	
	Not Important	22	8.36	0.57		23	10.3	0.37		24	19.17	0.6	

** p < .01

Summary of Findings

Overall, a majority of collegians reported that their faith was very important to them, that they saw God as a close and personal friend, and considered Him very involved in their lives. Across these God relationship dimensions was a positive association with relationship confidence, relational quality, and personal health, which became more significant over the first year of college.

Discussion

An encouraging finding in the study, though not surprising, was how many collegians see God as important and involved in their lives throughout their first year. Praise God for his presence on our campus. Pepperdine University attracts students for its academic excellence, beautiful surroundings, and Christian mission. Though some come more for the beach than the rich Christian community, the data indicated that the majority of our students have a keen interest in God.

Another inspiring finding was that how students view God and rate his influence and involvement in their lives connects not just with relational health, but also with mental and physical health. Our students who reported God as Very involved, faith as Very important, and God as a Close and personal friend also reported the highest levels of physical, mental, and spiritual health.

The developmental shifts of the young adult years are ripe opportunities for changes in relationship with God and others. According to the statistical results, when these students began college there were no significant associations between relationship with God and students' confidence in their ability to be successful in relationships or between relationship with God and their reported relationship quality with parents and friends. But by the end of their first year there was marked change. Within just a few months' time, results show that their relationship with God was correlated with their confidence in their relational abilities and the quality of their relationships. In the spring, those with closer relationships with God score higher in all of these realms than those with distant or absent relationships with Him.

Our results can't tell us why this occurs, but we have some hypotheses based on our 11 years of working with young adults through Relationship IQ (rIQ), a relationship education ministry to students that helps them love God and love others well. For example, perhaps as young adults start to navigate life with less parental input, more independence, and recognition of their limitations, they start to rely more on others and God. Those who have Him to rely on then may begin to fare better relationally and emotionally. An intrapersonal incongruence our counseling center sees is that though some students report faith as very important in their lives, they do not connect their faith with their current struggles. Their relationship with God does not impact how they deal with life's challenges. The

integration of God into everyday life is part of the maturing process. One of the ways that God matures us is through navigating difficult relationships. As we learn better how to relate well with others, we are also prepared for right relationship with God. This growth process during the young adult years may set the stage for the trajectory of their lives for decades.

There were significant associations at the end of the year between relationship with God and relationship quality with parents and friends, as well as relationship confidence. Those who saw God as a Close and personal friend or Respected voice reported higher relationship quality than those who were still trying to figure out who God is. Some may look at this type of association and interpret it to mean that relationship with God improves our relationships with others. However, these associations do not imply a causal direction. One could also argue that better quality relationships with parents and friends helps young adults have a better relationship with God. Either way, we have consistently observed that those lost in their relationship with God also seem to be lost in their relationships with others. Those that reported they were trying to figure out who God is also reported the lowest levels of health and relationship quality. If we can move students in the quality of their relationships with others, is that another way for us to help students move towards God? Though this hypothesis is beyond the scope of the current study, it is an important area for future research.

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The present study found that overall frequencies of God-image did not significantly shift in the first year of college, while overall God involvement and influence increased. This was consistent with previous research (Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008; Dickie et al., 2006; Gnaulati & Heine, 1997; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007), which saw God-image rooted in parental relational characteristics. As God-image is often enmeshed with the parental relationship, it tends to be slower to change. Anecdotally, through our interactions with students we have noticed that it is often in the later years of college that view of God tends to shift. One of the researchers will never forget the joy on a young man's face as he shared his realization that he had been relating to God as though God had the characteristics of his dad, who had demanded excellence out of his son before any relationship was offered. He shared with delight how he now realized that God did not demand excellence before relationship; God was calling him, imperfect him, to relationship now. This young man was a senior. It had taken time, new experiences with God and people, and distance from his dad for God to give him new eyes to see his Heavenly Father. A crucial way for young adults to experience God differently, learn who God is, and how to interact with him seems to be through relationship with others. Our consistent observation is that giving young adults greater relationship skill and understanding better prepares them for right relationship with God.

A limitation of the study was that we had a very small sample of students who reported their view of God to be a Cultural myth. This group also reported very low rates of health and relational quality. The sample size for this group was too small to understand more about these findings.

Within the Relationship IQ program, we have seen God transform students through conversations about sex, dating, healthy conflict, getting along with parents and roommates, navigating friendship, and establishing healthy boundaries. Anecdotally, people who were far from God drew closer when they learn how God created our brains to respond to sex and the relational implications of sexual choices. Students close to God learned more about intimacy with Christ and what it means to love people well. Our work is to create intentional space for the Holy Spirit's work of transformation. God has done amazing things on our campus as we have leaned into this reality of relationship with God and others being interconnected. Our anecdotal and research evidence is overwhelming at the interconnectivity of relationships with God and others.

There is still much to research and much to understand. An exciting area for further research would be to study how exposure to healthy relationship education may contribute to relationship quality with others and with God. Longitudinal research that follows young adults into adulthood, measuring correlations between relational and spiritual health, is an additional area for further exploration. Drawing from our results, research needs to examine how the rapid changes in relationships with others and God during college have lasting impact on adult adjustment and development. Future research would also need to examine how the demographic characteristics of students correlate with relational outcomes. Examining how students' backgrounds interplay with key interpersonal adjustment and developmental outcomes will help higher education practitioners and researchers understand and practically target key factors that may facilitate optimum development. 

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Mixed Signals: The Effects of Cell Phones on College Student Involvement

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Abstract

American college students lead the United States of America in cell phone use. This study utilized a *phenomenological* qualitative methodology to learn the lived experience of college student cell phone users and the effects of cell phones on co-curricular learning, per Alexander Astin's (1986) theory of involvement. The rapid rise and evolution of the cell phone impacts student behavior and learning. The results of the study indicated that cell phones promote student participation with peers and on-campus programs, but are unlikely to affect involvement with faculty or staff. Experientially, participants were critical of their peers' cell phone behavior, feared missing out, and favored face-to-face to communication in almost all contexts. Nevertheless, participants perceived cell phones mostly positively, even though they described the devices' undesired effects most frequently, believing cell phones are necessary to stay socially connected and informed during college.

Keywords: student involvement, cell phones, sense of belonging

Introduction

Mobile technology devices, from portable music players to tablets, help define the twenty-first century and the young adults who have grown up in it. As a result of their close connection with widely available multimedia electronics and the Internet, those born in the early 1990s to the present are known by their relationship with technology, labeled the *iGeneration*, *Generation M* (i.e., multitasking), and the *Net Generation* (Rosen & Cheever, 2010). But however familiar the PC, Mac, iPod, and iPad may be to Millennials, chief among technologies is the cell phone.

The global prevalence, popularity, and pervasiveness of cellular telephones grew tremendously in recent years. From 2005 to 2009 worldwide cell phone subscribers grew 109%, from 2.2 billion to 4.6 billion (International Telecommunications Union, 2010; MobiThinking, 2011). In 2010 alone, cell phone subscribers totaled 5.3 billion, sent 6.9 trillion text messages and, by the end of 2011, eclipsed more than 8 trillion texts sent each year (International Telecommunications Union, 2010; MobiThinking, 2011). In other words, in 2010 subscribers totaling more than three quarters of the world's population sent nearly 1.6 billion texts each day, and more than 1.8 billion texts every 24 hours a mere year later.

In the United States of America, one of the top countries for cell phone usage, 86% of people own a cell phone (Cell Signs, 2008). Leading the population are American college students, of whom 94% have a cell phone, 85% use text messaging, and 75% send texts every day (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 2008). Essentially, to be a college student is to own a cell phone. But what is often overlooked are the factors that account for the sudden growth in the use of this device among college students.

According to Wei and Lo (2006), the cell phone's swift growth in popularity is due to the technology's rapid evolution, from a business necessity and luxury item owned by a few, to an obligatory social device. Cell phones connect friends, parents, and children and, especially for parents of females, are a safety device which no daughter is to leave home without (Aoki & Downes, 2003). In the process, the cell phone advanced from a rudimentary communicator into a multimedia device with millions of applications, the ability to take photos, record video, and access the Internet, putting numerous methods for communication at users' disposal.

As a result of its rapid evolution and due to the constant contact the mobile device makes possible, cell phones profoundly shape college student behavior. Yet while the ability to communicate at any time from almost anywhere by voice or text is incredibly beneficial, the cell phone is also responsible for or linked to various undesired effects.

Research Intentions

Numerous cell phone-related issues affecting college students are known, including classroom interruptions (Burns, 2008; Campbell, 2006), impaired study memory (Smith, Isaak, Senette, & Abadie, 2011), lower relationship satisfaction and role performance (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugale, 2004; Beaver, Knox, & Zusman, 2010; Chesley, 2005), and high distress when separated from one's phone (Stam & Stanton, 2004). The effects of cell phones on the in-class experience are widely studied (Burns & Lohenry, 2008; Campbell, 2006; Rosen & Cheever, 2010). Yet research on the impact of cell phones on co-curricular learning is lacking.

Astin's theory of involvement. Alexander Astin's (1984) theory of involvement states that the more students are involved with the academic and social aspects of the college experience the more they learn and develop. Astin (1984) defined an involved student as one who devotes significant energy to academics, spends considerable time on campus, actively participates in student organizations and activities, and interacts frequently with faculty and staff. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features which impact student learning and development (Astin, 1984). That is, the more time (quantity) and seriousness (quality) a student devotes to their college experience, the more or less a student will learn and develop.

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Kuh and Love (2000) and Tinto (1993) suggested that student involvement is in large part the solution to student success, satisfaction, and retention problems. However, involvement requires energy and time. And students vary, as on a continuum, in the degree to which they can and choose to be involved in their education (Astin, 1984). As a device which promotes connection elsewhere and as a multi-media center with non-social features, cell phones can easily and significantly impact involvement. While no studies dealt directly with out-of-class learning, numerous studies suggest they considerably affect how college students relate with others and choose to be involved.

Purpose and Research Questions

At many faith-based institutions, an involved student community is a lauded element of their students' complete education (e.g., Christian Community, n.d.; Community Covenant, n.d.; Mission Statement, n.d.). That said, the effect cell phones have on students' co-curricular education is unstudied. Because no known research addresses the impact of cell phones on out-of-class learning, this study broadly sought to understand (1) what effect cell phones have on college students' out-of-class involvement with college peers, campus programs, and faculty and staff; and (2) what typifies the lived experience of college student cell phone users.

Literature Review

While 86% of Americans use a cell phone (Cell Signs, 2008), almost all American college students do. Yet, what most modifies phone use is a surprising variable. Jin and Park (2010) found that the more face-to-face interaction college students had the more they engaged their cell phone and the better their interpersonal motives were for using it. The literature shows that cell phones are used primarily to maintain already established relationships (Jin & Park, 2010; Leung & Wei, 2000; Wei & Lo, 2006). But while the motive to reinforce social bonds through electronics is not peculiar to cell phones, it is greatest among them.

Cell Phone Motives

College student cell phone users are highly motivated by a sense of belonging to a social community and use the device to preserve that connection. One example is students regularly scanning their phones to see if they need to respond (Braguglia, 2008).

In contrast to studies of landline telephones (Dimmick, Sikand, & Patterson, 1994; O'Keefe & Sulanowski, 1995), cell phones are used primarily for intrinsic or social reasons (e.g., companionship) much more than instrumental or utilitarian reasons (e.g., gathering information) (Jin & Park, 2010; Wei & Lo, 2006). Motives for using both landlines and cell phones include information gathering, social utility, and affection. Motives unique to cell phones include mobility, immediacy, fashion, and status (Jin & Park, 2010; Wei & Lo, 2006). Thus, as much as the cell phone is relied upon on-the-go and carried in case of a timely or emergency situation, much like a luxury timepiece which turns heads but also tells time, the cell phone also serves the less functional purpose of a stylish accessory. Cell phones are not simply mobile communicators; they are symbolic and expressive accessories showcasing one's personality, popularity, and taste (Jin, 2010; Wei & Lo, 2006).

When asked to place a price on their device, cell phone users tend to appraise their value higher than retail (Jin & Park, 2010; Wei & Lo, 2006). Linked to this valuation, individuals prioritize involvement with their cell phone over other sources of immaterial value which historically are more respected.

Cell Phones and Well-being

In cell phone versus educational studies, cell phones almost always win (Jin & Park, 2010). Cell phone interactions often take precedence over physically present company as well. A recurring theme within the literature is lower relationship satisfaction and worse role performance (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugale, 2004; Beaver, Knox, & Zusman, 2010; Chesley, 2005).

Worse role performance. When people engage their phones in social settings, even briefly, others generally perceive they have socially disengaged (Beaver, Knox, & Zusman, 2010). An unspoken rule is broken: You may not be physically present but focused elsewhere (Beaver 2010; Burns, 2008; Campbell, 2006). Yet for those glancing at their phones, they are triggered by their sense of community and hear a different message: Someone elsewhere needs me. But the distractibility and sense of urgency arguably affects student learning most of all.

One of the most reported undesired effects of cell phones is learning interruptions. Burns and Lohenry (2010) found that the vast majority of both students and faculty (85.1% compared to 84.2%, respectively) believe cell phones distract studies. Smith, Isaak, Senette, and Abadie (2011) further demonstrated through 24 Deese-Roediger-McDermott lists that students' attention and memory functioned best without cell phone distractions during study sessions and performed worse when required to call or send a text. When presented with cell phone tasks, students' true memory (i.e., the ability to remember correct answers) was negatively affected across the board, regardless of allotted time of study (i.e., 1-30 minutes), whether they were required to take a call (40 out of 100 points possible), make a call (40/100) or, most significantly, send texts (29/100), as compared to having no distractions at all (62/100). Despite evidence that cell phones have considerable negative effects on academic success and social perceptions, the desire to stay connected through the device even when it is socially unacceptable is powerful and difficult to resist.

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Dependence, ill-adjustment, and fauxcellarms. In an international study conducted by Naomi S. Baron (2008), when asked what they liked most about their mobile phones, students mentioned texting, but few mentioned talking. Students globally indicated that texting's stripped-down means for communication was preferred over voice calls and not because texts are non-invasive. Ironically, the majority of participants liked most their ability to contact others, but overwhelmingly liked least that others could contact them (Baron, 2008). *Reachability* exacts a heavy toll on users worldwide (Baron, 2008). Baron (2008) linked this toll to the relative newness of the technology. Students were still learning to adapt and struggling to cope with its ever-presence (Baron, 2008). Students, whether cognitively aware of it or not, were by and large ill-equipped to adjust alone.

A sizable number (especially in South Korea) claimed to be both dependent upon mobile phones and distressed by the device (Baron, 2008). Further, *fauxcellarms* or *phantom vibrations*, the widely reported sensation of a cell phone going off in the absence of a call or text, was a source of pride for some cell phone users but reflected a major downside of the technology for others: dependence (Simon, 2007).

Stam and Stanton (2004) asked students to give up one or more electronic devices for 48 hours and journal their experience. Laptops, televisions, and other electronic devices were included in the study. But those who gave up cell phones experienced the worst effects. These students reported great distress and heightened anxiety when separated from their cell phones, indicating strong dependence and greater personal connections to the device than other technologies (Stam & Stanton, 2004). As numerous studies confirm, dependence, separation anxiety, and distress are negative psychological effects cell phones have on college students (Ashforth, 2004; Beaver, 2010; Chesley, 2005; Reid & Reid, 2007; Stam, 2006).

Methods

The present study employed a phenomenological qualitative methodology to study student involvement and what impact cell phones have on it. A phenomenological research method helped obtain a rich initial understanding of the impact on involvement.

Data for the study was based on a nonrandom sample of undergraduate student volunteers at a small, Midwestern, faith-based residential college. To best understand the essence of the college student cell phone experience, purposive sampling was used. Seven participants, four males and three females, were interviewed. All participants actively used cell phones and partook in one-on-one interviews lasting approximately an hour.

Interviews were conducted in three series. Series one were semi-structured interviews, asking open-ended, broad questions. In series two and three, participants presented a less constrained description of their lived experience while the interviewer observed and explored the themes which emerged in the previous series in greater detail (Patton, 2002).

Findings

The following findings explore the impact cell phones have on the quantity and quality of college student involvement with peers, programs, faculty and staff, and the lived experience of college student cell phone users.

The Effect of Cell Phones on Student-Student Involvement

The most popular theme, expressed by all seven participants, was cell phones increase the quantity of involvement with college peers. In their experiences, texting frequently offered invitations to gather with groups of friends who were already together. On-going activities ushered a common sentiment: Cell phones are essential for college students to connect socially. A belief held by all seven participants was that spur-of-the-moment activities present a limited window of

opportunity and that without a cell phone they and others would socially miss out. However, many mixed signals were sent in relation to students' involvement with peers.

Effect on quantity of student-student involvement. Cell phones increased the quantity of in-person interactions with students with whom they had existing relationships, namely, students they lived with, classmates, and students with whom they shared leadership responsibilities. But a phenomenon which four participants noted was that when physically surrounded by strangers, they used their cell phones to engage friends elsewhere and passively dismissed students with whom they were physically present. A female participant complained, "Sometimes having a cell phone disconnects you from students because you'll find you use it a lot to not feel awkward... to make it look like you're preoccupied." When her roommate got a new smart phone, another participant said she felt shut out because for days in a row her roommate "would sit in bed for an hour or two and scroll through Instagram, get on the Internet or watch movies." As one participant summarized, "[students] are more interested in their phone than you." This was especially felt by students without the latest technology.

A student who did not own a smart phone expressed frustration at smart phone users for using their devices as "time fillers." The participants who used smart phones supported this notion, saying they used the non-calling and non-texting features of their phones most, namely browsers, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. A male said, "It's easy to get lost in devices, lost in another world where you are just interested in the information on the screen as opposed to the person in front of you." Yet, smart phone users did not believe such behavior was rude or wrong, at least not at first. Instead, they justified it on generational grounds, claiming constant use of technology, including in public areas and during meals, was socially acceptable. They believed that anti-social or rude cell phone behaviors were typical of daily student life, but were the fault of others, not themselves.

Satisfied with the regular interaction cell phones provided her, a female participant said, "I think with phones in general that the interaction with students may be more frequent but more superficial." While characterized primarily as social devices which promote student-to-student involvement through the phone and in person, participants emphasized that cell phones were best for quantity of involvement rather than quality involvement.

Effect on quality of student-student involvement. More stories that were critical of their peers' cell phone use were told than positive ones. This surprised the researcher, whose own experiences with the technology are vastly positive. Exploring this theme in the second and third series of interviews, five students

reflected that in reality their cell phone behavior was just as poor as their peers'. Though still critical of others, they recognized they were part of the problem and not immune to it. A prominent perception emerged: Cell phones promote shallow relationships and restrain relationships from developing and maturing. The cell phones' perceived negative effect on the quality of involvement with other students was so strong that participants indicated relational dissatisfaction continued even when interacting face-to-face, when cell phones were no longer present. Five of the seven participants reflected the belief that if they lived in a world with few cell phones, their relationships would be superior to the relationships they have now. The researcher wondered why participants' stories were so often negative. Perhaps the interview was a rare safe opportunity to talk about cell phone experiences unfiltered and that permitted participants to more often share negative stories.

The same five complained that texting conversations are often unclear, and when a response is not immediately received, one often wonders "is this person mad at me" and rarely assumes "their phone must be dead." Students believed that texting impaired their ability to communicate rich thoughts and emotions. A male participant shared, "We can say, 'oh I've texted them, talked on the phone.' Whatever. We're not getting any closer to truly knowing each other when it comes to cell phones and technology." Participants lamented the lack of depth in their relationships and believed cell phones were at fault for much of the superficiality and shallowness they experienced. Yet, participants noted their phones occasionally promoted quality conversations because they create a sense of safety.

Three participants stated that text messaging allowed them to have conversations too uncomfortable to have in person. "Because [text messaging] is kind of impersonal, you can say things you may not say face-to-face," a female participant offered. Conversely, a male emphasized,

There are much fewer risks involved in texting somebody information as opposed to telling them [face-to-face]... You can distance yourself from [their response]... You can say something... over text that you would never say to their face because you wouldn't want to deal with the reaction.

Whether an expression of cowardice or courage, cell phones facilitated vulnerable conversations because of the perceived safety provided. Nevertheless, participants overwhelmingly preferred to communicate by other means. All participants stated texting and voice calls were not their preferred means for communicating with others, and expressly stated they preferred to communicate face-to-face whenever possible.

The Effect of Cell Phones on Student-Program Involvement

All participants said cell phones increased the quantity of their participation in on-campus programs. Most of all, cell phones increased their awareness. When a friend texted that he or she was heading to a sanctioned event, participants were much more likely to go themselves. Illustrating this point, a female participant said:

When I'm not informed about what's going on [on campus] and then I personally get a text from someone, then I'll actually want to go... Sometimes it's an event I've heard about... But because someone has actually invited me, I'll go.

Two participants who held student leadership positions in their residence halls conveyed that when they invited students by text in addition to inviting them in person, they saw a notable increase in participation. Five of the seven participants stated that texted invites from friends were the most effective means to gain their participation.

The Effect of Cell Phones on Student-Faculty and -Staff Involvement

Participants struggled to answer the question "How do cell phones connect you with faculty or staff outside of class?" Two participants stated that they used voice calls and text messaging to contact a specific faculty member with whom they closely worked. However, they emphasized that the professor's casual personality, younger age, and personal invitation to contact him or her by text message made the professor a special case.

All seven participants sensed that, in general, faculty members are unfamiliar with cell phones and uncomfortable communicating with students through the device. They also perceived that cell phones are too casual and, therefore, inappropriate for contacting faculty. The main barrier was the perception that faculty and staff are respect-oriented. All seven participants believed that professionals preferred to be contacted by email rather than voice calls and, especially, texts. Even if professionals shared their cell phone numbers, participants still perceived they were likely unfamiliar with texting, uncomfortable being on close terms through cell phones with students, and might be offended if contacted by text.

Texting is one of the most frequent ways students communicate with others, including friends, family, significant others, and acquaintances, but not faculty or staff. For this reason, one male participant likened email to "texting for faculty." All seven participants stated they were much more comfortable contacting a professor or staff member by email than by cell phone even though they rarely did so.

The Lived Experience of College Student Cell Phone Users

One of the most surprising findings of the study was how psychologically attached college students are to cell phones and how frequently they communicated dependence. Without prompting, five of the seven participants mentioned *fauxcellarms* in their interview. All five participants excitedly shared that they had experienced phantom vibrations, phantom ringtones, and even the false sensation of their phone lighting up to indicate a call or text.

Describing his experience with fauxcellarms, a male participant explained, “You think that someone is calling [because] just having [a cell phone] with you all the time becomes a part of your life. It’s just like an extension of you, like an arm. And [human beings] weren’t really built for that.” Since cell phones are with students at all times, the same participant concluded, “[cell phones] can be negative because I think being solitary for a little while is good and can be a spiritual discipline. And not ever being able to have that I’d imagine would be pretty negative.”

The fear of missing out. Connected to fauxcellarms was one of the biggest fears and anxieties of college life: the fear of missing out. Participants feared that if they did not always have a cell phone near them they would miss out in some big way. That anxious sense revealed a sad fact: College students believe that apart from a cell phone they will not be contacted in person or by any other means. Reflecting that shared experience, a female participant added:

There have been times when I have left my cell phone in my room all day, and just the feeling of not having a cell phone now that I have had it so long is—I don’t want to say sickening—but [acting panicked] “I don’t have my cell phone!” I can’t tell if anyone is contacting me or if someone is calling me. What if I have to make a phone call? I’m very dependent on it even though I don’t use it all the time.

Similarly, a male participant added, “If the phone’s missing, something’s off balance. Sometimes my phone has more importance than my wallet.” Emphasizing the fear of being socially left out, another participant concluded, “I am anxious to know what’s going on, to remain connected. Because without my cell phone my personal feeling is [I am] not connected at all on a campus-wide basis.” Experiences with missing or broken cell phones validated this fear. A female participant lamented that people did not bother to contact her by any other means when her phone broke: “I looked at some of my old texts and I had missed some important things... Not having that communication put me outside [my social group].”

After losing her phone, a second female participant determined,

Because almost everyone else has that form of communication [a cell phone] becomes a necessity... If only 50% of the population had them, then not having one wouldn't really be that big a deal. But now that we have them—that instant communication—it's like if you don't have one people are like "What's wrong? How can we get a hold of you?"

Regardless why participants experienced fauxcellarms, past experiences with being socially left out prompted forms of anxiousness and fear.

Cell Phones: Positive, Negative or Mixed?

When asked how they would appraise cell phones overall, all seven participants said mostly positive. Not a single participant appraised cell phones negatively. Based on the frequency and number of cell phone complaints and amount of times participants criticized their peers' cell phone use, this universally positive impression was surprising. When asked why they believed cell phones were mostly positive in light of their complaints, all seven participants failed to rectify their positive opinions with their mostly negative descriptions. Perhaps the interview context allowed participants to share stories they would normally filter from conversation and maximized their opportunity. Whatever the reason is for the mostly negative stories and mostly positive overall impression of cell phones, these still reflect the lived experience for college students, while illustrating an opportunity for higher education professionals to help bridge this apparent gap.

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Discussion

The results of the study indicated that cell phones positively promote face-to-face out-of-class student involvement with other college students, increase students' participation in on-campus programs, but are unlikely to facilitate involvement with faculty and staff. Furthermore, the findings indicated that participants resented, blamed, and were dissatisfied with cell phones for the unsatisfactory quality of their relationships. Nevertheless, participants emphasized their perception of cell phones was mostly positive, even though they frequently described the devices' undesired and harmful effects, believing cell phones are necessary in order to stay socially connected and informed.

Face-to-Face Interaction

Congruent with Jin and Park (2010), the study confirmed that cell phone communication is a by-product of face-to-face relationships and not a replacement for them. The upside is that college students continue to engage face-to-face with

those they know. The downside is that when no familiar persons are present those same social motives can shut out those physically present. The premise that cell phones maintain existing relationships was further confirmed by students' frustrations. Participants had higher social expectations for their cell phone than what the device can realistically deliver. They believe cell phones improve and enhance relationships, but also are disenchanted by the negative effects which they experience daily.

Sense of Community

Research by Braguglia (2008), which linked cell phones users' sense of community to their constantly scanning their cell phones, was confirmed by participants' fear of missing out. Students' sense of belonging and involvement with peers is linked to success, satisfaction, and retention (Kuh & Love, 2000; Tinto, 1993). But cell phones hurt, not help, when students measure their belonging and worth based on the quantity and quality of cell phone interactions.

Participants emphasized the social benefits of cell phones and even stressed that utilitarian motives, such as information gathering, had mostly social ends. Jin (2010) and Wei and Lo (2006) found cell phones were used for social much more than utilitarian ends. But with smart phones commonplace, utilitarian motives like information gathering have greater social implications and minimize the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental motives. Essentially, with nearly every app having social network integration, everything college students can do on a cell phone will have, or be justified on, social ends.

Furthermore, participants saw smart phones as fashion statements and status symbols, for better or worse. Participants' experiences indicated the devices showcased their owners' personality, popularity, and taste (cf. Jin, 2010; Wei & Lo, 2006). And ironically, cell phones are both capable of socially connecting students as well as creating inequity among them. In practice, cell phones roughly represent college students' self-expressed identities.

Negative Cell Phone Experiences

Participants said cell phones produced anxiety, aligning with research by Baron (2008) and Simon (2007). The self-imposed need to immediately respond to others and fauxcellarm experiences indicated cell phone-related anxiety and potentially cell phone addiction. Baron (2008) found fauxcellarm experiences were similar to withdrawal symptoms. Integrating cell phones into programs can have the two-pronged effect of illustrating redemptive cell phone behavior (e.g., text-based live polling) and illustrate mindful habits that support a positive vision for cell phone use. Tech fasting, particularly, can improve the qualitative aspects of involvement, which were most lacking. Best of all, group fasts can illumine the

impact of cell phones while avoiding the fear of being socially left out that fasts otherwise promise.

Regardless of the kind of phone used, participants equated not having a cell phone with missing out and felt disconnected when separated from their phone. Stories of sadness, fear, frustration, and anxiety when separated from the device—though one expressed relief—confirmed the research of Stam and Stanton (2004), which indicated the average college student experiences sensations of high distress when separated from their device. These experiences bear serious implications. While cell phones may help students benefit from campus life, college students' mental, emotional, and social wellbeing are higher priority concerns than involvement. Far from entirely negative, cell phones have profoundly positive effects on student life. The challenge is that cell phones, especially smart phones, are a disruptive technology. New norms for relationships are quickly created and old norms complicated. Amidst this flux, opportunities for higher educators exist, namely, where relationship expectations and cell phones meet.

As long as the technology and the norms surrounding it are in flux, the college student cell phone experience will send mixed signals. Cell phones do not provide many benefits in terms of quality involvement. But involvement with peers and programs in terms of time and participation will generally profit as long as to be a college student is to own a cell phone. 

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Examining Mattering, Spiritual Mattering, and First-Year Retention at a Private, Religiously-Affiliated Institution of Higher Education

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this project was to explore how Schlossberg's (1989) theory of college student's mattering relates to college student retention in the context of a Christian institution of higher education. In addition, the authors created and tested a "spiritual mattering" measure based on Schlossberg's theory. Mattering is a self-perception that refers to how important we believe we are to others. Schlossberg (1989) inserted this concept into the realm of higher education when she examined mattering and adult students returning to college. The purpose of the study was accomplished through the following three research objectives: a) Determining whether "institutional" mattering predicts fall-to-fall semester persistence of first-year students at a religiously-affiliated campus; b) Constructing a *spiritual mattering* measure and assessing its psychometric properties; and c) Determining whether spiritual mattering predicts fall-to-fall semester persistence of first-year students at a Christian institution of higher education. The results of the study supported the hypothesis that higher scores for both spiritual mattering and university mattering were significantly related to higher retention rates at an institution of higher education.

With college student retention an issue at many institutions of higher education around the United States, researchers have comprehensively examined numerous facets of why students leave higher education in order to provide solutions to the metaphorical “retention puzzle” (Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990; Barefoot, 2004; Braxton, 2000; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007). Higher education institutions continue to implement research-informed strategies in order to improve retention on their campuses. However, many in the higher education community believe there is more to discover about this complex phenomenon (Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 2006). In addition, little research on retention has been conducted that examines retention facets in a Christian higher education setting. Therefore, continued research is necessary.

“Mattering,” the concept to be examined in the current study, is a psychological concept that merits greater attention in relation to student retention. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) were some of the first researchers to define mattering. They suggested that “mattering is a motive: the feeling that others depend on us, are interested in us, are concerned with our fate, or experience us as an ego-extension exercises a powerful influence on our actions” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 165). Schlossberg (1989) and other scholars (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Lynch, Schlossberg, & Chickering, 1989) closely linked mattering to greater student involvement and retention. These scholars argued that mattering facilitates persistence because it promotes a feeling of belonging and social integration into the campus environment, which is a key concept in Tinto’s model of student departure.

Several studies have looked broadly at mattering as it relates to the experience of college students; however, few studies have directly tested the relationship between institutional mattering and student retention. In addition, the author of the present study was unable to locate any studies examining the concept of mattering as it relates to student retention in a Christian higher education context.

Review of Related Literature

Schlossberg (1989) was one of the first researchers to examine mattering in a higher education context. In her seminal article, Schlossberg (1989) explored some of the key concepts of mattering and gave insight into the difference between marginality—when one feels pushed aside, unimportant, or non-central—and its polar opposite, mattering. She stated that the times people are most vulnerable to feeling marginalized are during transitions, when they are out of their comfort zones. The move to an institution of higher education is certainly a transition, and so it creates the threat of marginalization. Similarly, Cooper (1997) noted that non-traditional and African American students are susceptible to marginalization, most likely because they are usually in the minority. It is important to understand these risks and to help students avoid marginalization and increase their levels of mattering.

Although some interesting exploratory research has been conducted, much of the literature regarding mattering is primarily based in theory. In more recent years, researchers have been working to validate and standardize all the models and theories surrounding this construct, as well as to find better ways to measure it. France and Finney (2009) took the multiple dimensions defined by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) and attempted to clarify what model to use when measuring mattering. France and Finney, after testing one-, two-, three-, and four-factor models, landed on the four-factor model including attention, importance, ego-extension and dependence. In 2010, France and Finney furthered their work with mattering by adapting and validating the *University Mattering Scale* (UMS) to measure mattering specifically in university students. It is important to note that their study found evidence that the types of mattering are not interchangeable, so it is important to have a measure created specifically for mattering in universities if this topic is to be accurately explored.

Scholars interested in mattering as it pertains to universities continue to try to fill in other gaps in the research to understand better and measure this construct. Much of the preliminary data collected in this field has been limited by the populations which have been studied. Tovar, Simon, and Lee (2009), looking to expand the populations being examined, included a much more diverse college student population in their studies, surveying students attending a wide range of schools, from community college to master's level programs. Using this population, Tovar et al. (2009) created and validated a psychometrically sound instrument, the *College Mattering Inventory*. White and Nonnamaker (2008) had a similar idea: they examined mattering in doctoral students since most university mattering research is at the undergraduate level. During the study, they created the Communities of Influence model, focusing on belonging and mattering as they occur in various aspects of the student experience.

An obvious practical application of the many theories and findings regarding mattering is student retention in universities. The ability to measure mattering in students could assist higher education administrators in predicting, and possibly increasing, retention. Dixon and Robinson Kurpius (2008) studied students' success and graduation rates as related to the college stress, depression, self-esteem, and mattering levels of the students. Since college stress and depression are commonly connected to college dropout rates, it could be very helpful for retention efforts if there were a way to predict and even affect these variables. These researchers chose to examine mattering and self-esteem and found that the constructs were positively correlated and could predict effectively both depression and college stress, and thus, non-retention rates. Other studies pertaining to persistence and retention include Isaacson (2011) and Butcher (1997), both of whom tried different angles to get at the relationship between mattering

and persistence. While these studies were inconclusive, each study admitted to limitations and possible confounds that should be investigated. All in all, the many questions and uncertainties surrounding this topic highlight the need for further research.

One area that has hardly been researched in the study of mattering is how spirituality may influence this construct. The question is an important one, especially in a Christian higher education setting such as a Christian college or university where a student's faith may bring extra factors into the mattering construct. In a 2009 study, Seifert and Holman-Harmon discussed the importance of spirituality in the lives of college students, especially as it relates to their feelings of life-purpose and well-being. It is possible that mattering spiritually may also affect a student's likeliness to remain at a university. As "spiritual mattering" has not really been researched, a scale needs to be created and validated.

Research Objectives

The current study had three primary research objectives:

Objective 1: Determining whether "institutional" mattering predicts freshman to sophomore persistence of first-year students at a religiously-affiliated campus.

Objective 2: Constructing a *spiritual mattering* measure and assessing its psychometric properties.

Objective 3: Determining whether spiritual mattering predicts freshman to sophomore persistence of first-year students at a Christian institution of higher education.

Methods

Participants

The population selected for the study came from first-year students at Abilene Christian University, a selective, private, residential, master's-level university affiliated with the Churches of Christ located in Abilene, Texas. ACU is a member of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities and is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The initial survey to validate the new spiritual mattering scale was administered to 101 undergraduate students. As the initial survey was not related to retention, these students were of all undergraduate classifications. Additionally, demographics were not collected during the initial deployment.

For the subsequent main retention survey, the sample size was 545. This survey measured university mattering and spiritual mattering, and only first-year students were included. After data collection, the data was reviewed to assure that

students were eligible for the study. The data of 42 students was removed due to ineligibility or incomplete surveys, leaving a sample size of 503 students eligible for the survey.

Of these 503 students, 38% were male and 62% were female. Regarding ethnicity, 75% of the students were White, 11% were Hispanic or Latino/a, 9% were Black or African American, 2% were Native American or American Indian, 3% were Asian or Pacific Islander, and less than 1% were of another ethnicity. Regarding church affiliation, 40% of the students identified as Church of Christ, 17% as Baptist, 3% as Catholic, 28% as non-denominational, 8% as other, and 3% as without church affiliation. The mean age of participants was 18.8, with a standard deviation of 1.4.

Procedure

Development of *Spiritual Mattering Scale*. An item pool was created to form the *Spiritual Mattering Scale* (SMS), using Rosenberg and McCullough's (1981) three components of mattering—*attention*, *importance*, and *dependence*—as inspiration for the different items. An initial test deployment of the SMS item pool was conducted with a small sample of 101 undergraduate students in order to ascertain validity and reliability of the newly created instrument. The students were recruited by going to various undergraduate classes with the instructors' permission, at which point the survey and its purpose were thoroughly explained to all students. The students were made aware that participation in the study was completely optional, and they signed an informed consent before participating. The SMS item pool was analyzed with Cronbach's alpha and a factor analysis to remove poor items from the item pool. The final SMS items were then used in the main retention study.

University mattering and spiritual mattering in relation to retention. The main retention study survey included the *University Mattering Scale* (UMS), the *Spiritual Mattering Scale* (SMS), demographic questions, and a question asking for the students' ACU ID number for retention tracking purposes. It was administered to participants who were enrolled in a first-year level, required Bible course. The students were recruited by going to various first-year BIBL 102 classes with the instructors' permission, at which point the survey and its purpose were thoroughly explained to all students. The students were made aware that participation in the study was completely optional, and they signed an informed consent before participating.

After the final survey was administered, the university's Office of Institutional Research assisted in identifying those students who returned in the subsequent semester (persisters) and those who did not (non-persisters). This information was ascertained by tracking the students' ACU ID numbers to see which students remained at ACU. At that point, the students' data was coded into two groups—persisters and non-persisters—at which point all identifying information, namely the ACU ID numbers, was deleted to preserve student confidentiality. The new data from this deployment of the *Spiritual Mattering Scale* was analyzed with a follow-up factor analysis to further confirm the psychometrics of the scale. Then, the *University Mattering Scale* and the *Spiritual Mattering Scale* were correlated to discover if the two scales were similar yet not redundant. Finally, two independent samples t-tests were completed, one between student persistence/non-persistence and the UMS, and one between student persistence/non-persistence and the SMS.

Assessment of Institutional Mattering: The *University Mattering Scale*

The first instrument to be utilized was the *University Mattering Scale* (UMS). This scale is a version of Elliott, Kao, and Grant's (2004) general mattering index, adapted and validated by France and Finney (2010) for use with students in a university setting. It is a 24-item scale that represents three components of mattering (awareness, importance, and reliance) as defined by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981).

Assessment of Spiritual Mattering: The *Spiritual Mattering Scale*

To assess spiritual mattering, the *Spiritual Mattering Scale* (SMS) was constructed for the purposes of the current study. Items were drafted to sample the degree to which students felt that they mattered in the spiritual context of their faith-based educational experience. For each of the items of the SMS, students were asked to rate their perceived level of spiritual mattering. Although the initial scale contained nine items, listed in Table 1, the final scale was narrowed down to six, given in Table 2. Each item was rated on a 1 to 4 likert scale (*strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*) with items scored so that higher scores indicated greater level of perceived mattering. The psychometric properties of the SMS are discussed in the Results section. (Tables are on the following page.)

Tables

Table 1

Item Pool for the Creation of the SMS

Items

1. I feel like I make a spiritual difference on this campus.
2. Other students don't notice when I miss Chapel. (R)
3. Other students sometimes come to me with prayer requests.
4. My professors at ACU are not invested in my spiritual growth. (R)
5. Other students at ACU seek me out for discussions about faith issues.
6. I feel that, through campus opportunities and my local congregation, I am making a difference.
7. Spiritual leaders on campus and in the community know who I am.
8. I feel like God has been using me on this campus.
9. Much of the time, people of the ACU community are indifferent to my spiritual needs. (R)

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Note. (R) = reverse scored item

Table 2

Final SMS Items

Items

1. I feel like I make a spiritual difference on this campus.
2. Other students sometimes come to me with prayer requests.
3. Other students at ACU seek me out for discussions about faith issues.
4. I feel that, through campus opportunities and my local congregation, I am making a difference.
5. Spiritual leaders on campus and in the community know who I am.
6. I feel like God has been using me on this campus.

Results

The Creation and Psychometrics of the *Spiritual Mattering Scale*

Given that the *Spiritual Mattering Scale* (SMS) is a new measure and that others may wish to use it in future research, its psychometric properties were explored. First, to explore the dimensionality of the SMS items, an exploratory principal components analysis with Varimax rotation of the nine SMS items was conducted using the data from the initial test deployment. Based upon a scree test, a one-factor solution was determined to be the best fit for the items (eigenvalue = 3.12, % variance = 35%). Most of the SMS items displayed strong factor loadings. However, three items yielded weak or split factor loadings, so those items were eliminated and another analysis was performed with the remaining six items. Once again, a scree test revealed a one-factor solution to be the best fit (eigenvalue = 2.86, % variance = 48%). The final six-question scale was the SMS scale utilized in the large study.

When the final SMS was deployed within the context of the main retention study, a factor analysis was performed to confirm the scale's accuracy. The larger sample size produced even better results for the SMS, generating a one-factor solution with an eigenvalue of 3.68 and a percentage of variance of 62%. Moving from factor structure to reliability, the final SMS scale generated a Cronbach's alpha of .87. Finally, the mean of the SMS was 16.11, with a standard deviation of 3.38.

Spiritual Mattering Scale Relationship to University Mattering Scale

For the purposes of the present study, it was crucial to make sure that the SMS and the UMS were similar to the extent that they each measured an aspect of mattering, while different enough that they were not redundant. To ascertain that the SMS and the UMS were not redundant, a correlation was run between the two scales. The scales showed a significant correlation of .594, which suggests that the scales are similar, but not redundant.

Spiritual Mattering, University Mattering, and Persistence

Persistence. Abilene Christian University operates on a fall and spring semester academic calendar. To recap, participants were first-year students enrolled at ACU for the 2012-2013 academic year. Persistence was operationalized as returning to ACU for the subsequent fall 2013 term.

Of the 503 participants, 449 students were classified as “persisters.” Conversely, 54 “non-persisters” did not return to ACU after finishing a year at the school. Thus, in the language of retention, ACU retained 89.3% of the first-year participants from the spring 2013 to the fall 2013 semester.

Independent samples t-test analyses. Two independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare university and spiritual matting scores to persistence. As seen in Figure 1, there was a significant difference in means in university matting scores between persisters and non-persisters [$t(494) = 5.523, p < .001$]. In addition, as seen in Figure 2, there was a significant difference in means in spiritual matting scores between persisters and non-persisters [$t(491) = 4.077, p < .01$]. In other words, participants scoring higher on spiritual matting or university matting were more likely to persist at the university than students with lower scores.

Figures

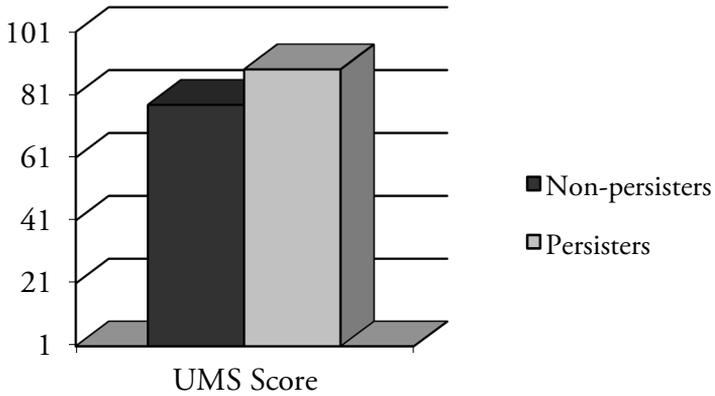


Figure 1. Spiritual matting scores in persisters and non-persisters.

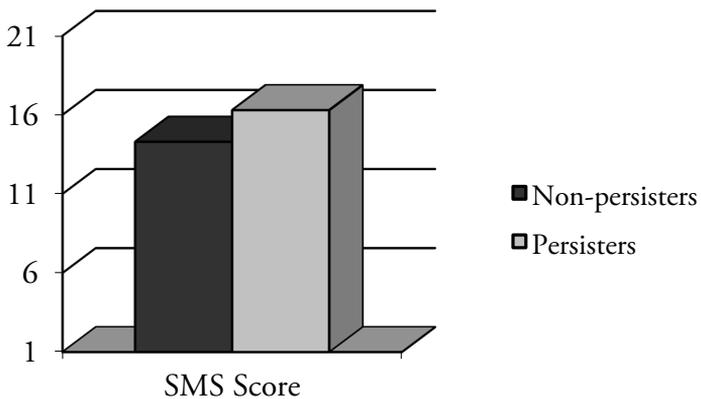


Figure 2. University matting scores in persisters and non-persisters.

Discussion

Summary of Results

As discussed previously, retention and drop-out rates are very important to higher education today. For many years, experts have attempted to figure out the many pieces of what has come to be known as the complicated “retention puzzle.” Although there is no one factor that explains everything, it is possible to find pieces to influence that will hopefully improve retention rates. One such piece might be the psychological construct of mattering, or “the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person” (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981, p. 164). The current study identified university mattering as a possible influence and proposed a new type of mattering called spiritual mattering as another factor that merits exploration.

The present study had three primary objectives. The first objective was to determine whether institutional mattering predicted freshman to sophomore persistence of first-year students at a religiously-affiliated campus. Based on the results of the study, there seemed to be a link between institutional mattering and freshman to sophomore persistence on this particular campus. The second objective of the study was to construct a *spiritual mattering* measure and assess its psychometric properties. This objective was also accomplished, and a factor analysis confirmed the scale’s accuracy. The third objective of the study was to determine whether spiritual mattering predicted freshman to sophomore persistence of first-year students at a Christian institution of higher education. Based on the analysis of the data collected for the study, there seemed to be a link between spiritual mattering and freshman to sophomore persistence on this particular campus.

Implications for Practice

Institutions of higher education are continually looking for sound research on college student retention. The current study not only moved the research forward on the concept of mattering as it relates to retention, but it also highlighted spiritual mattering as a concept that may be useful at faith-based institutions of higher education. For those who work in the field of higher education, including administration, faculty, and staff, the research presented here confirms the importance of relationship building, hospitality, and community. Administrators who seek to improve retention rates at their institutions, faith-based or not, may find this information helpful.

First-year and orientation programs may be interested in the relationship between mattering and retention and could try to integrate activities that increase university and spiritual mattering into orientation and first-year programming,

both in and out of the classroom. Student Life offices may also be affected. Administrators in this area should make sure that students integrate and feel like they matter to the university. Residence Life and other extra-curricular programming should reflect this philosophy. Not only should administrators focus on and support general mattering, but also spirituality and spiritual mattering. The findings of the present study could also be helpful to retention offices. As such offices study and work to manage and improve retention and dropout rates in the short and long term, a simple measure such as this may be very helpful.

Limitations

The current study was limited in several ways. The primary limitation was that it was performed on a very specific and limited group of people. For example, it included students from one university, with a very specific Christian affiliation—Church of Christ. The study’s sample was also heavily female and White, and although the gender and race breakdown in the study was an accurate representative of the gender and race breakdown at ACU, the full picture was limited.

Another possible limitation was that the selection process was imperfect and could have been more randomized. Perhaps there might be another way to improve selection; maybe the Office of Institutional Research could have sent out an email to all freshman students, although electronic deployment can cause a unique set of problems.

Directions for Future Research

While being able to see the relationship between university mattering or spiritual mattering and retention is useful, the current study only assessed the relationship after the university had lost students. A future study that could yield more insight would be to take the relationship and try to make it into a cleaner predictive model. This would be the next step in aiding higher education institutions in finding helpful ways to use these ideas. Hopefully, such a study could allow practitioners to make interventions before students leave.

It would also be fascinating to see how mattering, and especially spiritual mattering, affects retention at a secular institution. A study exploring whether spiritual mattering is relevant in secular institutions could yield some interesting results. Perhaps the effect is as strong at secular colleges and universities; conversely, perhaps spiritual mattering is still important to retention, but not to the same degree as at private, faith-based schools.

One final question that seems crucial to ask is: “What exactly promotes mattering and spiritual mattering?” It is clear that it is positive and helps retention, but what specific factors or interventions promote it? A study delving in to several different

possible interventions and factors with a pre- and post-tests would be very helpful for getting new ideas as to how to augment mattering levels.

Conclusion

Years of retention research have aimed to solve the retention puzzle, and although the research has yielded some interesting findings and interventions, drop-out rates remain fairly static. With the rising cost of education and the competition for students, it is crucial to make sure universities are satisfying students' needs. The face of higher education might be changing, and it is important for institutions to stay relevant and continue to offer the best products that keep students engaged and enrolled. Retention is vital to universities in order to maintain solid finances and a good reputation, and it is important to the financial well-being and future success of students.

One way to increase retention and to improve the experiences of students could be to try to increase students' levels of mattering, particularly university mattering and spiritual mattering. Ever since Schlossberg (1989) discussed the importance of mattering in relation to the college student experience, researchers have looked into and upheld the idea that mattering can improve higher education. However, the current research put quantitative, evidential support behind the idea and linked these two types of mattering directly to student retention. This might be a step in the right direction for higher education and is certainly an idea worth pursuing in future research and practice. 

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No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction

Marnie Ferree, 2010
Downers Grove, Illinois: MP Press

Reviewed by Sara Hall

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Sex Addicts on a Christian Campus?

I hear the words *sex addict* and I immediately think, “I don’t know any.” Sex addicts don’t hold jobs, go to church, live on my street, and attend Christian colleges. My students aren’t sex addicts. Yes, they talk about sex, they have sex, they are curious about sex, they are very interested in sex, but they aren’t sex addicts. However, after reading Marnie Ferree’s book, *No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction*, my eyes were opened in a different way to how much sex, its power, its distortions, its pervasiveness affects those I work with as a counselor on a Christian college campus. Ferree is married, a mother, a pastor’s daughter, and a recovering sex addict. With her experience and insights, I found much to think about concerning this subject—sexual addiction in Christian women.

Ferree addresses eight ways sexual addiction presents in women: 1. Relationship or Love Addict: When a woman goes from relationship to relationship either in rapid succession or with multiplicity, trying to fill the void within her. 2. Romance Addict: Women who are hooked/lured by the romance and intrigue of it all, but then lose interest once the chase is over. It’s more exciting to find someone new than to try to deal with a real, lasting relationship. 3. Fantasy Addict: This woman’s relationships exist primarily in her mind, creating magical men that do not really exist, providing an escape from her daily grind, boring life, or bad situation. 4. Pornography or Cybersex Addict: Many women in this

category develop intense online relationships that feel safer, and more often than not, lead to physical acting out also, so accessible, affordable, and anonymous. 5. Masturbation: Ferree talks about this as a way of escaping problems, avoiding true intimacy, soothing yourself, and of course, pornography is commonly used with this addiction. 6. Exhibitionism: Ferree challenges the reader to not just think in terms of strippers and prostitutes, but in sexual dressing, provocative body language, etc. These actions provide a certain high from the attention the women garner. 7. Addict who sells or trades sex: The author is not just referring to money exchanges. Sometimes a woman will give sex in exchange for favors, security, gifts, or because a man took her on a date. 8. Partnering with another addict: This category is a complicated dynamic that often switches between “the thrill, the chase, the closeness, the sense of power of the other person” and the co-addict who “influences another to win them over, manipulate them, or keep them in a relationship” (p. 67).

I retain a small caseload of clients at the university, about fifteen at a time. When I read this book, I could place a client or two in almost every category. Ironically enough, most were not coming to address sexual issues specifically, but other problems brought them my way. Student Life Professionals, think about the students God keeps at the forefront of your mind (or their actions put them in your path more often). Might they fit into one or more of these categories? If you think in terms of a continuum, I doubt you will have to look too far. Even though this book is addressed to female addicts, I found it described some of my male clients also. The author helped me think about the help I provide to male clients in a different way. In sessions, I was challenged to spend more time feeling the intense pain and abandonment feelings that often are a precursor to addiction. I was challenged not to soft pedal how difficult the road to recovery is. Also, Ferree stresses that successful recovery is multifaceted. This resonated immediately with my work in Student Life and Counseling at several different Christian colleges, as we often talk about building support networks and accountability. I started to concentrate on those aspects of counseling more thoroughly as well.

Like mentioned earlier, Ferree is a recovering addict. Because of this, I think she tends to come across with a “Do-It-This-Way-or-Else-It-Won’t-Work” attitude. Part of this seems forgivable given her years of recovery. Part of me balks at it, since all of you working with students know what works and is meaningful for one does not necessarily translate to working for another. Still, when I work with students, we often talk about having an entire toolkit of resources when we are trying to rid our lives of unwanted sins, and Ferree gives many solid ideas for recovery.

The author addresses several other issues intertwined closely with sexual addiction, but are also more common experiences. She spends a lot of time addressing family patterns, unspoken rules, and family roles/labels. She devotes an entire chapter to the idea of abandonment and trauma and includes a few helpful categorizing charts. An unexpected benefit for working with Christian students is how Ferree addresses issues surrounding being a pastor’s kid. Throughout the book, she talks about some of the burdens and issues

she faced because of this and the distorted spiritual messages that well-meaning Christians sent her, which are all too common. I always have a ministry kid on my caseload, so this gave me a deeper understanding of the history of these particular students.

Each chapter has a few discussion questions at the end to help an individual or a recovery group process from topic to topic. The final one-third of the book deals with the recovery process. Ferree includes many tools of recovery, reminders of the lengthy recovery process, and a chapter specifically for clinicians/husbands.

Unfortunately, the book is painfully void of any discussion of sexual identity, sexual confusion, or homosexuality. It is mentioned in passing, but not addressed or discussed to any degree. Student Development Professionals, I ask you: Does a week go by without talking to at least one student about homosexuality, same-sex attraction, gender identity, gender confusion, or something similar? If you want more information on this topic, look elsewhere.

Most of my students are professing Christians. When one of my supervisors told me about this book, I thought it might have an impact on one or two of my clients. Even after more than ten years working with Christian college students (and being a graduate of a Christian college myself), how naive and surprised I was to find it relating to so many! Get a copy for your library, let me know what you think. Or try a small group—let me know how it goes. 



Beyond Measure: Rescuing an Overscheduled, Overtested, Underestimated Generation

Vicki Abeles, 2015
New York, New York: Simon & Schuster

Reviewed by Ryan G. Hawkins

Recently, the definition of academic success has come under increasing levels of scrutiny. High grades, good test scores, and receiving an acceptance letter from an elite college are the marks of success in the classroom. All of this is done in the name of what Abeles labels the “application arms race.” Outside of the classroom, students are expected to be a part of countless co-curricular activities aimed at bolstering their resume and college application packets all the while doing hours of homework which keeps them up until midnight or later. According to Vicki Abeles, the never-ending quest for success is having a damaging effect on the mental health and overall well-being of youth in the United States. Abeles, a former attorney turned documentary filmmaker, did extensive and thorough research and put together numerous examples of the harm happening at the current level of pressure to succeed in her popular 2010 documentary, *Race to Nowhere*. In *Beyond Measure: Rescuing an Overscheduled, Overtested, Underestimated Generation*, Abeles does three things: she suggests that this narrow view of success is doing a great deal of harm to children, families, and communities; she contends that what causes the harm is unacceptable; and she suggests things that can be done by educators, parents, and communities to help our nation’s youth escape the dangers of “high stakes childhood” to have a healthy childhood.

The book is divided into eight chapters set between a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue provides the reader with an answer to the question of why the book was necessary as a follow up to *Race to Nowhere*. The first chapter provides a primer to the issues surrounding the emotional and physical harm Abeles sees in the current system of achievement on the present generation of children. In the second chapter, Abeles proposes that the overall way to help children is to give them more unstructured time outside of school and to use their time in school more effectively.

The next four chapters outline the remedies Abeles sees for restoring school-life balance to our nation's youth. Each of the chapters provides findings from research and first hand accounts to back up its claim. The chapters end with examples of what is being done to remedy the problem. The topics covered in chapters three through six include homework, testing, college admissions, and finally, better strategies for teaching and learning. The book finishes with a plea to be mindful of the over all well-being of children and not just be concerned with their academics. The final chapter offers suggestions on how to put the book's material into practice. The book closes with an epilogue in which Abeles speaks of a number of stories about students who have found joy in their academics. Abeles also describes where she wants her work to grow and be of help to even more students, parents, and schools.

Abeles uses a mixture of formal medical and psychological research and studies with stories and interviews to make her point that the current atmosphere of perfectionism and achievement is harmful to the nation's children. The weight and use of formal research and stories from her interviews and events is far from balanced. Chapters begin with a couple of pages filled with research studies that have been done, and then the bulk of the chapter is filled with stories about why the topic of the chapter is a problem and what has and can be done to help students, families, or schools with the issue. There are times in the book when it even seems that Abeles disregards the evidence gathered from research in favor of making her point from the stories she has collected. For example, early in the book Abeles addresses the issue that academic stress is an issue for all children, not just privileged kids. She begins by summarizing the results of a study which found that kids from upper middle class families are more likely to show signs of anxiety and other mental health concerns due to stress. Abeles then goes on to sum up several interviews she conducted that seem to refute the findings of the research study in a tone that seems to point to a belief that this anecdotal evidence outweighs psychological research. All that to say, it is important to note that this book is a persuasive piece, written by a documentarian trying to make a point and not a researcher trying not to bring her bias to bear in her writing.

The greatest strength of the book is that while Abeles sees the issue of the “application arms race” as a universal problem in American schools, she does not provide universal suggestions on how to end the issues behind the problem that will work everywhere. The suggestions Abeles gives, particularly in chapter eight, are general enough that educators can take the principles in the book and contextualize if and how they are applicable in specific contexts. This is an especially important point for higher education professionals to take away from this book, because most of the practical suggestions are aimed at the K-12 educator or parents and not the college educator or administrator.

While the book does not deal with college student development issues directly and is not written through the lens of the Christian faith, Christian student development professionals could still benefit a great deal from reading it. Many of the students that enter our institutions, residence halls, and student programs have come out of an atmosphere that emphasized grades and getting into the best of the next stage of life as the definition of success. *Beyond Measure* can give student development professionals a better understanding of that way of thinking and the dangers it may have on the well-being of our students. Furthermore, it is a much needed reminder that many of our students are coming to our campuses putting their primary identity in places other than in Christ and may be in need of a certain degree of spiritual counsel on identity and motivation. All in all, the book is not aimed at the student development educator, but there is a lot we can learn about the mindset of students from it, especially those who work regularly with freshmen. 

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Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for Students
(Second edition)

M. Levy Shankman, S. J. Allen, & P. Haber-Curran, 2015
San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass

Reviewed by Morgan K. Morris

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Numerous books exist regarding emotional intelligence and even more concerning leadership. However, few books address both emotional intelligence *and* leadership. Fortunately, Marcy Levy Shankman, Scott J. Allen, and Paige Haber-Curran combine these topics exceptionally in *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for Students*. These scholars argue that research in emotional intelligence and leadership should be synthesized, as emotional intelligence is critical in leadership.

This text defines emotionally intelligent leadership (EIL) as “an intentional focus on three facets: consciousness of self, consciousness of others, and consciousness of context” (p. 9). These three elements outline the text and frame the authors’ argument of the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership. I found the book unique, significant, and worth reading, as it provides insights and tools to equip students—and those working with students—to embrace emotionally intelligent leadership in their lives and work.

Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for Students begins with an introduction explaining the background and format of the book. Following the introduction, the text divides into the three facets of emotionally intelligent leadership. The chapters within each of the facet sections describe capacities of that specific consciousness as related to emotionally intelligent leadership. For example, “Emotional Self-

Perception” is a chapter within the Consciousness of Self section of the text. Each chapter not only includes content but also additional resources to help readers better understand the connection between emotional intelligence and leadership.

The first facet of emotionally intelligent leadership and the focus of the first section of the text is consciousness of self. Shankman, Allen, and Haber-Curran argue that “[d]emonstrating emotionally intelligent leadership means being aware of yourself in a number of ways, especially being deeply in tune with your emotions, values, strengths, limitations, and worldview” (p. 21). Throughout this section, readers are challenged to analyze and better understand how their leadership is affected by their perceptions, self-esteem, attitudes, achievements, and other personal influences.

The second facet of emotionally intelligent leadership, consciousness of others, is addressed next in the text. To introduce this facet, the authors remind readers: “By nature, leadership is interpersonal” (p. 111). Therefore, it is crucial to understand others in order for self to lead well. Furthermore, the authors believe that “[b]y being conscious of other people’s abilities, emotions, and perceptions, you can better inspire, connect with, work with, and influence others” (p. 111). This section encourages readers to assess the value of inspiring, coaching, working with others, and other relational factors with regard to leadership.

The third and final facet of emotionally intelligent leadership addressed in the text is consciousness of context. Consciousness of context refers to “paying attention to how environmental factors and internal group dynamics affect the process of leadership” (p. 209). This section focuses on the importance of setting and situation. Within this facet, setting “refers to the environment and structure of the group or organization” (p. 209), and situation “includes the many different forces of a particular time and place” (p. 209). Utilizing these definitions, the facet analyzes how setting and situation create context and influence leadership.

Together, these facets draw clear connections between emotional intelligence and leadership. Such connections are furthered through the authors’ incorporation of resources including a variety of references, “student voices,” and reflection questions. Each chapter includes its own list of references citing resources regarding both emotional intelligence and leadership. Synthesizing these resources validates the claimed connection between emotional intelligence and leadership.

“Student voices” incorporates student insights regarding the topic of each chapter. This portion includes quotes directly from students relating their own thoughts and experiences. These quotes often reveal students’ natural exposure to the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership. Most students have not received training in emotionally intelligent leadership, and yet many reference these concepts as a part of their experience.

The authors end each chapter with a set of reflection questions. Open space is even provided after each question to allow readers to engage and write personal responses. The questions help students and professionals connect their own experiences to the text. Moreover, the questions provide an opportunity for readers to begin drawing their own ties between emotional intelligence and leadership.

The material covered in the book, paired with these resources, creates an excellent argument for the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership. Shankman, Allen, and Haber-Curran not only utilized their own insights but also incorporated the experiences of hundreds of students, researchers, and scholars in interviews, quotes, and references throughout the text to make their case. The broad reach of resources included in the research establishes the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership with significance and merit that cannot be ignored.

The concept of emotionally intelligent leadership is certainly worth discussing, and it is crucial for Christians to begin learning about this topic. Although *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for Students* and the argument it makes are not specifically Christian, they coincide well with a Christian worldview. Christians view mankind as whole beings comprised of physical, mental, spiritual, and *emotional* elements. It is crucial for us to analyze these elements and how they affect other aspects of our lives, such as our leadership.

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Furthermore, as Christians in higher education, we view students as whole beings in the process of holistic development. We should always be searching for new means to invest in and develop students. In many ways, we probably already invest in students with regard to leadership and maybe even emotional intelligence. However, we now have a wonderful tool to help students learn how these concepts are connected.

With this outstanding resource supporting the connection between emotional intelligence and leadership, we should be encouraged to embrace and practice emotionally intelligent leadership. *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership: A Guide for Students* can be utilized individually or in groups, with students or with colleagues. In the concluding chapter on developing emotionally intelligent leadership, Shankman, Allen, and Haber-Curran remind readers that we will never be finished with this work. Students and professionals alike are constantly growing and learning; may we now begin to grow and learn in our pursuit of emotionally intelligent leadership. 

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The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students about Vocation

Tim Clydesdale, 2015
Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press

Reviewed by Aaron Morrison

Dr. Tim Clydesdale, in *The Purposeful Graduate*, addresses the recent reports of college students “academically adrift” and “lost in transition” (p. xv). For higher education to help these students, Clydesdale offers a possible solution: purpose-exploration programming, as concluded from his thorough evaluation of the Lilly Endowment’s Initiative for the Theological Exploration of Vocation.

Clydesdale has three goals in mind for his book: (1) to “evaluate” the programs funded by the Lilly Foundation’s initiative, (2) to render “sociological analysis” of why certain “programs worked when and where they did,” and (3) to give a “recommendation” to create institutional “space” for purpose exploration programs (p. 23). I believe Clydesdale largely succeeds in meeting his goals, making this an important contribution to ongoing discussions of spirituality and higher education.

The Purposeful Graduate appeals most to those familiar with social science research and who care about the students on their campuses. In particular, I think president’s cabinet-level administrators would value this book in preparation for curriculum design discussions, and mid-level administrators would appreciate it in creating co-curricular programming. Remarkably, Clydesdale keeps this volume accessible to non-religious audiences, although it might resonate more easily with Christian audiences.

Clydesdale separates *The Purposeful Graduate* along seven chapters. The first three chapters feature a narrative tone, marked by stories and analysis of how purpose-exploration programs successfully impacted campuses and individual lives. Chapters 4 and 5 contain more pronounced social science language. Here, Clydesdale presents the central evidence from his evaluation with many individual quotes and charts. Lastly, in Chapters 6 and 7, he writes his recommendations to institutions on making purpose-exploration programs happen and the lessons they teach.

Clydesdale holds high hopes for purpose-exploration programs. I empathize, and I also notice some weaker points. My concern starts with Clydesdale's typologies of faculty and student respondents in Chapters 4-5. Creating a typology risks the convenient appearance of evidential fit for the author's conclusions. To his credit, Clydesdale realizes the limits of creating a new typology: "this is not the first, nor will it be the last, typology of American college students" (p. 87). Clydesdale's use of new typologies does not diminish his analysis significantly, but it represents a missed opportunity to test other well-regarded typologies by other scholars.

The many individual student testimonies convince me: Purpose-exploration programming deeply affected *some* students. However, this volume does not fully answer *which* students and *what ratio* of each student type purpose-exploration programming affected. To borrow from Clydesdale's typology, it makes sense that "Future Intelligencia, Activist Reformers, Idealists, and Utilitarians" (p. 87) gain a lot from participating in purpose-exploration programs. Yet, only attracting a couple types of students among many cannot effectively argue for \$2.5 million worth of programming (p. 241).

Clydesdale wisely acknowledges this problem of self-selection in Appendix 2 (p. 241). *The Purposeful Graduate* does not claim purpose-exploration programs can "convert generic members of a campus population into purposefully grounded idealists." Rather, it merely shows the "positive effect" such programs can have "on students, educators, and campuses in general." "Self-selection," by Clydesdale's reckoning, does not "undermine the value of a program." He points to the participants' self-reports with comparisons of participants and non-participants, "both of which this evaluation employed" as evidence.

Another critique of note occurs on pp. 96-97. Clydesdale argues purpose-exploration programming could systematically improve graduation rates. He tries to compare participant institutions' six year graduation rates with those of randomly sampled "similar" institutions. Clydesdale himself says this was a "crude experiment." He cites "new programs" (rather than their content) could have made students "feel more appreciated and more educationally productive." The systematic improvement of graduation rates due to purpose-exploration programming remains unclear, but Clydesdale does prove such programming at least improved graduation rates among some students.

Clydesdale believes this volume adds to the literature on the “value of engaging spirituality on campus” in two ways:

- (1) [by] identifying theologically embedded exploration of purpose and vocation that is especially generative among campus populations,
- and (2) describing the broad impact that occurs when a critical mass of students and educators coalesces into a pro-exploration, self-sustaining community. (p. 214)

The Purposeful Graduate demonstrates what happens when students connect discussions of life’s ultimate questions with the ordering of their everyday habits and pursuits. The initial moves of Chickering, Kuh, Astin, Nash, and Palmer correlated spiritual development with positive student outcomes like civic engagement and academic scores (p. 214). Now, scholars and practitioners possess more evidence of how discussions of spirituality, framed through the topic of vocation, can change the cultural fabric of an institution.

As an administrator, I found several sections particularly instructive. In Chapter 6, the section on “strategic blunders” (pp. 176-188) contains leadership lessons I will reflect on for a while. Clydesdale even has a useful chart of all the blunders he identified. Another useful section sees Clydesdale delivering a much welcomed critique of how social science research misuses the term “spirituality.” He comments, “Most of [the] literature sprinkles this term like salt on French Fries” (p. 216). Lastly, I appreciated the appendix on programmatic tools used by these institutions (p. 290), which provides a great reference for administrators to begin brainstorming.

I commend all the work the author and his team undertook in putting together *The Purposeful Graduate*. The individual success stories helped me remember why I love to see students become virtuous citizens. I predict faculty and administrators will pour over the evidence in this volume for some time, especially regarding how to mine the liberal arts to help emerging adults transition into full adulthood. In a world anxious over which paths to choose, Clydesdale reminds us to pause amidst the noise of life and reflect why we are here. 

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Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for the Innovation Era

Tony Wagner and Ted Dintersmith, 2015
New York, New York: Scribner

Reviewed by Chris Riley, J.D.

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According to the authors of *Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for the Innovation Era*, America as we know it is on the verge of collapse, based not on threats from ISIS, global warming, or political polarization, but our continued reliance on an outdated education model. Using equal parts inspiration and drama (there is an accompanying documentary by the same name as the book), this primer on entrepreneurial education provides many good ideas of what could be along with a handful of solutions to achieve the desired results. While fewer overgeneralizations and more practical guidance would be ideal, the work provides interesting insights into a system that often comes up short in holistically developing students for success in the modern era.

The authors begin by outlining early educational systems that reserved the study of philosophy and ideas for the aristocracy, while the majority of citizens worked in a trade or apprenticeship program. In the late 1800s, that changed when Charles Eliot of Harvard and the Committee of Ten developed a system to educate large numbers of immigrants and refugees from farms for basic citizenship and for jobs in a growing industrial economy. The new system taught students to perform repeated tasks rapidly without errors or creative variation. As time passed, uniform assessments were developed to measure student (and teacher) success in terms of memorizing educational content.

According to the authors, little has changed since the adoption of that educational system, despite the shift of technological tectonic plates that forever altered the landscape of the world's economy. In short, they contend that our educational system continues to produce students ready for the assembly line and not the Genius Bar. While the authors acknowledge the necessity of students in grades K-6 grade to learn the basic core concepts of reading and writing, math, science, and history, they allege the educational-industrial complex including standardize testing, lectures, advance placement courses, lack of effective teacher training, and college prep make grades 7-12 a series of hoops that students have to jump through to earn an otherwise worthless credential.

As an alternative, *Most Likely to Succeed* promotes a reformed system that inspires students with real world problems and assesses skills learned rather than information memorized. The authors point to the following essential skills that an effective modern-day educational system should foster: learning how to learn; communicating effectively and productively with others; creative problem-solving; managing failure; effecting change in organizations and society; making sound decisions; managing projects and achieving goals; and building perseverance and determination. But above all, the authors conclude that “the single most important lesson we can impart to our youth is that they can, through their passions and talents, make the world a better place, in a way they define” (p. 143).

Turning to colleges, the authors contend that a degree as currently constituted is an overvalued relic that does not live up to what it promises. In so doing, they rely on a mix of questionable data related to the lack of proven learning; overgeneralizations about faculty preoccupied exclusively by tenure and abstract research; and misconstructions of the academic factors considered by national college rankings. Still, they do provide helpful insights regarding the growing emotional cost of college and need for colleges to help prepare students for careers, which both should be considered by leaders in Christian higher education.

The authors point to the growing number of students who are depressed, anxious, unable to solve their own problems or recover from minor setbacks as evidence of the emotional toll of the current elite educational system. As a solution, they indirectly point to entrepreneurial efforts that require students to fail early, fail often until their innovations succeed (as the student would define it). This seems somewhat contrary to the theories in William Deresiewicz's book, *Excellent Sheep*, which argues that education should not only “teach kids to think” but assist them in building their souls in addition to their resumes.

This should resonate with Christian student affairs professionals who recognize that students' emotional turmoil cannot be solved by more success (even as they define it). This is especially true when they do not know how to find peace

and fulfillment in the absence of new hoops through which to jump. Helping students understand not only how or what they are doing, but why they are doing it remains essential in Christian higher education.

With regard to helping students prepare effectively for careers, *Most Likely to Succeed* points not to specific career placement courses but to liberal arts as a whole, which entrepreneurial-minded employers recognize as increasingly valued over content expertise. Moreover, recent research by Gallup, referenced by the authors, points to six undergraduate practices that support not only deep learning but career satisfaction:

at least one professor who made the student excited about learning; professors who cared about the student as a person; a mentor who encouraged the student to pursue her goals and dreams; a project that took a student one semester or more to complete; an internship or job that allowed the student to apply what she was learning in the classroom; and the student was extremely active in extracurricular activities and organizations. Gallup, Inc. (2014). *Great jobs great lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index report*. Washington, D.C.

These practices reflect many of the entrepreneurial purposes of a 21st-Century education model and should guide both curricular and co-curricular endeavors.

The book concludes with a single chapter related to practical solutions focusing mainly on examples in the K-12 context. With regard to the vision to transform colleges, the authors provide a list of innovations that many universities are considering or have implemented including reduced focus on standardized testing in admissions, competency-based projects and offerings, interdisciplinary or capstone courses, internships, accelerative learning programs, and even hacking higher education with a series of six-month internships.

I recommend this book because it is important to consider and understand how both our universities as a whole and our work as student affairs professionals have been and will be impacted by the changes of the innovation era. Moreover, it is obvious that our educational systems face big challenges that can only be met with big solutions. While those may not all be included here, it sets the stage for professionals to appreciate and undertake the work before us. 

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Boys Adrift: The Five Factors Driving the Growing Epidemic of Unmotivated Boys and Underachieving Young Men

Leonard Sax, M.D., Ph.D., 2007
New York, New York: Perseus Book Group

Reviewed by Jenni Williams

While conducting a presentation to parents, Dr. Leonard Sax was asked a series of questions by parents with concerns about the development of their sons. The problems ranged from lack of motivation to acting out at school and home. The discussion sparked interest for further research and led Dr. Sax to identify chemical, cultural, and environmental factors which may be negatively impacting the development of young men. In his book, he identifies five factors that may be contributing to a lack of motivation and drive among young men. These factors are changes in education, video games, ADHD medication, environmental toxins, and the loss of positive role models.

Sax devotes a chapter exploring each of these factors, including personal research, clinical studies, and testimonials of those affected. He presents findings from his experience as a medical doctor and psychologist. Additionally, he has conducted extensive research related to gender issues and the science of sex differences. While his findings are not prescriptive, they do illuminate an area of concern for both professionals and parents.

First, he identifies the ways that education has changed. Students are expected to enter into rigorous study at a younger age, and most five-year-old boys are not prepared for these high expectations. In many cases, these demands set them up for failure and cause them to disconnect from the learning experience (pp. 19-21). The second factor identified

by Sax is video games. He identifies first-person shooter and violent video games as specific problems. In these environments, boys can control their world and experience dominance that they may not experience in the real world. This leads to a detachment from reality and desire to escape into fantasy. The third factor is ADHD medication. Sax states that there is a growing number of students who have been prescribed stimulant drugs to treat ADHD, when they may not actually have the disorder. He draws a correlation between the dependence upon stimulant medications and a lack of motivation and drive (pp. 89-91). The fourth factor is environmental toxins. He presents research on chemicals in plastic that are polluting our drinking water and our bodies. There is concern related to consumption of these chemicals during pregnancy and their effect on cognitive and sex development of babies in utero. Finally, he recognizes that there is a disconnect between males and their sons. In cultures that have endured for hundreds of years, there is a distinct process where the older males train the young men how to be “men:” how to treat a woman, how to behave, how to provide, and so on. In these rituals of “passing the torch,” young men have clear expectations set before them. In the American culture, there is no such process.

In recent years, kindergarten has evolved into an “academic kindergarten.” The changes require that kindergartners perform on the academic level of what was previously first grade. Children are expected to enter kindergarten with a list of competencies, prepared to tackle reading and math. The days of finger painting and naptime are over. Sax points out that most five-year-old girls are prepared to engage in this environment, while most five-year-old boys are not. He references a study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), which shows that brain development in young girls is “roughly two years ahead” of brain development in boys (p. 17). Therefore, boys are more likely to be frustrated by the academic demands of the today’s kindergarten curriculum, which may cause them to dismiss school altogether.

The author highlights a variety of teaching and learning environments throughout the book that have been successful in meeting the educational needs of young boys. Among these are competitive learning environments (pp. 42-48), *Waldkindergarten* or “forest kindergarten” (p. 189), and single-sex classrooms/schools (pp. 212-215). Each of these environments offer benefits for learning, however, they may not be conducive to the needs of every child.

Sax spends significant time addressing the implications of chemicals on the development of boys. First, he explores the rise in children diagnosed with ADHD and the subsequent increase in prescriptions for stimulant medications, such as Ritalin, Adderall, Concerta, among others. He references a study conducted by Harvard on juvenile laboratory animals, which shows that these medications cause damage to a part of the brain called the *nucleus accumbens*.

This is the portion of the brain that “is responsible for translating motivation into action” (p. 90). The study reported that the animals look fine, however they were lazy and unmotivated to do any work. The second chemical factor is related to phthalates found in plastics. These can be found in plastic bottles, pacifiers, and baby bottles. As babies, even in utero, come into contact with phthalates, they experience damage to their developing brains. Sax recommends that parents remove plastics that contain phthalates from their households.

Sax also provides insight into a frightening trend, in which young men are more comfortable with the virtual worlds of their Xbox console and are more likely to seek sexual satisfaction through pornography instead of engaging in a meaningful relationship with a living, breathing woman. Boys and young men experience a level of control in these virtual worlds that they may not experience in the real world, which places them on a dangerous trajectory as they learn from these fantasy worlds how to interact with others and women.

While Sax is not writing from a Christian viewpoint, I believe that his book has application for those in Christian higher education. It is troubling to read about the emotional disconnect boys are experiencing, as they become disillusioned with learning and are medicated simply to meet the demands of the classroom. In my work with college students, I have witnessed exceptionally bright young men begin their freshman year with excitement only to drop out after their second semester because they have no motivation simply to attend class. Based on Sax’s work, this could be symptomatic of the disconnect with learning and the need to escape into a fantasy environment where there is “will to power” (pp. 56-58).

As Christians student affairs professionals, we should be enthusiastic proponents for equipping young men to enter manhood and for preparing them with the support they will need to fill this role. This should stem from our interaction with students in both the curricular and co-curricular environments. The awareness of the challenges facing these young men better equips those in student affairs to intervene and support the success of these students. 

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Publications Policy

Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development

All articles should be consistent with the Doctrinal Statement, Article III of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Association for Christians in Student Development.

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3. Research, theoretical, or applied articles dealing with the integration of faith and learning within the field of Christian Student Development or within the broader field of Christian Higher Education as a whole.
4. Reviews of articles in other journals relevant to Christian Student Development.
5. Reviews of books relevant to Christian Student Development practice.
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2. Follow the guidelines on format, style, and submission procedure provided in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th edition).
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 - 7-10 pages for applied research articles
 - 3-4 pages for article reviews
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5. Include an abstract of no more than 150 words on a separate document page.
6. Include the current *vita* information for each author: address, title, degree(s) and institutions where earned, and specializations.
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