# TRANSITION JOURNEYS IN EMERGING ADULTHOOD AS INTERVARSITY STUDENTS SEEK TO CONNECT WITH FAITH COMMUNITIES AFTER GRADUATION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY WITH EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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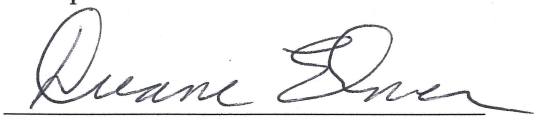

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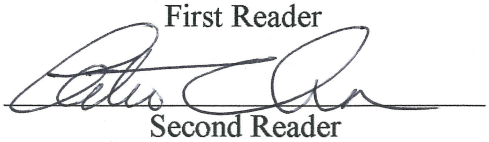

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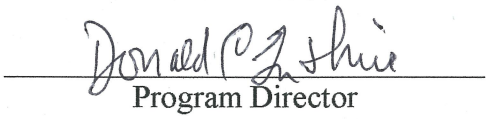

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the transition process as alumni of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship sought to find their place in faith communities after they graduated from university. Interview data revealed the process of finding a faith community was often intricately connected with each person's identity formation process. If the desired qualities were not found in faith communities, a selection process ensued where each graduate determined which unique set of qualities would not be compromised. These qualities were often indicative of each person determining what he or she would stand for in the world. Data reveal they were looking for an identity fit and companionship so they might keep growing. Numerous findings emerged which have educational and sociological implications for future graduates, leaders of faith communities, and other stakeholders who care about their transition process. The research was conducted in the Chicago area but was designed so the study might be duplicated in other cities and with other populations of twenty-somethings.

to InterVarsity students and alumni

your hearts and lives inspire me

in my own journey

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# CHAPTER 1

# RESEARCH CONCERN

"The timing and meaning of coming of age- that is, reaching full adult status- is different today than it was 50 or 100 years ago, different in fact than it has ever been" (Arnett 2006a, 4). In the past adolescence was seen as the time in the human life cycle where there was freedom for exploration before taking on adult commitments (Erikson 1959; 1997). However, because of globalization and economic changes, there is now a longer period of exploration before adult commitments are made (Arnett 2002, 781). *Emerging adulthood* is the phrase most commonly used to reference this period in life, although other terminology is used in the literature as well. The phrase was developed because it seemed to best capture "the way people in their late teens and early 20s describe themselves, developmentally" (Arnett 2006a, 11).

## *Statement of Research Concern*

"Important aspects of identity formation, one of the pillars of human development, take place during the transition to adulthood" (Côté 2006, 85). In the course of this elongated season, because of globalization there is an ever growing range of choices available to emerging adults. Society offers a virtual smorgasbord of identity options from which to choose (Josselson 1994, 15-16). As a result of these societal

changes, “the challenges of creating a viable identity are perhaps greater than they have been in the past” (Arnett 2002, 781). The identity formation process is “based less on prescribed social roles and more on individual choices, on decisions that each person makes about what values to embrace and what paths to pursue ” (Arnett 2002, 781).

In the past a community of elders or extended families might facilitate the identity formation process, leading and guiding younger members of their community into prescribed roles. However, society is changing. There is now less support “in making developmental transitions” and “individuals are left largely to their own internal resources more so than in the past” (Côté 1996, 423). Ethnic identity formation is even more complex, especially for many members of society who come from immigrant or multi-ethnic families (Phinney 2010, 36; Rotherman-Borus et al. 1994, 62-83). “Even if a secure identity has been achieved during adolescence, it is likely to be reexamined as a result of changing contexts” when these individuals move to different settings for educational and professional pursuits (Phinney 2006, 121).

There is a desire on the part of educators to discover if there are ways to make the journey easier. Most believe emerging adults need to approach this time purposefully for decisions and actions taken during this season of life set trajectories for years to come. It is argued that an agentic rather than a passive response is need for personal development (Côté 2006, 92). “Some emerging adults appear well prepared to make their way into the roles and responsibilities of adulthood, bolstered with more stable, coherent, and commitment-based identities, whereas others may require external help (e.g., intervention) to transition into adult roles and responsibilities” (Schwartz et al.

2005, 224). Finding a community of belonging that encourages agentic development can be one of the most difficult tasks emerging adults face (Côté 2006, 99). However, even if such a community is found, educational and social institutions are often poorly linked (Côté 1996, 425), thereby hindering development when transitions occur (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Religion can be a principle source of identity strength (Erikson 1968, 31; Josselson 1996, 235-236) and longitudinal research has been conducted to understand the beliefs and faith journeys of emerging adults (Smith et al. 2011; Smith and Snell 2009; Smith and Denton 2005). However, researchers found many emerging adults living lives of materialism, intoxication, sexual exploitation and self-gratification (Smith et al. 2011, 6-10). Few emerging adults reflected much interest in social or justice issues in the "larger world around them" (Smith et al. 2011, 10). When it came to participating in faith communities, most did not necessarily feel "uncomfortable in religious services" but the prevailing sentiment was they didn't feel a sense of belonging in them either (Smith and Snell 2009, 152).

Research indicates that the developmental period of emerging adulthood seems to be "the nadir of religious participation in American society" (Arnett 2004, 177), "a time when many form religious beliefs which differ from their parents and become skeptical of religious institutions" (Arnett 2004, 165-187). A common conception is that participation in faith communities will automatically happen once emerging adults settle down, marry and have children. However, many studies indicate

that such an assumption is not a foregone conclusion (Kinnaman and Lyons 2007, 23; Smith et al. 2011, 12).

A prominent sociology of religion professor from Princeton, Robert Wuthnow, argues that faith communities provide ample resources for the development of children, teens, married couples and older adults, but *"almost nothing"* to help emerging adults weather this formative time of life (Wuthnow 2007, 12). He believes faith communities "*could* be a valuable source of support" for emerging adults, but that potential is rarely realized (Wuthnow 2007, 13). Because this new stage of life is extending the period before adult commitments are made, Wuthnow argues even if emerging adults return to faith communities after they marry and have children, "it is now more likely that a teenager may drop out of his or her congregation after confirmation at age thirteen and not feel the same urgency about participating again until he or she is a parent at age thirty-five" (Wuthnow 2007, 12). Yet, research shows engagement with faith communities can be extremely beneficial for emerging adults, especially as they seek to overcome addictive or unhealthy behaviors and seek to form healthier life patterns (Masten et al. 2006, 179).

Although research indicates the trend in emerging adulthood has been "away from religious beliefs and religious participation" in rare instances it goes "in the other direction, toward greater faith" (Arnett 2004, 176). In these instances emerging adults desire a vibrant and engaged faith, one that equips them to make a difference in the world. However, if emerging adults take an agentic approach to their faith development and desire to tackle societal ills such as racial injustice or poverty, when these emerging

adults seek to interact with evangelical churches in the Unites States many find racialized congregations where ethnic diversity is the exception rather than the norm (Emerson and Smith 2000). In many white evangelical churches members "share the Protestant work ethic, support laissez-faire economics, and sometimes fail to evaluate whether the social system is consistent with their Christianity" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 22). In these congregations more often than not when it comes to pressing social issues regarding race or poverty members tend to avoid "rocking the boat" and seek to live within prevailing cultural norms (Emerson and Smith 2000, 22).

InterVarsity students are some of the "rare cases" mentioned by researchers who are examining trends in emerging adulthood. Two authors write:

> While most respondents held very modest and sometimes no expectations about positive social and political changes that they could help to bring about, a small minority voiced a dissenting opinion. Some emerging adults believe that in fact they "can make a difference." They see opportunities for having an impact on society for the better and believe they are obliged to take on those challenges. They seek to enhance economic and educational opportunity, grassroots urban renewal, racial justice, the end of human trafficking, and other causes through creative communication, community organizing, and social movement activism. They view anything less as selfish indifference that is morally intolerable. (Smith and Snell 2009, 73)

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is deeply concerned about these types of issues, including racial reconciliation (Emerson and Smith 2000, 65). It is an extremely diverse ministry. Statistics from the 2011-2012 school year indicate "of the 35,065 active InterVarsity students … 36% identify themselves as ethnic minorities" (InterVarsity 2013). The organization's vision is "to see students and faculty transformed, campuses renewed, and world changers developed" (InterVarsity 2013). Every three years

InterVarsity sponsors a large mission conference called Urbana. In addition to providing training, the gathering acts as an opportunity to connect students to a myriad of diverse mission opportunities in the United States and around the globe. At the most recent conference, "representatives from over 250 mission organizations, graduate schools, seminaries, and training programs" set up displays to engage students in dialogue about future opportunities (InterVarsity 2012, 62).

InterVarsity's core values are focused in three broad categories: context, formation and expression. With regards to context, they seek to be a redeeming influence among the people, ideas and structures found at universities. They seek formation by encountering the living God through Scripture, prayer, spiritual formation, community, discipleship of mind and leadership development. They express faith through evangelism, whole life stewardship, engaging in cross-cultural mission, ethnic reconciliation and justice, and partnering with churches in ways that will enable students, faculty and staff to be equipped "to be lifelong active members in local congregations" (InterVarsity 2013). They proactively seek to create and encourage opportunities for their students to have meaningful and transformative experiences that will help them internalize and identify with these values. As a result, many InterVarsity graduates go on to become leaders in faith communities and mission organizations around the world (Richardson 2007).

### *Research Problem*

As students' identities change and they begin internalizing these values, a perfect storm can begin to take shape. If they go abroad with a mission organization right

after graduation they are likely to weather the transition well and find a sense of belonging with a ministry that reinforces these values. However, for the rest who are sent out to be "world changers" and encouraged to become "lifelong active members in local congregations" (InterVarsity 2013), these very same beliefs and values could make it more difficult for InterVarsity graduates to integrate into many evangelical churches within the United States (Richardson 2007). The purpose of this research is to investigate the transition process InterVarsity students experience after graduation from university as they seek to find their place in faith communities, and what helps and hinders their transition process.

### *Research Questions*

Qualitative research was undertaken because it is often "particularly valuable when investigating topics that are complex and have not been widely studied" (Phinney 2008, 105). The following four questions undergirded the study. They were designed to elicit data to begin understanding the process as InterVarsity students seek to transition to a local faith community after graduating from university.

1. What are InterVarsity graduates looking for in faith communities and why are these qualities important to them?

2. What are InterVarsity graduates experiencing as they seek to transition to faith communities?

3. How do InterVarsity graduates describe the responsibility of stakeholders in helping or hindering their transition to faith communities?

4. How do InterVarsity graduates describe their own personal responsibility in the transition process?

*Significance Of The Study*

This study is significant for many reasons. "The study of emerging adulthood – the prolonged transition into adulthood extending into the 20s – is a rapidly growing area of research" (Schwartz et al. 2005, 201). "Although scholars have long been interested in the distinction between adolescence and adulthood, there remains a lack of research on development across these years" (Tanner 2006, 25). As such, this study is able to make a contribution to the general literature and research surrounding emerging adulthood.

Currently "there is extensive literature characterizing" the university experience and comparatively little research "surrounding the experience of recent" graduates, especially as they transition from university communities (Fox 2011). "Religious faith and practice generally associate with settled lives and tend to be disrupted by social, institutional, and geographical transitions" (Smith and Snell 2009, 75). Emerging adulthood is a phase of life rife with "unsettledness" yet little scholarly research exists to illuminate what is happening as these individuals seek to transition to faith communities after graduation. Publications that do cite trends tend to aggregate data across a broad age spectrum (Kinnaman 2011; Kinnaman and Lyons 2007; Wuthnow 2007). This interdisciplinary study has the potential to shed light on this gap in transition literature.

Literature also urges study of "a certain segment of the population" that already engages in active responses to their development in a way that equips them to work well in a globalized world (Côté 1996, 423-424). InterVarsity engages its students

in a developmental process which helps them internalize values and skills necessary to address and navigate the challenges of globalization (Emerson and Smith 2000, 22; Richardson 2007). As such they are positive deviants worthy of research (Wishik and Van der Vynckt 1976), and the rationale for viewing them in this manner will be elaborated in Chapter Three.

As congregants age, emerging adults are needed for faith communities to endure. "Baby boomers are no longer the future" of religious communities in the United States for "as they grow older, they are rapidly becoming the past. The future now rests with younger adults" (Wuthnow 2007, 1). As such, it is imperative to deepen understanding about what emerging adults are experiencing as they seek to transition to faith communities after graduation from universities.

Not only is this age demographic important for the future of faith communities, InterVarsity graduates are uniquely equipped to help faith communities flourish in the years ahead. Because of human migration patterns the United States is becoming increasingly multi-ethnic. This change will have significant implications for churches. InterVarsity graduates have many of the skills necessary to navigate this trend. They are able to form meaningful friendships across cultures and are comfortable sharing their faith in respectful ways (Bramadat 2000, 52). InterVarsity also prepares their students for various leadership roles within congregations, such as leading Bible studies and small groups (Bilhorn 2008). In addition, InterVarsity teaches their students to place a high value on financial stewardship and giving (Nelson 2013).

Another reason this research is significant is "the message of the gospel is ultimately an invitation to come and join the family of God and to grow together in his grace and love" (Cha 1998, 158). Coupled with data from other studies, this research can provide pastors and church leaders with additional knowledge they may need to help their faith communities become places of welcome for current and future InterVarsity graduates.

Lastly, "there is something particularly powerful and poignant about the "twenty-something" years, harboring, as they do, both promise and vulnerability" (Parks 2000, xi). "In naturally occurring resilience, luck may play a significant role in the conjunction;" however, for stakeholders who care about "the successful transitions of young people to adulthood, it would be desirable to rely less on lucky conjunctions and more on thoughtful scaffolding of this transition" (Masten et al. 2006, 188). This study is significant because it is able to provide such scaffolding for future InterVarsity graduates, and others who care deeply about this gifted group of emerging adults and desire to support them through the transition.

### *Definitions*

In order to eliminate confusion surrounding the terminology used in this research, a few phrases and words will be clarified at his time. Words such as "varsity" or "inter-varsity" are referenced on university campuses around the globe and often they can be synonymous with the word "student." However, in this research study any reference to such words or phrases connotes students or alumni who have been involved in a ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship during their time at university. As referenced, a

fuller description about InterVarsity graduates and the ministry of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship is provided in Chapter Three. Often when the organization is mentioned in the research, the title "InterVarsity" is referenced rather than the longer phrase "InterVarsity Christian Fellowship."

The phrase "faith communities" plays a prominent role in the research questions. Although this phrase can be used broadly to capture many religious affiliations, for the purpose of this study it means a regular gathering of Christians who meet for the primary purpose of encouraging ongoing Christian maturity. At the outset of the study the term was synonymous with churches or Christian congregations; however, it was not necessarily limited to such synonyms if other forms of community were uncovered which met the same primary purpose.

In the United States the words "college" and "university" are relatively interchangeable. The distinction in wording once meant an institution of higher education offered Ph.D. programs. Decades ago when an institution of higher learner obtained the ability to confer doctoral degrees, they would change the name of their institution from "college" to "university." However, in recent decades many colleges have retained their formal titles even though they added doctoral programs. In many countries the word "college" means the equivalent of what is often referred to as High School in the United States. For simplicity sake, and to alleviate misunderstanding if this research is read by people in other countries, the word "university" will be used throughout the dissertation.

## Limitations

The greatest limitation in conducting this qualitative research was InterVarsity's privacy policies and protocols. The InterVarsity alumni program falls under the purview of the Advancement Department. The Director and Associate Director of the Advancement Department affirmed and supported the research (Ginsberg 2013; Nickelson 2013). However, the organization has privacy policies and protocols prohibiting it from distributing lists of student or alumni information to people outside the organization. As a result, the researcher was unable to search lists from their data base as a means to select research participants. The process she followed to select her sample is explained in Chapter Four.

# CHAPTER TWO

# PRECEDENT LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to investigate the transition process InterVarsity students experience after graduation from university as they seek to find their place in faith communities. The goal of this chapter is to highlight salient themes from literature which illuminate the research problem and shed light on findings which emerge from interview data. Due to space constraints, only a brief sample of the literature will be provided at this time.

## *Globalization Of Chicago*

Globalization and economic development have elongated the period between adolescence and the time young adults take to fully enter into adult commitments (Arnett 2004, 3-25). This is no exception in the Chicago area. Initially Chicago was built around two principle commodities, grain and livestock (Miller 1996, 89). It became a gateway city that aided the transportation and sale of farming commodities through its extensive canal and railway systems (Cronon 1991, 263-309; Miller 1996, 93-97). The Chicago Fire occurred on October 8, 1871. "At the time of the fire, Chicago had just recently consolidated its position as the West's preeminent city" because of its extensive transportation network (Miller 1990, 12-13). "*The fire produced*

an odd sense of euphoria. All at once the population was released from the past- not metaphorically or theoretically, but in actuality" (Miller 1990, 38). City Council outlawed "wooden buildings in the downtown area" (Mayer and Wade, 1969, 118) and what transpired in the aftermath was "meteoric development" (Miller 1990, 65). Whether in building or manufacturing, a wealth of jobs arose for people who did not have advanced education. As a result, people from diverse cultures and nationalities poured into the city with the hope of finding employment and a better life (Grossman 1989; Holli and Jones 1995).

Over the last few decades the economy has been shifting. Finance jobs remain a significant component of the economy in the Chicago area, finding their earliest roots in the stock exchange which was developed to facilitate the sale of farm commodities. However, the stockyards and many manufacturing plants have closed. Now many people need a university education to find employment. New areas such as "risk management innovation, information technology and health services" are growth industries where higher paying jobs can be found (World Business Chicago 2014a, 1). Tourism and hospitality are also growth sectors; however, many jobs in these companies do not pay well. Even if a company remains in the manufacturing industry, it is likely they are buying and selling products around the globe. As a result, globalization has created increased complexities. Chicago firms "rely on their ability to keep recruiting the best and brightest" to "maintain their edge in the global marketplace" (World Business Chicago 2014b, 1). Competing for employment now often requires higher levels of education, and entering the workforce many years later than generational predecessors.

*Clarifying Terms*

Multiple terms are used in literature to describe the demographic to which InterVarsity graduates belong. Prior to the introduction of new terminology, this season of life was lumped into adolescence or it was encapsulated into young adulthood (Erikson 1997, 32-33). For most people adolescence now represents teen years prior to the age of entering university. Also, a "young adult" group at a church might include people up to the age of 40" (Arnett 2004, 18-19). Neither captures what is occurring during this unique season of life. Sociologists tend to focus on "transition to adult roles" and psychologists focus on "the development of maturity" (Tanner 2006, 26). From these differing vantage points conflicting terminology arises.

The term "emerging adulthood" arose as a result of how "people in their late teens and early 20s" described themselves in interviews (Arnett 2006a, 11). Scholars rooted more in the psychology realm speak of emerging adulthood as the time in life primarily between 18 to 25 years of age (Arnett 2004, 20). They frequently use this term regardless of what year the person was born because their primary emphasis is on this period or stage of human development. Sociologists use the terms adolescence, emerging adulthood and young adulthood in the literature. They also reference the age cohort with labels such as *Millennials, Mosaics* or *Gen Y* (Barna Group 2013a; Pew Research Center 2012a; Howe and Strauss 2000, 4; Kinnaman and Lyons 2007). Although the dates vary a bit, this cohort represents people born between the years 1981 and 2002. Another common term is *twenty-somethings* as it captures the stage of life from emerging

adulthood through the early part of young adulthood, but the phrase is not tied to specific years of birth (Wuthnow 2007).

The researcher's personal nomenclature preference for this study is emerging adulthood because it captures the developmental process occurring during the life season of the transition she is investigating. She likes the term because it arose from people within the demographic itself, rather than choosing a tag or label developed by someone outside the cohort (Arnett and Tanner 2011b, 126-127). However, the choice is not without critique. Sociologists at times criticize the term saying it does not capture human development because it applies primarily to people who have the opportunity to attend university and who come from wealthier contexts (Cote and Bynner 2008, 251; Kloep and Hendry 2011a, 53-104).

The critique is a valid one (Arnett and Tanner 2011a, 50; Arnett 2000, 476-477; Arnett 2002, 781). However, since InterVarsity graduates in the United States attend university and are growing up in an economic context which affords them many opportunities, the term *emerging adulthood* seems appropriate. The researcher also likes the term *twenty-somethings* as it avoids this pitfall of exclusivity and the complications of identifying when a person truly crosses over from being an *emerging adult* to a *young adult*. Nevertheless, since literature reflects the use of many different terms, in this chapter the researcher will honor the nomenclature cited by each author whose writings are referenced.

*What Is Meant By Emerging Adulthood?*

Theory and research regarding "emerging adulthood are still in their nascent stages" (Arnett and Tanner 2006, xvii) but are growing rapidly (Schwartz et al. 2005, 201). Given the critical nature of what happens during this season of life, "it is striking that more empirical work has not focused on these pivotal years" (Tanner 2006, 51). However, from the research which has been completed, a broad picture is emerging.

Emerging adulthood represents a formative time in life when many foundational decisions are made which impact a person's life for years to come. The precedent writer who proposes emerging adulthood as a new stage of human development outlines five qualities as differentiating this stage of human development from others. He writes:

1. It is the age of *identity explorations*, of trying out various possibilities, especially in love and work.
2. It is the age of *instability.*
3. It is the most *self-focused* age of life.
4. It is the age of *feeling in-between*, in transition, neither adolescent nor adult.
5. It is the age of *possibilities*, when hopes flourish, when people have an unparalleled opportunity to transform their lives. (Arnett 2004, 8)

It is a time of re-centering or differentiation from families of origin "which constitutes a shift in power, agency, responsibility, and dependence" from parents (Tanner 2006, 27). It is during this season of life "emerging adults develop skills for daily living, gain a better understanding of who they are and what they want from life, and begin to build a foundation for their adult lives" (Arnett 2004, 13-14).

## *Identity Formation*

Identity formation is often the developmental construct from this period which is referenced most frequently in literature (Arnett and Tanner 2011b,133). It "forms the framework for adulthood" because it "is the process of claiming membership in the social world" and "standing for something" (Josselson 1994, 12). Many authors who are writing about identity formation in emerging adulthood cite the precedent theories of Erik Erikson (1950; 1959; 1968; 1997), James Marcia (1966; 1994), or Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005).

## The Human Life Cycle Model

Literature surrounding Erikson's model of identity formation is rife with controversy. Authors reference this theory as being foundational in their research, while readily acknowledging its deficits.

### *Erikson's Theory Of Identity Formation*

Erikson's theory of identity formation is rooted within his broader theory of the human lifecycle (1997, 32-33; 1980, 129). He describes eight stages of the human lifecycle: infancy, early childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age (Erikson 1997, 32). To each stage he describes a psychosocial crisis which is normative for a specific season of life. The word "crisis" is used "in a developmental sense to connote not a threat of catastrophe, but a turning point, a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential" (Erikson 1968, 96).

Erikson ascribes identity formation as the normative developmental process for adolescents and young adults (1968, 17), although in his developmental charts it is normally aligned with adolescence (1997, 32; 1980, 129). The core tenet is that identity formation must be navigated well if a young adult is going to be able to make the commitments necessary in the next stage of life, such as significant commitments in personal relationships or in one's profession. Erikson believes it is a "firm sense of inner identity" which "marks the end of the adolescent process and is a condition for further and truly individual maturation" (1968, 88-89).

Identity formation is fashioned upon the interplay of three levels and that is why it is referred to as a psychosocial model. The first level is the social-aspect. It is rooted in the idea that people's environment is not only around them, but is "forever in them" as well (Erikson 1996, 24). The environment in which a person is raised is therefore significant in shaping identity. However, there is also a self-aspect. This is comprised of a person's "selves" and the "roles" he or she plays in society (Erikson 1996, 211). The third is the ego-aspect. It is also frequently referred to in the literature as the ego-identity. This is the "central and partially unconscious" aspect of each person which "must at any given stage of life deal with a changing Self which demands to be synthesized with abandoned and anticipated selves" (Erikson 1968, 211).

In Erikson's model identity formation is tied to the inner agency where various selves are brought into a composite "Self" (1968, 217-218). "The selves are mostly preconscious" but "they can become conscious" if "the ego agrees to it" (Erikson 1968, 218). He explains there are often "shock-like transitions between these selves" but

a healthy personality brings congruence and coherence to them (Erikson 1968, 217). Identity formation continues throughout one's lifetime. It is never fully established or achieved, nor is it static or unchangeable (Erikson 1968, 24). Rather, it is the sense that in certain stages of life, primary developmental tasks are *normative.* Identity formation is the primary developmental task which is normative for emerging adults.

Erikson writes that the process "defies a definitive definition or explanation (1968, 9). The reason why identity formation "is so all-pervasive and yet so hard to grasp" is because it "located' *in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*" (Erikson 1968, 22). Even Erikson's own understanding of the term "identity" changed over the years. He writes:

> At one time it seemed to refer to a conscious sense of individual uniqueness, at another to an unconscious striving for a continuity of experience, and at a third, as a solidarity with a group's ideals. In some respects the term appeared to be colloquial and naïve, a mere manner of speaking, while in others it was related to existing concepts in psychoanalysis and sociology. And on more than one occasion the word slipped more like a habit that seems to make things appear familiar than as a clarification. (Erikson 1968, 208)

The process of identity formation is "a kind of *psychosocial relativity"* because it "employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning" (Erikson 1968, 23). In the process "the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him" (Erikson 1968, 23).

*Primary Critique Of Erikson's Theory*

As a whole the main concerns with Erikson's model lie in the "invisibility of women, class, race and culture to the development of any theory of "normal" or healthy development" (Archer 1992, 25). Some believe his theory "excludes the lived realities of women's lives and the lives of other marginalized groups to which Erikson and his theory-building colleagues did not belong" (Sorrel and Montgomery 2001, 99). The model was developed primarily on "Eurocentric male model normality" (Archer 1992, 29). For example, "from the beginning, the construct of identity was arguably descriptive of male development" (Patterson et al. 1992, 12). "Women face a more complex task in identity formation than do men, because of the number of content domains within which they define themselves, and the relative lack of societal support for their position" (Patterson et al. 1992, 15). Women's developmental track is considered a secondary reality despite the fact they comprise so much of the human race (Josselson 1996). Others believe the idea of "grand theories" in general are absurd given human complexity and diversity (Kloep and Hendry 2011a, 54-58).

Despite these shortcoming, some who critique the weaknesses of the theory also appreciate aspects of it. For example, one proponent explains "Erikson's legacy of the concept of identity was heuristic and connotative rather than operational and concrete. Trying to define identity as emergent, he discussed its core (the interface of individual and society) and some of its edges" (Josselson 1994, 16-17). Another writes, "Not being a research methodologist, Erikson is not attempting to find the operational

definition of identity. As a clinician he does an exquisite job of conveying the complexity and richness of a concept that perhaps defies a single definition" (Archer 1992, 29).

*Relevance Of Erikson's Theory*

In one aspect Erikson's human lifecycle model is important for it serves as the backdrop for Arnett's terminology *emerging adulthood* (Arnett 2006b, 304-306). Neither adolescence nor young adulthood seem adequate to fully capture the essence of what is happening between the ages in which a person can enter university and when they make adult commitments such as deciding to get married or have children. For this reason, understanding the human lifecycle model is imperative for understanding the context of the broader dialogue which is taking place in the literature.

Also, Erikson writes that an understanding of one's identity "becomes more necessary (and more problematic) wherever a wide range of possible identities is envisages" (Erikson 1968, 245). The process of identity formation is significantly more difficult in this current era of late modernity and globalization (Giddens 1991). In prior eras people would be able to experience identity formation through interaction with their elders while remaining embedded in stable communities (Mead 1970). Later they could establish identities through meritocracy as they served in community roles or in a job which remained fairly consistent over time. The "project" of forming an identity in late-modernity is much more difficult (Giddens 1991; Côté 2000, 131). The pace of change is now so rapid as a result of globalization that "the challenges of creating a viable identity are perhaps greater than they have been in the past" (Arnett 2002, 781).

## Identity Status Model

James Marcia is the person who first found a way to operationalize the identity construct in Erikson's model (1966). As a result, substantial research has been done in the area of identity development and this has resulted in interventions being done in the context of therapy, education, pastoral guidance, career counseling, and parenting (McKinney 1994, 248). Ruthellen Josselson's writings are often the most frequently cited when it comes to critiquing and understanding the model with regard to women's developmental path (1996; 1994).

In Marcia's precedent work (1966) he describes four identity statuses which illuminate Erikson's identity formation process. These are foreclosure, diffusion, moratorium and achievement. In many ways he seems to view the foreclosed and diffused identity formations as inferior to moratorium and achieved statuses. It is this assumption with which Josselson takes greatest issue. Additional domains have also been developed within the identity status model; however, they will not be mentioned at this time since they are not referenced as frequently in the literature surrounding emerging adulthood.

### *Foreclosed Status*

A person with a foreclosed identity status is one who has never experienced the identity crisis which Erikson describes yet he or she expresses commitment. Marcia explains with these people, it is "it is difficult to tell where" their parents' goals "leave off" and "where the students' goals begin" (Marcia 1966, 551). For foreclosed individuals university experiences "serve only as a confirmation of childhood

beliefs. A certain rigidity characterizes" their personalities (Marcia 1966, 551-552). They have usually grown up in a setting which has not allowed for genuine exploration. "Foreclosure families are notable for their closeness and warmth. But this closeness and warmth is conditional, contingent on one's adherence to the family rules" (Marcia 1994, 39). People with foreclosed identities are threatened by the idea of deeply exploring and examining their worldviews and the assumptions and values which undergird them.

*Diffused Status*

A person with a diffused identity is one who is characterized by lack of commitment. He or she has "neither decided upon an occupation nor is much concerned about it" (Marcia 1966, 551). There is also a lack of concern for ideological matters or the person "takes a smorgasbord approach in which one outlook seems as good" as any other (Marcia 1996, 551-552). "Authority figures such as parents and teachers described them as "wasting their time" or "not living up to their potential" (Marcia 1994, 42-43). Not only has the person not undergone the identity crisis of which Erikson speaks, he or she has no interest in entering into that crisis. These individuals are more concerned about living a carefree existence and not being bogged down by commitments.

*Moratorium Status*

An individual who is in moratorium has launched himself or herself "into the exploration phase" and he or she is "suffering its consequences" (Marcia 1994, 40-41). Unlike the foreclosed or diffused identity statuses, these individuals embrace the crisis despite the pain it causes (Marcia 1996, 552). "Within the moratorium status, guilt

and anxiety can become so overwhelming that the clear thinking necessary for exploration becomes clouded or blocked. Or the young person in a moratorium phase may become stuck and despair of ever finding a social choice that feels right" (Josselson 1994, 20). "One thing the person may learn in this phase is how the society responds to different choices: What is valued by others? What is tolerated by others" (Josselson 1994, 16)?

University is a society sanctioned moratorium. "North American society schedules this moratorium in late adolescence, and the young person is expected to settle these matters sometime between ages 21 and 25, although they often extend to age 30 (Josselson 1994, 15). For the individual out of phase with the society, who wishes to explore identity either too early or too late, or who is unable to bring the time for exploration to closure in the form of commitments, grave difficulties may ensue" (Josselson 1994, 15-16).

*Achieved Status*

A person who has the identity achievement status "has experienced a crisis period and is committed to an occupation and ideology" (Marcia 1966, 552). He or she "has seriously considered several occupational choices and has made a decision" even though the "ultimate choice may be a variation of parental wishes" (Marcia 1966, 552). "With respect to ideology" the person has "reevaluated past beliefs and achieved a resolution" that enables him or her to act freely in future situations (Marcia 1966, 552). People with this status are often actively seeking out opportunities for growth (Marcia

1994, 41). “Studies of the stability of identity statuses” indicate an increase in identity achievement over time at university (Josselsson 1994, 18-19).

*Primary Critique Of Marcia’s Theory*

Josselson conducted a longitudinal research study over a twenty-two year period with thirty women who were randomly selected from universities in Illinois and New York and who were between the ages of 21 and 43 (1996, 15-26). She believes identity is “the ultimate act of creativity’ which enables people to “build a bridge” between who they are “internally” and who they “are recognized as being” in the social world (1996, 27). However, “society’s confusion over the roles it is willing to allot to women” has made identity formation a far more complex process for them (Josselson 1996, 31). “Women have multiple layers to their nature, and the solution to the riddle of identity formation is to include as many strands as possible” (Josselson 1963, 243).

Josselson built upon the work of James Marcia but she created different terms for the same categories. She uses the terms guardians, drifters, searchers and pathmakers for Marcia’s terms foreclosure, differentiation, moratorium and achievement respectively (1996, 35). “In Marcia’s initial conceptualization, the identity statuses that included crisis for exploration- identity achievement and moratorium- were deemed to be the “high” statuses, while those that bypassed exploration were viewed as the “low” statuses” (Josselson 1994, 19). Marcia came to this conclusion because of the positive outcomes experienced by men who held these “high” statuses. However, in her longitudinal research, Joseselson found for women “the high statuses tended to be the committed ones” (1994, 19-20; 1996), foreclosure and achievement.

Years after proposing the identity status theory, Marcia writes that "every stage has its accompanying identity issue, so every significant life change means an identity reformulation" (Marcia 1994, 42). However, given one status is called "achievement," it gives the impression growth or change stops at some point in time. Josselson found women she interviewed were incredibly complex and one of the few commonalities was they were regularly engaged in a process of revision (Josselson 1996, 238-258). Other concerns about the identity status model are as people age, the statuses represent personality types rather than a spectrum of human development (Schwartz 2001, 12).

## Bioecological Theory Of Human Development

Urie Bronfenbernner's bioecological theory of human development is also referenced frequently in the literature surrounding emerging adulthood. Regardless of whether authors are based primarily in the field of psychology or sociology, the distinct difference is their dearth of critique of this theory in the emerging adult literature in comparison to Erikson's model.

### *Bronfenbrenner's Theory*

"The bioecological theory of human development reached maturity 10 years after the publication of the ecological systems theory" (2005, 3). Initially the theory focused primarily on the developing person and his or her environment. The bioecological theory of human development acknowledges more explicitly the role of

genetic inheritance in development. However, it is aspects of Bronfenbrenner's earlier theory which best illuminate data from interviews with InterVarsity graduates.

Bronfenbrenner's theory focuses on transitions or "shifts in role or setting, which occur throughout the life span" (1979, 6). It differs from theories in social psychology, sociology and anthropology because human development is the primary concern (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 12). "The developing person is viewed not merely as a tabula rasa on which the environment makes its impact, but as a growing, dynamic entity that progressively moves into and restructures the milieu" in which he or she resides (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 21). "Development is defined as the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 9).

The theory has both a systems and interpersonal component. "The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 3). As humans transition among these different nested structures, the roles they occupy change. However, "roles have a magiclike power to alter how a person is treated, how she acts, what she does, and thereby even what she thinks and feels" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 6). "What matters for behavior and development is the environment as it is *perceived* rather than as it may exist in "objective" reality" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 4).

*Systems Aspect*

The *ecological environment* is conceived typically as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next. These structures are

referred to as the *micro-, meso-, exo-,* and *macrosystems"* (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 21-22). "A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 22).The mesosystem is comprised of interrelations "among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 25) Therefore, a mesosystem is made of many microsystems. The exosystem "refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant," however, what happens in the exosystem impacts the developing person and the developing person can impact it (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 25-26). The macrosystem functions "at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 26).

*Interpersonal Aspect*

Interpersonal structures serve "as contexts of human development" (1979, 56). Bronfebrenner explains this happens when there is an *observational diad.* This "occurs when one member is paying close and sustained attention to the activity of the other, who, in turn, at least acknowledges the interest being shown" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 56). It can then evolve into a *joint activity dyad* "in which the two participants perceive themselves as doing something together" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 56-57). *Reciprocity* ensues in that each part of the dyad begins influencing the other. He explains "the optimal situation for learning and development is one in which the balance of power gradually shifts in favor of the developing person, in other words, when the latter is given

increasing opportunity to exercise control over the situation" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 58). As this happens an *affective relation* grows that can continue long after the participants are even physically together (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 58).

Thus, simply noticing and paying close attention to people can become the catalyst for development. "If one member of a dyad undergoes developmental change, the other is also likely to do so" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 65). Over time activities become roles, and "human development is facilitated through interaction with persons who occupy a variety of roles and through participation in an ever-broadening role repertoire" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 104).

*Facilitating Growth*

By creating quasi-experiments in the various systems it is possible to impact development and even alter aspects of the systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 41-42). Development is enhanced if "role demands in the different settings are compatible" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 212). It is also enhanced "as a direct function of the number of structurally different settings in which the developing person participates in a variety of joint activities and primary dyads with others, particularly when these others are more mature or experienced" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 213). Bronfenbrenner explains development is optimal when there are supportive links between microsystems or settings (1979, 214-215).

## *Ethnic Identity Formation*

Jean Phinney is the author mentioned most frequently in articles and books about ethnic identity formation in emerging adulthood. She writes that "the task of understanding ethnic identity is complicated" given the uniqueness which distinguishes each type of group (Phinney 1990, 499). She finds even the definitions of "ethnic identity" to be diverse (Phinney 1990, 500). Although many books and articles examine ethnicity through the lens of intergroup relations (Tajfel 1982), ethnic identity formation looks at the issue at the level of the individual and its focus is developmental (Phinney 1990, 502).

### Through The Lens Of Erikson, Marcia And Bronfenbrenner

Phinney examines identity formation in light of Erikson's and Marcia's work. She believes ethnic identity formation has three stages: unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search, and achieved ethnic identity (1990, 503). Unexamined ethnic identity is marked by a lack of exploration. The searching stage involves trying to understand the "meaning of ethnicity for oneself" (Phinney 1990, 503). The achievement stage is marked by a "clear" and "confident sense of one's ethnicity" (Phinney 1990, 503). Phinney writes that under the lack of exploration there are two possible subtypes. These include diffusion as characterized by a lack of interest or concern with ethnicity and foreclosure as marked by absorption of ethnicity based uncritically upon the opinions of others (Phinney 1990 503).

She believes although "developmental psychology has been more attentive to the role of history and culture than some other branches of psychology, the emphasis in

the field remains on processes of growth and change that are assumed to be common across all people" (Phinney 2000, 27). To her this approach is too simplistic given "identity formation involves the development of both personal identity and group identity" (Phinney 2000, 28). She believes studying identity formation from an ecological or systems perspective is much better. However, doing that type of research is far more difficult. She writes:

> All young people must navigate complex worlds of home, school, friends, work, and leisure, in contexts that are continually changing. Yet relatively little research takes seriously the need to deal with the complexity and contextually embedded nature of human development. Even for those who accept the importance of viewing development as dynamic and contextually embedded, it is a daunting task to frame research questions and design studies that acknowledge, let alone deal with, this complexity. As a result, contextual factors are rarely addressed in depth, and much research continues to emphasize universal processes. (2010, 33-34)

Despite the complexities she believes "there is a progression in normal development from an unformed or diffuse identity to a secure committed identity" (Phinney 2010, 36).

## Minority Identity Development Model

Another developmental approach to ethnic identity formation is the Minority Identity Development Model. Although it can be described as having three primary stages (Morten and Atkinson 1983, 157), it is usually explained as a five stage process (Atkinson et al. 1983; Atkinson 2004). Rather than a typology, the model highlights the flexible nature of ethnic identity formation. It seeks to show the developmental journey and range of stages people can traverse throughout their lifetimes, and the developmental process is not "to be interpreted as irreversible" (Atkinson et al.

1983, 35). It is not a description of fixed characteristics but of cognitive processes leading to subsequent choices and behaviors.

Stage one is conformity. People in this stage are "distinguished by their unequivocal preference for dominant cultural values over those of their own culture" (Atkinson et al. 1983, 35). Their attitude towards themselves is self-deprecating, their attitude towards people from other cultures is discriminatory, and their attitude toward people from the dominant culture is appreciative. Stage two is dissonance. This is a time of cultural confusion when the person experiences conflict as he or she wrestles with alternating feelings of self-deprecation versus pride and appreciation for their own ethnicity. These thoughts and feelings of confusion carry over to people from other cultures and those in the dominant culture as well.

Stage three is marked by resistance to the dominant culture and immersion into one's own ethnic heritage. The person is appreciative of self, they have "feelings of empathy for other minority experiences," and they reject "the dominant society and culture" (Atkinson et al. 1983, 37). Stage four is introspection, where the person becomes uncomfortable with the strong negative thoughts and feelings they have towards the dominant culture and unequivocal acceptance of everything within their own cultural heritage. At this stage they begin to experience a deeper level of critical awareness that leads to "selective trust and distrust" of self, people from other cultures and the dominant culture (Atkinson et al. 1983, 38).

Stage five is "synergistic articulation and awareness," marked by a resolution of earlier "conflicts and discomforts" (Atkinson et al. 1983, 38). In a later

version of the model the title is shortened and referred to as the "synergistic stage" (Atkinson 2004, 44-46). The person experiences "a strong sense of self-worth, self-confidence, and autonomy" which germinates from the process (Atkinson et al. 1983, 38). The end result is:

> Cultural values of other minorities as well as those of the dominant group are objectively examined and accepted or rejected on the basis of prior experience gained in earlier stages of identity development. Desire to eliminate *all* forms of oppression becomes an important motivation of the individual's behavior. (Atkinson et al. 1983, 38)

As such, in many ways the Minority Identity Development Model mirrors the path Phinney describes as people move from a foreclosed to achieved identity status. A primary difference is the strong link in the final stage of the Minority Identity Development Model to social justice and the eradication of oppression.

## Ethnic Identity In Emerging Adulthood

"The basic premise of identity theory is that new experiences can trigger identity exploration. The period of emerging adulthood is marked by a widening exposure to new situations, ideas, responsibilities, and persons" (Phinney 2006, 123). "For immigrants and minorities … identity formation is complicated by their multiple identifications and affiliations, with their own ethnic culture, with the larger society, with other minority groups, and, in many cases, with various multicultural communities" (Phinney 2010, 36). "Even if a secure identity has been achieved during adolescence, it is likely to be reexamined as a result of changing contexts" in emerging adulthood "when lives are characterized by changing circumstances and new experiences" (Phinney 2006, 121).

"Young people are agents in their own development, making decisions and choices that ultimately shape their developmental pathways" (2010, 35). "University provides a context that raises further identity questions as young adults deal with a wide range of new experiences that highlight contrasts between home and school or between themselves and others …. Over the university years, students show evidence of increasingly complex reasoning and higher levels of integration among various identities" (Phinney 2008, 103). Although "still in its infancy" research about ethnic identity formation seems to be revealing it is so complex it might never be fully achieved (Ong et al. 2010, 46-47; Gushiken 2013).

### *Theological Reflection Regarding Identity*

Scripture speaks to the issue of identity in both the Old and New Testaments. The theological construct *Imago Dei* teaches that image bearing is a vital part of the identity of all human beings. The image of God is visible in all people but that image has been marred because of sin. As a result of the redemptive and salvific work of Christ, humans are urged to pursue an active developmental posture so the marred image might transform and God's image might once again be more readily seen through their lives on earth (Eph 1-6) and revealed fully in humans throughout eternity (1 John 3:2). When this theological truth is taken seriously, it profoundly aids relationships across ethnic and generational divides.

### *Imago Dei*

*Imago Dei* is a Latin term which means "made in the image of God." Its theological roots begin in the creation narrative found in the Bible in Gen 1:26-28.

The passage states:

> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Because God made human beings in His own image, all people are endowed with honor and dignity (Robinson 2010, 7). "Every human being is special and important" (Assohoto and Ngewa 2006, 11).

Although there are many theological interpretations of what it means to be created in God's image (Dyrness 2008, 43-51), "in recent years it has generally been agreed that the Bible nowhere speaks of a loss of the image" (Bray 2000, 575). "At the outset the concept of man as the *image* or *likeness* of God tells us that" human beings are "to *mirror* God and to *represent* God" (Hoekema 1986, 67). This is core to their identity. One of the Ten Commandments states that human beings should never design or craft graven images or idols (Exod 20:4) because God "has already created an image of himself: a living, walking, talking image" (Hoekema 1986, 67).

Before sin entered the world the *imago Dei* was wholly evident. "After man's fall into sin, the image of God was not annihilated but perverted …. Because of the Fall, therefore, the image of God in man, though not destroyed, has been seriously corrupted" (Hoekema 1986, 83). "The image is now malfunctioning- and yet it is still there" (Hoekema 1986, 85). "In fact, the very greatness of man's sin consists in the fact that he is still an image-bearer of God. What makes sin so heinous is that man is

prostituting such splendid gifts. *Corruptio optimi pessima:* the corruption of the best is the worst" (Hoekema 1986, 85). Identity rooted in *imago Dei* reveals that racist ideologies like those which arose under Nazism and Apartheid are extreme examples of heinous corruption which should have no place in genuine Christianity (Vorster 2011, 130).

## Redeeming The Image Bearers

Christ is "the image of God par excellence" (Hoekema 1986, 73). The Bible teaches that "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). Through His work on the cross, the penalty for the sin of humanity was paid. Through Him there is forgiveness, redemption, and renewal (John 3:1-17; Col 1:13-14). Salvation through Christ is God's gift to humanity and renewal takes place through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1-16; Gal 5:16-25).

"Since the image of God has been perverted through man's fall into sin, it needs to be renewed. This renewal or restoration of the image is what takes place in the redemptive process. Does this restoration mean that an image that was utterly and totally lost is now given back? No; it is better to say that the image of God that has become perverted, though not totally lost, is being rectified, is being set straight again" (Hoekema 1986, 86). "This renewal is both God's gift and" each human being's "task" (Hoekema 1986, 89). "The renewal of the image of God, therefore, is not an experience in which" human beings "remain passive, but one in which" each person "must take an active part" (Hoekema 1986, 91). "Likeness to God is still" each person's "true identity and so fuller

participation in this reality" remains each person's "true calling. These twin motifs, namely identity and participation, are important" (Robinson 2010, 15).

## Impact On Human Relationships

To be human is "*to be directed toward God"* and *"to be directed toward one's fellowman"* (Hoekema 1986, 75-76). As such *imago Dei* has significant implications for how human beings interact with one another. Innate in the construct is the imminent glory and dignity of each human being. Of this C.S. Lewis writes:

> It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbor. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. (1976, 45-46)

*Imago Dei* is a theological construct that can provide people with a clearer lens to perceive the identity of ethnic and generational "others." The depth of a person's dignity and worth does not lie in his or her age or ethnic heritage but rather in the deeper identity that each person is made in the image and likeness of God, and *"the image of God in its totality can only be seen in humankind as a whole"* (Hoekema 1986, 99).

*Education To Foster Identity Development*

Emerging adulthood is a season of life "critical for the establishment of mature structures of thinking, yet also vulnerable to stabilizing distortive forms of thinking" (Labouvie-Vief 2006, 80). Education can provide scaffolding needed to facilitate development during this season (Masten et al. 2006, 188). What follows are three educational approaches for fostering identity development in emerging adults. The first is rooted in identity literature, the second in student development literature and the third straddles both academic disciplines.

## Identity Interventions

Emerging adulthood provides "a unique window of opportunity for strategic intervention to promote positive change" (Matsen et al. 2006, 186). Since identity development involves both social and individual components, it is possible to intervene at the individual level or "in the social climate within which identity formation takes place" (Josselson 1994, 16). Intervention can be focused on making the transition to young adulthood easier and surer (Josselson 1994, 24) or it can be focused on identifying those at risk and creating "both individual and group mechanisms to provide assistance" (Joseelson 1994, 22-23).

When the identity intervention is social, it can serve as a bridge between society and emerging adults. Josselson writes:

> Are there social gatekeepers available to greet and orient the new members, or is the society closed, viewing newcomers as rivals or threats and making entry difficult? As a society becomes morally confused and itself diffuse, possibilities for meaningful joining lesson. Identity, to the extent that it is a form of shared meaning-making, requires the society that regards itself as meaningful. Today many young people are diffuse in

> identity because they are coming of age in families and communities where values are unspecified, religion disowned, and occupation tedious and under stimulating. (Josselson 1994, 23)

*When Are Identity Interventions Appropriate?*

If a person needs to make changes to "reverse negative outcomes or increase positive outcomes" identity interventions can be beneficial (Waterman 1994, 233). Benefits such as improving a person's quality of life or experiencing better outcomes in personal relationships, in the workplace, or in society as a whole are good reasons to consider this educational tool (Waterman 1994, 233). The potential detriment of identity interventions must also be taken into consideration if there is likelihood that a person will experience adverse consequences as a result of the educational exercise (Waterman 1994, 233). Questions about whether or not foreclosed individuals should enter into identity interventions are debated in the literature. Some who are in the psychology field believe it is best to not target foreclosed individuals (Waterman 1994, 237; Marcia 2001, 64). However, the nature of higher education tends to be a process whereby students enter in a foreclosure stance with borrowed "beliefs and lifestyles uncritically adopted from parents or other influential authorities" to later graduate with a belief system that is more personally owned (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 62).

*Examples Of Identity Interventions*

One example of an identity intervention is perspective taking. It is "the process by which individuals develop the ability to see the world imaginatively from the perspective of someone other than themselves. This process enhances social interaction

and minimizes egocentrism, thereby making available occasions for exploration in identity formation" (Markstrom-Adams and Spenser 1994, 85-86). Jesus' teaching about loving one's enemies (Matt 5:43-48) is an example of perspective taking for Christians are exhorted to imaginatively consider all situations through the perspective of their heavenly father so they might reflect His image in the world.

Another approach is similar. It involves first "exploring attitudes toward the self," especially feelings regarding "ethnic self-esteem and self-acceptance" (Markstrom-Adams and Spenser 1994, 98). "Second, in targeting attitudes toward others of the same minority group, issues of group pride and feelings of group affiliation and belongingness are addressed. Diversity in views among members of one's group is also explored" (Markstrom-Adams and Spenser 1994, 98). Third, individuals are encouraged to familiarize themselves "with the values, beliefs, and cultural practices of other groups" and understand "the effects of prejudice and discrimination on other groups" (Markstrom-Adams and Spenser 1994, 98). "Fourth, in exploring attitudes toward members of the dominant group, the individual is again encouraged in perspective taking on the values, beliefs, and cultural practices of the dominant group. Identifying useful or helpful features of the dominant group is encouraged" as well as differences and similarities between the person's own group (Markstrom-Adams and Spenser 1994, 98). Dialogue is often a tool employed in identity interventions (Josselson 1994, 23).

Individuals might be linked or networked so they can traverse the intervention with others, or they might traverse it with a mentor instead of with a group (Josselson 1994, 22). If the intervention is social instead of individual, it might involve

educating gatekeepers or those who are supposed to be orienting emerging adults who will be entering the context (Josselson 1994, 23). In these instances it might involve working with those who are older who need help with perspective taking and gaining skills necessary to relate well inter-generationally.

## Self-Authorship

Marcia Baxter Magdola conducted over 1,000 interviews of people over 22 years ranging "from the time they were 18 to their current age of 40" (2009, xix). They report "succeeding in adult life required them to develop their *internal voices*- to decide within themselves what to believe, who to be, and how to relate to others" (Magdola 2009, xix). The process of becoming an adult requires a person to find and include his or her "own voice in the arena of authority" and develop an inner sense of his or her own truth that the individual and others can trust (Parks 2009, xvi). S*elf-authorship* means using that "internal voice" to guide a person's life (Magdola 2009, 2). Although evangelicals will bristle at the terminology "self-authorship," the construct should not be abandoned simply because of the nomenclature chosen to name or identify the developmental process. Christian educators are also concerned about "nurturing the emerging adult's still fragile voice" (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 65) and a primary responsibility of spiritual leaders is to help emerging adults grow in their ability to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-15).

*The Process For Developing Self-Authorship*

Developing self-authorship involves "giving up one way of meaning making to adopt a more complex one" (Magdola 2009, 3). It is the continual process of finding those parts of oneself that are not readily visible (e.g., family expectations), pulling them out to reflect on them, and deciding "what to make of them" (Magdola 2009, 3). "The journey toward self-authorship is complicated by the fact that multiple layers of development take place at the same time" (Magdola 2009, 9). As each person seeks to determine what they believe and value, who they are, and what types of relationships they want to have with people, cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal development takes place (Magdola 2009, 9). It is the epistemological dimension coupled with the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions that make self-authorship more than simply a critical thinking exercise. Self-authorship occurs at the intersection between these three spheres.

As a result of the interviews, Magdola discovered a majority of people leave university "believing the plans they had acquired from authorities" (Magdola 2009, 6). She calls these *external formulas* and people believed they would automatically "yield success in adult life" (Magdola 2009, 6). However, over time these same graduates would come to challenging crossroads where some paths would point to *external formulas* and other paths would point to their own dreams and be congruent with their *inner voices* (Magdola 2009, 6). Following external formulas often left people feeling unfulfilled and as though they had missed out on opportunities. This pain brought them into a journey of "learning to *listen to their internal voices"* (Magdola 2009, 7). The new path which

required listening was not easy but over time they began to "hear their internal voices more clearly" (Magdola 2009, 7).

Once this skill of listening starts to be honed self-authorship can begin. Self-authorship is the process of molding oneself and one's life in accordance to the established internal voice (Magdola 2009, 8). On this path people learn to begin "trusting their *internal voice.* From this they build an *internal foundation* which serves as a foundation comprised of values and beliefs which help them to live out *internal commitments*" (Magdola 2009, 8-9). The process is greatly aided if they are able to find "good company," which Magdola calls *learning partners,* along the journey (2009, 11).

*Individual Responsibility For Self-Authorship*

Every person has an individual responsibility to meet his or her own life challenges, yet each person also has a role in helping others as well. Developing self-authorship requires personal initiative as well as the support of friends, family members, coworkers, employers, etc. (Magdola 2009, xix-xx). For a person making the journey, he or she needs to be willing to take a few crucial steps. Individuals need to take time to think through the kind of support they need so they are able to recognize "when it is available in others" (Magdola 2009, 14). It is also an individual's personal responsibility to be able to clearly communicate with others "what would be beneficial" (Magdola 2009, 14-15). Lastly, it is also critical to know "the qualities of a good partner" on the journey so each person is able to give back and also "be a good partner to others" (Magdola 2009, 14-15).

*Educating For Self-Authorship*

A goal in education is to move people away from "reliance upon *external formulas"* (Magdola 2009, 2). Although many of the people Magdola interviewed over the years were able to find "company for the process," others "often reported feeling somewhat alone in facing the challenges of adult life" (Magdola 2009, 11). Educating for self-authorship involves being "good company" for others. People who are "good company" have, from the *back seat,* learned how to respect peoples' thoughts and feelings, and they are willing to help them "sort through their experiences," and collaborate with them "to help them solve their own problems" (Magdola 2009, 12). Carefully designed writing projects (Haynes 2004, 63-90), diversity education (Hornak and Ortiz 2004, 91-123), urban internships (Egart and Healy 2004, 125-149), and various spiritual disciplines (Dunn and Sundene 2012) are some of the ways in which educational institutions are seeking to help students in this area.

## Identity Capital

James Côté was the first person to develop the "identity capital" model (1996). Whether written by himself or with others, many of his books and articles now form the precedent literature in this nascent field (Côté 1996; Côté 1997; Côté 2000; Côté 2002a; Côté 2002b; Côté and Levine 2002; Côté and Schwartz 2002; Schwartz et al. 2005; Côté 2006). Côté's model is frequently referenced in literature about emerging adulthood. The construct was originally developed as a means to help students cope more effectively in their transition from higher education into a globalized workplace (Côté 1996, 423; Côté 2000, 207). "The identity capital model constitutes a developmental-

social psychological approach to identity formation that integrates psychological and sociological understandings of identity" (Côté 1999, 578; Côté 2000, 209). The psychological framework is built upon Erik Erikson's writings regarding ego-identity (1950; 1959; 1968; 1997). Its sociological roots are primarily based upon a negative response to some of the thinking espoused by Kenneth Gergen in his book *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life* (1991) and agreement with concepts raised by Anthony Giddens in the book *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age* (1991).

*Historic Shifts In The Identity Formation Process*

Côté speaks of societies as pre-modern, early-modern and late-modern. In these periods he argues identities were once ascribed in the pre-modern era, achieved in the early-modern era and are now managed in the late-modern era (Côté 1996, 420). Côté argues in "pre-modern society, social identity" was "largely determined by one's characteristics or attributes (like race, sex, parent's social status)" (1996, 421). In early-modern society identity was primarily fashioned upon the basis of achievement and attainment of material goods (Côté 1996, 421). He is not saying issues such as race, sex, status and personal achievement are no longer important. Instead, he is arguing the period of late-modernity is actually a period of fierce tribalism and increased competition. As a result it will be critically important for people to form an identity which enables them to effectively navigate an increasingly complex society comprised of a myriad of diverse identity markets (2000, 131).

Although Côté agrees with Gergen that the present society is inundated with messages about finding identity in self-saturation through such means as media and consumerism, he disagrees with the post-modern tenet of Gergen's writings that there is no longer any stable self. Gergen argues there are merely illusions of self which change and morph in manipulative and self-protective ways depending on a human being's current environment (1991). Côté instead affirms Giddens' stance that human beings are reflexive in nature as they seek to develop their identities, but in this process they are still able to form *a stable sense of self* rooted in personal biography and an ongoing narrative (1991, 54-55). It is only from the formation of *a stable sense of self* that they will be able to navigate the plethora of identity markets present in late-modern society.

*Explicating Identity Capital*

Côté argues the complexities of late-modernity create a myriad of *identity options*. For instances the explosion of technology alone has now made it possible for younger generations to experiment with and reinvent identities online (Palfrey and Gasser 2008, 17-37). As Gergen explains, many individuals take a passive approach to the overwhelming possibilities and simply allow the loudest messages to determine who they will become in any given moment (1991). A crux of the identity capital model is it argues for an active rather than a passive or default response to identity formation in late modern society. He believes emerging adults should take a proactive stance towards their own development and identity formation. In the midst of that proactive or agentic stance, emerging adults need to invest" in "who they are" and their response has the potential to

"reap future dividends in the "identity markets" of late-modern communities" (Côté 1996, 425).

The identity capital model argues "the most successful investors in the identity markets have portfolios comprising of two types of assets, tangible and intangible (Côté 1996, 426). Côté explains "tangible resources" are "effective as "passports" into other social and institutional spheres, inasmuch as they are vital in terms of getting by "gatekeepers" of various groups with whom one wants to be a member, as well as being accepted by established members" (Côté 1996, 426). The intangible assets include things such as "ego strength, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility and complexity, self-monitoring, critical thinking abilities," as well as a sense of purpose (Côté 1996, 426). "Tangible identity capital resources enable access to, and ability to benefit from, structural networks and positions, while intangible resources include various personality characteristics, especially agentic capacities in meeting an environment in such a way as to benefit from what it has to offer" (Côté 2002b, 120).

*Educating For Growth In Identity Capital*

Côté argues it is the responsibility of all professional educators to find ways to help students develop the skills necessary to navigate diverse identity networks as part of their university education (Côté 1996, 423; Côté 2000, 207). However, most of the literature surrounding identity capital is still developing the nascent construct from a sociological or psychological perspective. To date few articles have been written that illustrate in detail which educational processes are best suited for fostering growth in identity capital. Because of this dearth, people are left to individually search for

educational applications which might facilitate emerging adults in their acquisition of skills or qualities that will help them to be welcomed into diverse communities of strangers after graduation.

## *Evangelical Congregations In The United States*

A broad spectrum of literature surrounds the topic of evangelicalism in the United States. What follows is a small sample from this literature which can shed light on what InterVarsity students are facing as they seek to find their place in faith communities after graduation.

### What Does It Mean To Be An Evangelical?

Evangelical "became the common British and American name for the revival movements that swept back and forth across the English-speaking world and elsewhere during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Marsden 1991, 2). "Central to the evangelical gospel was the proclamation of Christ's saving work through his death on the cross and the necessity of personally trusting him for eternal salvation" (Marsden 1991, 2). Evangelicalism includes Christians who believe the following:

1. the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of the Bible,
2. the real historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture,
3. salvation to eternal life based on the redemptive work of Christ,
4. the importance of evangelism and missions, and
5. the importance of a spiritually transformed life." (Marsden 1991, 4-5)

In other words evangelicalism focuses on the need for personal conversion, demonstrating the gospel through activism, having a high regard for Scripture and

stressing the need for Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross for redemption (National Association of Evangelicals 2013). Being evangelical means "having a fairly strong transdenominational identity, whatever happens to be one's denominational affiliation" (Marsden 1991, 6).

## A Brief History Of Evangelicalism

Evangelicalism began in the 1730s through British revival movements led by people such as John Wesley (Bebbington 1993). The influence of these revival movements spread to the United States and in the nineteenth century "evangelicalism was a very broad coalition, made up of many subgroups. Though from differing denominations, these people were united with each other, and with persons from other nations in their zeal to win the world for Christ" (Marsden 1991, 2-3). Between the 1870s and 1920s the broad coalition split apart (Marsden 1980; 1991; Carpenter 1984). The more theologically liberal parts of the coalition "were willing to modify some central evangelical doctrines, such as the reliability of the Bible or the necessity of salvation only through the atoning sacrifice of Christ" (Marsden 1991, 3). The more theologically conservative parts of the coalition were unwilling to modify these central tenets and they became known as fundamentalists (Marsden 1980).

As a result of the theological differences, fundamentalists became increasingly strict in their desire to pull away from what they perceived to be liberal influences. The two groups were also known by the terms liberal or conservative Protestants. On "April 7, 1942, a group of about two hundred Christian men" met to "launch a religious movement they hoped would transform the character of conservative

Protestantism and literally change the course of American religious history" (Smith 1998, 1). These religious leaders wanted their religious identity to be tied to the core tenets of evangelicalism rather than to outward legalistic practices such as abstinence from things such as dancing or attending movie theaters which were common place in fundamentalist circles. That gathering was the birthplace of what is now referred to as the start of the modern evangelical movement in the United States (Smith 1998, 1).

Since that time the lines have become blurred regarding who is liberal and who is conservative, and who is evangelical and who is not. Often the distinction lies more with individual church pastors who are leading congregations rather than a distinction at the highest levels of a denomination (Wuthnow 1989, 184). Often "conservative churches are better at maintaining and growing their membership because they make more "costly demands upon members" and inspire "their members to witness to others" (Stark 2008, 25). The trend, however, is for conservative churches to compromise and "lose their organizational vigor, eventually to be replaced by less worldly groups, whereupon the process is repeated" (Finke and Stark 1992, 237).

"At the end of the twentieth century, about two-thirds of Americans claimed membership in a church or synagogue, and about one-third of Americans claimed to attend religious services weekly or nearly weekly" (Fischer and Hout 2006, 191). However, "scholars argue about how accurate these reports of attendance are (Chaves 2011, 42-43). Most acknowledge that respondents tend to err in the direction of over reporting attendance and also that people who are religiously active are more likely to answer surveys" (Fischer and Hout 2006, 191). As a result, these figures might be

overstated 10 to 30 percent. Broadly speaking there was a decline in church attendance by young Baby Boomers in the 1960s, a rise in church attendance in the 1980s because of a surge of religious conservatism, and a second aftershock in the 1990s and 2000s as youth became disaffected (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 91-133).

## Primary Research Regarding Trends In Evangelicalism

Numerous scholars and organizations are doing research regarding current trends within evangelical congregations in the United States. However, certain studies are more frequently cited when the topic is about emerging adults and their ability to find their place in faith communities. Although it is impossible at this time to give a detailed overview of each of these research projects, what follows is a brief synopsis to provide context for the statements which follow.

### *The General Social Survey*

The research most often cited comes from the General Social Survey, or GSS as it is often called. The General Social Survey was first developed in 1972 under what at that time was called the National Opinion Research Center located at the University of Chicago. “Except for the U. S. Census data, the GSS is the most frequently analyzed source of information in the social sciences” (General Social Survey 2013). “More than 20,000 journal articles, books and Ph.D. dissertations are based on the GSS” (General Social Survey 2013).

*The Pew Research Center*

The Pew Research Center was created in 1990 as a nonpartisan fact tank. In 1996 The Pew Charitable Trusts became the organization's sponsor (Pew Research Center 2013). The center spawned many initiatives including the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life. When research is published by this forum conflicts of interest and research methodology are always disclosed (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012a, 2012b, 2010). However, often the research and recommendations are based not solely on one study but on aggregated information from numerous sources.

*Faith Matters Surveys*

Authors claim the Faith Matters Surveys "are among the most thorough surveys of Americans' religious and civic lives ever conducted" (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 557). The surveys were conducted in 2006 by International Communications Research on behalf of Harvard University. The research was funded by the John Templeton Foundation and many of the leading academicians who work with research on religious trends in the U.S. were consulted on the project (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 557).

*Christian Smith And Colleagues*

Christian Smith's work is frequently cited in literature about trends within evangelicalism and religious trends in the lives of emerging adults. A book written by Smith and his colleagues, *American evangelicalism: Embattled and thriving* (1998), comes from data collected through the Evangelical Identity and Influence Project which

was funded through a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. It involves a three-year research process with interviews in the summer of 1995 and 1996, along with congregational observation (1998, 221-289). The semi-structured interviews in 1995 lasted two hours and included people from "six different locations around the United States" (Smith 1998, 221). From that data in 1996 a national telephone survey was developed and the response rate for that was 69 percent and 2,591 people responded (Smith 1998, 225-226). This "study focuses primarily on the beliefs, attitudes, opinions, commitments, and behaviors of *ordinary e*vangelicals, and not evangelical organizations and leadership" (Smith 1998, 21). A focus of the study is to understand why "some religious movements seem to thrive while others languish" (Smith 1998, 67).

Smith also published a book in which Michael Emerson was the lead author, *Divided by faith: Evangelical religion and the problem of race in America* (2000).This research was also funded through a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts (Emerson and Smith 2000, ix). Their findings arise from analysis of race relations in the United States, data from the GSS, original data gathered through 2,000 telephone interviews and approximately two hundred face-to-face interviews, as well as the writings of various authors (Emerson and Smith 2000, 18-19). In 2000 when the book was written Emerson and Smith write "evangelicals come from all ethnic and racial backgrounds, but nearly 90 percent of Americans who call themselves evangelicals are white" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 3). For that reason they explain their book focuses primarily on white evangelicals. Their research uncovers "how the organization of American religion leads to racially segregated congregations" and how the "very processes that make religion

strong in the United States simultaneously contribute to racialization" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 19).

Also, Smith and a team of researchers have been doing a longitudinal study with emerging adults that began when they ranged from 13-17 years of age. This research was funded through Lilly Endowment Inc. (Smith et al. 2005, vii; Smith et al. 2009, v), as well as funding from "The University of Notre Dame College of Arts and Letters and the John Templeton Foundation" (Smith et al. 2009, v). To date three books have arisen from this research (Smith et al. 2005; 2009; 2011). They conducted a "nationally representative telephone survey of 3,290" adolescents "followed by personal interviews with 267 of them in 45 states …. In 2005, a second telephone survey was conducted with most of the same subjects, and 122 of the same respondents were interviewed" (Smith and Snell 2009, 3). "In 2007 and 2008" they "conducted a third wave" of surveys and interviews (Smith et al. 2011, 17). By that time respondents were18-23 years old.

*The Barna Group*

David Kinnaman is the President of the Barna Group. "Over the past 10 years, Barna Group has interviewed 27,140 Millennials in 206 studies" and monthly they are adding to their research base (Barna 2013). Kinnaman has written two books about the religious practices of emerging adults. *Unchristian: What a new generation really thinks about Christianity … and why it matters* (Kinnaman and Lyons 2007) focuses on the perceptions emerging adults hold about churches and evangelicalism. *You lost me: Why young Christians are leaving church … and rethinking faith* (2011) addresses why

young people who used to attend churches frequently as teenagers are no longer participating in faith communities. His books and the trends reflected on the Barna Group's websites are based upon multiple studies and aggregated data. Sociologist Bradley Wright takes issue with some of the Barna Research because he believes they at times make sweeping generalizations from data and they lack peer review (2010, 14-19).

*The Baylor Institute With Gallup*

Rodney Stark was a sociology professor at Baylor. His book *What Americans really believe: New findings from the Baylor surveys of religion* (2008) examines religious beliefs and practices in the United States. His analysis compares responses from a regional and national survey conducted in the early 1960s with three national studies carried out between 2005-2007 on behalf of Baylor's Institute for Studies of Religion (2008, 1-2). The polling was conducted by Gallup. More than 1,600 adults were randomly chosen from many parts of the United States to answer a 350 item survey. The premise of his book is that "Americans differ greatly in their religious tastes and convictions" (Stark 2008, 2) and many common assumptions about their religious practices are myths which are not valid.

*The National Congregations Study*

Mark Chaves is a sociologist at Duke who oversees the National Congregations Study. It is "an ongoing national survey effort to gather information about the basic characteristics" of congregations in the United States (National Congregations Study 2013, 1). It uses information collected in conjunction with the General Social

Survey to identify a "nationally representative sample of religious congregations" that researchers then use to find a key informant or leader to interview such as a pastor, priest, rabbi, etc. (National Congregations Study 2013, 1). Data are collected and trends are analyzed. Primary waves of research were conducted in 1998 and between 2006 and 2007. The research is funded through a major grant from the Lilly Endowmwent as well as additional grants from four other foundations and institutes. Since it is done in conjunction with the General Social Survey, data for the study is collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.

*The National Young Adults And Religion Study*

Robert Wuthnow initiated this study in 2004 because at the time he felt "little attention was being paid to the special needs and interests of young adults, either by researchers or religious organizations" (Wuthnow 2007, 233). His study involved analyzing existing national survey data. These included The Arts and Religion Survey conducted by Gallup, the Civic Involvement Survey sponsored by the Lilly Endowment and the Pew Charitable Trusts, and the GSS just to name a few. The purpose of this study was to mine data from various surveys by examining the specific demographic of adults age 21 to 45. In addition to drawing upon existing survey data, Wuthnow "commissioned approximately one hundred in depth, qualitative interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to hear in their own words from some clergy and from young adults themselves how they were thinking about religion and spirituality" (Wuthnow 2007, 234). His focus was on young adults who were no longer in university or living with parents (Wuthnow 2007, 235).

*Primary Weakness Of These Research Studies*

Putnam and Campbell mention that the "General Social Survey was conducted only in English and thus omitted Spanish-only speakers" and, as such, it "exaggerates the decline" of Catholicism in the U.S. (2010, 141). The Faith Matters Survey was offered in Spanish. However, since the majority of religious surveys are conducted in English, linguistic barriers cause an under representation of church involvement in the United States. The degree of this under representation will not be known until religious surveys are offered in multiple languages so the growth and vitality of diaspora faith communities can be captured in the statistics as well.

## The Evangelical "Religious Marketplace"

Evangelicalism in the United States is best represented "by the metaphor of a religious marketplace" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 136). "Some readers may shudder at the use of "market" terminology in discussions of religion" (Finke and Stark 1992, 17). However, unlike many nations in Europe, the United States never had a religious monopoly where one religion or denomination was sanctioned as the official religion that everyone must follow. From its earliest founding religion had to be *marketed* (Berger 1967, 138). Now "religious organizations compete for members and the "invisible hand" of the marketplace is as unforgiving in ineffective religious firms as it is of their commercial counterparts" (Finke and Stark 1992, 17).

"Competitive marketing theory" seems to represent "the best orienting framework and set of assumptions with which to construct an explanation for evangelicalism's vitality" in the United States (Smith 1998, 85). It spawns

"entrepreneurial leaders who promote an immense variety of religious products" while also incorporating a "rich variety of Christian traditions and positions into a common identity-movement without relying on geographical or organizational centralization or uniformity to do so" (Smith 1998, 86). What follows are some of the characteristics of evangelical marketplace in the United States.

*Homogeneous Congregations*

Putnam writes that "faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America" (2000, 66) and that dimensions of social capital vary between two aspects. Bridging social capital brings people together and bonding social capital holds people together (Putnam 2000, 22-23). "Bridging and bonding social capital are good for different things. Strong ties with intimate friends may ensure chicken soup when you're sick, but weak ties with distant acquaintances are more likely to produce leads for a new job" (Putnam 2000, 363). The problem in the United States is most evangelical churches are homogeneous in nature (Wright 2010, 82), although predominantly white congregations are slowly growing a bit more diverse over time (Chaves 2011, 28-29). Evangelical congregations are more effective as repositories of bonding social capital rather than being known as places that can easily bring together racially diverse people (Smith and Emerson 2000, 141; Wright 2010, 82-86).

Evangelical churches are less welcoming of Asians and Hispanics when compared to mainline denominations, Catholics, Jewish and others (Wuthnow 2007, 194). "Church going seems to encourage young adults to be more accepting of people

from ethnic groups different from their own; yet evangelicals, who go to church more than anyone else, are less accepting" (Wuthnow 2007, 197). Practices which reproduce racial divisions "are invisible to most Whites" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 9). However, the situation is not limited to them. Racially homogeneous congregations are common in the United States because "immigrants, now as in the past, frequently turn to religion as a source of identity" (Wuthnow 2007, 183). Also, many involved in church planting movements and evangelism have taken the homogeneous unit principle to heart. It is the concept that people prefer to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or cultural barriers (McGavran 1970; Wagner 1979). In this way many church planters and church leaders *market* their faith congregations to very specific demographic niches.

Some believe planting homogeneous faith communities is against Scripture and they urge for planting multiethnic congregations (Emetuche 2010, 77). However, when people speak out about this, "it is not just that the prophetic voice is fragmented; the prophetic voices that call for overcoming group divisions and inequalities typically are ghettoized" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 166). "They will have followers, but they will be a minority voice, both in terms of size and strength" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 166). "Truly multiethnic or multiracial" congregations remain "very rare and difficult to sustain over the long run" (Chaves 2011, 28).

*For Married People With Children*

Most evangelical faith communities are family centric. In the United States faith communities are seen as places where couples marry and raise their children. Yet, trends in emerging adulthood indicate people are marrying later and having fewer

children (Arnett 2006a, 5-7). With regards to marital trends, they help "to identify *where* the decline in religious attendance has occurred" (Wuthnow 2007, 55). "Married couples may be attending religious services at the same rate now as a generation ago, but there are significantly fewer of them" (Wuthnow 2007, 55). Wuthnow argues the trend away from church attendance is due to delays in marriage (2007, 51-70) and "data from Pew Research Center polls are also consistent with this argument, showing that among adults under 30, married people are more likely to have a religious affiliation than unmarried people" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012, 30).

"Religious faith and practice generally associate with settled lives" (Smith and Snell 2009, 75). "Transitions by definition break patterns and routines, and establishing new ones that are very similar to the ones practiced earlier are more difficult than either simply continuing with the same ones or completely changing them" (Smith and Snell 2009, 75). Emerging adulthood has always been rife with transition yet "young adults are less likely to participate in a religious service than they were a generation ago. Those who do populate the pews are an increasingly skewed cross-section of young adults (Chaves 2011, 52-53). They are the married minority, whereas the unmarried majority scarcely frequent congregations at all" (Wuthnow 2007, 214).

Wuthnow warns that because of these changes the United States is "on the same trajectory as Western Europe" with regards to a looming decrease in the size and influence of faith communities (Wuthnow 2007, 66-67). Stark believes Wuthnow's argument is unwarranted and that emerging adults will return when they marry and have children (2008, 183). However, other researchers disagree with Stark's assessment

(Kinnaman and Lyons 2007, 23; Smith et al. 2011, 12). Although it used to be assumed that young adults would return to the church once they had children, Barna Group research indicates "the largest share of parents (50%) reported that having children did not influence their connection to a church" (2010, 1). "This perspective was most common among parents in the Northeast and West" as well as among university graduates (Barna Group 2010, 1). Of the remaining 50%, Barna Group research reveals people from lower income homes, Hispanic parents, and politically conservative people are "most likely to describe an increased level of church activity after becoming parents" (2010, 1).

*Confusing Messages To Women*

Diverse and confusing beliefs about the roles of women are present in many evangelical faith communities in the United States (Tucker 1992). Much of the controversy involves interpretation of 1 Tim 2:11-15 and the meaning of the word *kepahlē* or "head." The passages in dispute regarding women leading in the church are primarily two: 1 Cor 14:33-38 and 1 Tim 2:8-15. The other passages relate primarily to the issue of a woman's role in marriage and these are found in Gen 3:16; 1 Cor 11:2-16; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-19 and 1 Pet 3:1-7. Unfortunately the debate over the roles of women can be "called an emerging civil war within evangelicalism" (George 2007, 266). War stories are common as many women have been hurt in the debates and battles (Ingersoll 2003, 61-97). A spectrum exists within evangelicalism in the United States between complimentarianism and egalitarianism regarding how much leadership a woman can have in a faith community. "The issue of women in leadership is not a minor

or marginal one. It profoundly affects the sense of identity and worth on *both* sides of the gender line ” (Willard 2010, 11).

Complimentarianism

Complementarianism is the theological view that men and women must maintain distinct roles in families and faith communities. It is the belief that men and women are “equal in essence” yet perceived to have different functions (Schreiner 1991, 128). Within this view *“biblical headship* for the husband is the divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christlike, servant-leadership, protection and provision in the home. *Biblical submission* for the wife is the divine calling to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts” (Piper and Grudem 2006, 52-53). Complementarianism covers a broad spectrum. “At one end are those who view male headship in marriage as primarily symbolic and who permit women to participate in church leadership but bar them from the position of head pastor. At the other end of the spectrum are those who draw clear and absolute demarcations between men and women in almost every dimension of life” (Ingersoll 2003, 16). Conservative complimentarians believe women cannot be pastors or elders (Piper and Grudem 2006, 77) and the act of “teaching” is narrowly defined (Moo 2006, 179-193). It is this more conservative group within complimentarianism which is publishing books like *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Piper and Grudem 2006). This text alone provides articles from twenty-two authors. People on the more conservative end of complimentarianism believe female roles should be limited to things such as women’s ministries, children’s ministries, music ministries,

and gender specific counseling. Often if women move outside these designated spheres of ministry in the church their behavior is seen as disobedience to God's rule and order.

Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism refers to "*biblical equality"* between the genders" (Johnson 210, 18). It "does *not* infer sameness or interchangeability of male and female. Rather, what is meant is that the Bible does not teach a stereotyped gender "role" subordination of a woman to a man. There is an equality of essential worth, rank, privilege, standing, and full humanity without stereotyped gender functions as part of each one's basic identity" (Johnson 2010, 18). It is the belief God gifts people not on the basis of gender but rather on what he desires for them to do in the world (Barton 2010, 40). Within egalitarianism in the Gen 3:15 passage "domination by one gender over the other was not God's ideal" that should be upheld but rather it was a prediction "of consequences" that Christians should "work hard to overcome and that Jesus himself would fully overcome" as part of his redemptive work (Barton 2010, 42). Proponents of egalitarianism argue older and more comprehensive lexicons never include the "common English usage of "authority over," "leader," "director," "superior rank" or anything similar as meanings" for the word *kepahlē* or "head" (Tucker 1992, 127-128). Also, it is the belief that if women are required to continually pay "*for Eve's transgression with their silence and submission"* human beings "*negate the full redemptive power of the gospel"* (Barton 2010, 44).

Additional Concerns

The intensity of the debate has been increasing in recent years. In 1991 proponents of complimentarianism did not propose that they were speaking for evangelicalism (Piper and Grudem 2006, 403-405). However, when the text was revised the new foreword declares "pagan ideas underlie evangelical egalitarianism" and these views "must always lead to an eventual denial of the gospel" (Duncan and Stinson 2006, xii). Yet, having "women in public Christian ministry is a historical distinctive of evangelicalism" (Larson 2007, 213). Evangelicalism, "not theologically liberal traditions," from its inception in the early 1700s included women in leadership roles in the church such as "preaching, teaching, pastoring, administering the sacraments and giving spiritual oversight" (Larsen 2007, 213).

Roles are confusing and inconsistent because for many years women have been encouraged to become missionaries and lead overseas, yet they are not permitted to do the same ministry tasks on United States soil (Tucker 1992, 177-183). "Several times women reported that, when they expressed interest in leadership in their churches they were offered positions in the nursery or the Sunday school. Women who indicated that this was not exactly what they had in mind were reminded by church leaders that those who would lead in the church must do so by serving" (Ingersoll 2003, 114). "It has primarily been a change in evangelicalism in the last sixty years in the United States that had brought what now is a substantial controversy about women in leadership in evangelical churches" (Larsen 2007, 231-235).

*Status Quo More Than Social Justice*

Evangelicals in the United States "are generally not counter-cultural. With some significant exceptions, they avoid "rocking the boat," and live within the confines of the larger culture" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 22). "They share the Protestant work ethic, support laissez-faire economics, and sometimes fail to evaluate whether the social system is consistent with their Christianity" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 22). Yet, evangelicals also "believe in "engaged orthodoxy" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 3). Engaged orthodoxy means "taking the conservative faith beyond the boundaries of evangelical subculture, and engaging the larger culture and society. To be sure, for many non-evangelical Americans, this is controversial. For evangelicals, however, this engaged orthodoxy is part of their very identity" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 3).

"Evangelicals want their traditional faith to offer solutions to pressing social problems, such as race relations" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 3). However, most white evangelicals have a deficit tool kit which causes them to see racial issues in simplistic and individualist ways (Emerson and Smith 2000, 115-133, 153-168). Evangelicals employ a "personal influence strategy" with regards to social change (Smith 1998, 187). "They believe the only truly effective way to change the world is one-individual-at-a-time through the influence of interpersonal relationships. Most ordinary evangelicals and leaders alike seem to share this view" (Smith 1998, 187). That is their toolkit. Because of this "they routinely offer one-dimensional analyses and solutions for multidimensional social issues and problems" (Smith 1998, 188-189).

## *The Situation For Twenty-Somethings*

"Young adults are no longer born into faith communities that embrace them fully and command their allegiance over a lifetime" (Wuthnow 2007, 124). "By examining the world of contemporary emerging adults" it is possible to "hold up a mirror that reflects back to adults a telling picture" of what twenty-somethings might be facing in the transition to faith communities after graduation from university (Smith and Snell 2009, 4).

### Relatively Nothing For Them

Society has always provided institutions to support various phases of development. Elementary schools, secondary schools and universities are examples. For those who do not go to university, many enter the military for support in their development. Wuthnow believes "religious congregations have followed suit. Sunday school programs for younger children, and high school or campus ministries for teenagers and young adults provide support and instill values. The amazing thing about this pattern of support and socialization is that" for the most part it "comes to a halt about the time a young person reaches the age of twenty-one or twenty-two" (2007, 12). "After providing significant institutional support for the developmental tasks that occurred before" churches "provide *almost nothing* for the developmental tasks that are accomplished when people are in their twenties and thirties" (Wuthnow 2007, 12). "Evidence suggests overwhelmingly that young adulthood is a time when other social institutions fail to be of much help …. Yet nearly all the major decisions a person has to make about marriage,

child rearing, and work happen after these support systems have ceased to function" (Wuthnow 2007, 216).

Wutnow believes the void is creating a situation where "younger adults are having to invent their own ways of making decisions and seeking support for those decisions" (2007, 12-13). He writes, "Congregations *could* be a valuable source of support for young adults. They *could* be places where young adults gravitate to talk about the difficult decisions they are facing or to meet other people of the same age. Congregations *could* be guiding the career decisions of younger adult or helping them think about their budgets and personal priorities" (Wuthnow 2007, 13). However, many faith communities are uncomfortable dealing with controversial issues such as "science, sexuality, alcohol, politics, environmental issues, and other religions" and the "null curriculum leaves many emerging adults ill prepared to face the questions that will loom large in adult life" (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 97).

## Church Attendance Is Down

"Millennials currently attend church or worship services at lower rates than Baby Boomers did when they were younger" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010, 7). Figures indicate "18% of Millennials currently report attending religious services weekly or nearly weekly, compared with 26% of Boomers in the later 1970s" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010, 7). Most do not necessarily feel "uncomfortable in religious services" but they do not feel at home or a sense of belonging in them (Smith and Snell 2009, 152). They express concerns that faith communities are hypocritical, too focused on getting converts, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political

and judgmental (Kinnaman and Lyons 2007, 29-30). Many who used to attend but do not attend any longer have the "sense that the decision to disconnect was out of their hands" (Kinnaman 2011, 10). One-quarter of those interviewed who were not raised in the church believe Christianity in the United States has "gotten off track and is not what Christ intended. *Modern-day Christianity no longer seems Christian*" to them (Kinnaman and Lyons, 2007, 29).

Barna research reveals 59% of millennials who grew up in Christian churches walk away "from either their faith or from the institutional church at some point in their first decade of adult life" (Barna Group 2013a, 1). "When asked what has helped their faith grow, "church" does not even make the top 10 factors" (Barna Group 2013a, 1). However, approximately "one-quarter of 18 to 29-year-olds are practicing Christians, meaning they attend church at least once a month and strongly affirm that their religious faith is very important in their life" (Barna Group 2013a, 1). Many of these young adults say they are "more excited about church" than at any other time in their lives (Kinnaman 2011, 27). "Two out of five (42 percent) of eighteen – to twenty-nine-year-old Christians say they are "very concerned" about" their generation "leaving the church." (Kinnaman 2011, 26-27). Barna research is shared frequently with pastors yet Wright believes the claims are alarmist, citing that most generations are concerned about the faith commitments of the generation which follows them (2010, 59-62).

## Relationships Essential For Staying

Emerging adults who are staying and are happy in their faith communities cite having close personal friendships with other adults inside the church. Relationships

"are the driving force. Being loyal to friends is one of their highest values. They have a strong need to belong, usually to a tribe of other loyal people who know them well and appreciate them" (Kinnaman and Lyons, 2007, 22).

## Other Factors For Staying

While the ability to form close personal friendships in faith communities is essential, other factors are salient as well. Emerging adults "want to be taken seriously today- not for some distant future leadership position" (Barna 2013a, 5). They welcome guidance but they want it in a form that "is dialogical and mutual rather than unidirectional" (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 206). Barna Group research points to five ways faith communities can build deeper, more lasting connections with millennials. These include the following:

1. Make room for meaningful relationships.
2. Help them develop discernment skills.
3. Make reverse mentoring a priority.
4. Embrace the potency of vocational discipleship.
5. Facilitate connection with Jesus. (Barna Group 2013a, 2-6)

### *Twenty-Somethings' Religious Identity*

Religion is a principle source of identity strength (Erikson 1968, 31; Josselson 1996, 235-236). One of the pillars of identity formation is "developing an ideology, a world view, a way of making sense of the world" and this "includes religious beliefs" (Arnett 2004, 165). Yet, emerging adulthood "is a time when many form

religious beliefs which differ from their parents and become skeptical of religious institutions" (Arnett 2004, 165-187).

## Shaped In Faith Communities

"Faith is a patterning, connective, relational activity embodied and shaped not within the individual alone" (Parks 2000, 89). "It is by being located in social groups- which themselves have formed and sustain meaningful collective identities- that one comes to know who one is, what one should do with one's life, and why" (Smith 1998, 90). However to move from various statuses of religious identity formation, such as from a foreclosed identity to one which is achieved, faith communities must be secure enough to allow difficult questions and the uncomfortable dialogue which is needed for development. Some believe that although faith communities can play a significant role in identity formation in emerging adulthood, they often abdicate their role (Phinney and Rosenthal 1992, 178).

## Not A Priority For Most

Côté writes "with respect to ideological identity" his research on religious identity formation during the twenty-something years "shows very little activity, which suggests most emerging adults have already made their mind up or avoided the issue entirely and then stuck with that position" (2006, 107). This research finding resembles what others have found as well (Clydesdale 2007; Smith and Snell 2009). "Emerging adults are primarily dedicated in this phase of their lives to achieving their own financial, identity, and household independence from their parents. Serious religious faith and

practice do not necessarily directly conflict with that mission, but they are not crucial or intrinsic to it either" (Smith and Snell 2009, 76). Many emerging adults do not prioritize this aspect of their lives until they find themselves immersed in self-destructive patterns (Smith and Snell 2009, 85) or they need to change life course (Masten et al. 2006, 179).

## The Rise Of The "Nones"

Historically a person's religious affiliation has been a key component of his or her religious identity. Yet, in a recent study conducted by The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, researchers discovered "one-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated (2012, 9). This reflects the highest percentages recorded in the history of Pew Research Center polling. "Americans describe their religious affiliation in terms that more closely match their level of involvement in churches and other religious organizations" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012, 11). "The decline is concentrated among white Protestants, both evangelical and mainline" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012, 13).

"The growth in the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans – sometimes called the rise of the "nones" – is largely driven by generational replacement" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012, 10). "Nearly one-in-five adults under age 30 (18%) say they were raised in a religion but are now unaffiliated with any particular faith" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010, 4). In the Pew study "two-thirds or more of the unaffiliated say that churches and other religions institutions are too concerned with money and power (70%) and too involved in politics (67%) (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012a, 29). "Their actions and identities are formed not only

by their understanding of what is, but also of what ought to be" (Smith 1998, 90). "People who are not particularly religious and who are not conservative Republicans are more likely to say" they have no religious affiliation (Chaves 2011, 21).

There are various hypotheses regarding what is causing the change. One rationale for the increase in the rise of "nones" is a reaction against being identified with the Religious Right (Putman and Campbell 2010, 120-121). The Pew Research Center agrees with this hypothesis (2012a, 29). "A majority of the religiously unaffiliated clearly think that religion can be a force for good in society, with three-quarters saying religious organizations bring people together and help strengthen community bonds (78%) and a similar number saying religious organizations play an important role in helping the poor and needy (77%)" (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2012b, 14). Nonetheless, negative perceptions or experiences are such that these individuals would prefer to religiously self-identify as nothing. "These data do not prove" young adults are "shifting directly from evangelical faith to a complete lack of religious identity. But the timing does suggest that both indicators might have been moved by some common change in the religious marketplace" (Putnam and Campbell 2010, 125). The change in religious identity to unaffiliated might be more a reflection of the change in church attendance rather than a change or loss in religious beliefs (Wright 2010, 45).

## A Counter Trend

Despite attention being given to the rising "nones" there is a counter trend. There are emerging adult Christ-followers "who are passionate, committed, and bursting to engage the world for the sake of the gospel" (Kinnaman 2011, 26-27). Smith and his

colleagues found “most emerging adults today- contrary to widespread popular perceptions and media reports- have little care about, investment in, or hope for the larger world around them” (Smith et al. 2011, 10). However, they say of the counter trend that these emerging adults:

> believe that in fact they “can make a difference.” They see opportunities for having an impact on society for the better and believe they are obliged to take on those challenges. They seek to enhance economic and educational opportunity, grassroots urban renewal, racial justice, the end of human trafficking, and other causes through creative communication, community organizing, and social movement activism. They view anything less as selfish indifference that is morally intolerable. (Smith and Snell 2009, 73)

“Some of these young believers have stayed deeply connected to a local parish or congregation” while others are a bit disillusioned with the church but are engaged in mission and ministry outside of it” (Kinnaman 2011, 26-27). “Among Millennials who are affiliated with a religion,” their intensity of “religious affiliation is as strong today as among previous generations (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010, 5). However, if something significant does not change in the religious marketplace, “with fewer and fewer children in each successive cohort being brought up in an organized religion" one can expect religion “to continue to decline as a normative influence in the transition to adulthood and therefore as a less important source of adult identity” (Côté and Bynner 2008, 262).

### *Educating For Market Place Realities*

“There is something particularly powerful and poignant about the “twenty-something” years, harboring, as they do, both promise and vulnerability” (Parks 2000,

xi). Although statistical data is conflicting at times and using past trends to predict future behavior is imprecise at best (Wright 2010, 72-73), educating for development in emerging adulthood can emphasize supporting that potential (Tanner 2006, 47). "Emerging adulthood is arguably the period of the life course when the possibility for dramatic change is greatest" (Arnett 2004, 190). What follows are three educational constructs found in student development literature which can help to inform a response to these market place realities and which also illuminate interview data gathered from InterVarsity graduates.

## Marginaliy And Mattering

Nancy Schlossberg is often cited as the precedent writer on the construct of "marginality versus mattering" within the field of student development (1989, 5-15). She discovered that in times of transition, people "often feel marginal and that they do not matter" (Schlossberg 1989, 6).

### *What Does The Construct Mean?*

The construct was introduced first in social psychology literature by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981). The construct has societal implications but for the purposes of this research the focus will be individual application. Marginality at this level is best understood as the opposite of mattering. The "construct of *mattering* refers to the perception that" a person is significant in the world and can "somehow make a difference" (Thomas 2011, 485). It also refers to "the feeling that others depend" on the person, are interested in him or her, and are concerned with the person's fate (Rosenberg

and McCullough 1981, 165). “The most elementary form of mattering is the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person” (Rosenberg and McCullough 1981, 164). It is the sense that people care about what the person thinks, wants, or does (Rosenberg and McCullough 1981, 10).

Perceptions regarding marginality or mattering are critical for they cause people to be motivated or unmotivated to engage (Scholssberg 1984, 28; 1989, 9). Mattering involves attention, importance, dependence, and appreciation (Schlossberg 1989, 9-11). Dependence relates not only on the idea that a person depends on others but that others are also depending on him or her (Schlossberg 1989, 10, Rosenberg and McCullough 1981, 165). It is the sense that “other people will be proud” of the person’s “accomplishments or saddened” by the person’s “failures” (Schlossberg 1989, 10).

“The polar themes of marginality and mattering connect” all people “rich and poor, young and old, male and female” (Schlossberg 1989, 6). They raise imperative questions about belonging such as: “Do we make a difference; do others care about us” (Schlossberg 1989, 6)? “The perceived impact of mattering is accepted in higher education” (Tover et al. 2009, 154) and it is seen as “an aspect of identity” (Tover et al. 2009, 155). Mattering is also a significant tenet in Christian teaching about the Body of Christ, for each person is deemed to have value and is provided mutual roles of giving and receiving ministry (Rom 12, 1 Cor 12; 1 Pet 2:4-5). People who believe they do not matter are prone to depression and mental health issues (Thomas 2011, 485).

*Who Is Most Vulnerable?*

"Every time an individual changes roles or experiences a transition, the potential for feeling marginal arises. The larger the difference between the former role and the new role the more marginal the person may feel, especially if there are no norms for the new roles" (Schlossberg 1989, 7). The university "freshman, marginal at first, can become a part of the community, yet this same person will feel marginal many more times in life- possibly after graduation on entering the job market or moving to a new city" (Schlossberg 1989, 8). "People moving from one city to another often feel marginal" for they are "often nagged by the question, do I belong in this new place" (Schlossberg 1989, 7) or would anyone notice if I disappeared (Scholssberg 1989, 10)? "Often people in the midst of one transition experience other transitions, which makes coping especially difficult" (Schlossberg 1984, 35).

*What Actions Can Be Taken?*

In society as a whole "social action can alleviate permanent marginal status" (Schlossberg 1989, 8). In educational institutions "those working to build a sense of community through activities are challenged to understand why certain individuals get involved, thereby creating community among themselves, and why others seem unable to establish connections or a meaningful level of involvement" (Schlossberg 1989, 6). If the construct is true, "that mattering is a motive and does determine behavior" care needs to be taken to ensure "programs, practices, and policies are helping people feel they matter" (Schlossberg 1989, 11). "Mattering is important to all adult learners" (Schlossberg et al.

1991, 201) and "the creation of environments that clearly indicate to all students that they matter will urge them to greater involvement" (Schlossberg 1989, 14).

Educators "need to examine the type of transition (anticipated, unanticipated, or non-event), the context of the transition (relationship of person to transition, setting in which the transition occurs), and the impact of the transition on the individual's life (on relationships, routines, assumptions, roles)" (Schlossberg 1984, 35). Transitions are a time of liminality and frequently they feel like periods of invisibility (Turner 2001, 48). "Emerging adulthood acts as a "hinge" moment in many individuals' lives" where they are "caught in the "liminal space" between adolescence and adulthood" (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 205). Schlossberg and her colleagues believe "supports are needed by most people as they leave" university and this transition period is an "area for creative intervention" (Schlossberg et al. 1991, 163). She and her colleagues recommend developmental mentors who ask questions "that can help adult learners integrate their knowledge" (Schlossberg et al. 1991, 173). They also believe "referrals for career planning and placement services" are needed as well as "referrals to transition groups" (Schlossberg et al. 1991, 177-189). They argue there are numerous pay offs for educational institutions when adult learners are supported (Schlossberg et al. 1991, 208-226).

## Theory Of Involvement

Alexander Astin's "Theory of Involvement" was first published in 1984. He developed the theory as a way to bring order to the extensive amount of literature surrounding "student development in higher education" (1984, 297). By his own

admission part of the appeal of his theory lies in its simplicity (Astin 1984, 297). The crux of the theory is *"students learn by becoming involved"* (Astin 1985, 36).

*Explicating Astin's Theory*

The theory argues it "is not so much what the individual thinks or feels, but what the individual does, how he or she behaves, that defines and identifies involvement" (Astin 1975, 298). Astin does not deny "that motivation is an important aspect of involvement " (1984, 298). "On a more subtle level, the theory of student involvement encourages educators to focus less on what they do and more on what the student does: how motivated the student is and how much time and energy the student devotes to the learning process" (1984, 301). However, Astin believes involvement is the "more useful construct for educational practitioners" (1984, 301). He believes the question "how do you motivate students" is probably a more difficult question to answer than "how do you get students involved" (Astin 1984, 301)?

"The theory of student involvement explicitly acknowledges that the psychic and physical time and energy of students are finite. Thus, educators are competing with other forces in the student's life for a share of that finite time and energy" (Astin 1984, 301). "Administrators and faculty members must recognize that virtually every institutional policy and practice … can affect the way students spend their time and the amount of effort they devote to academic pursuits" (Astin 1984, 301-302). He argues that "an excellent learning environment is characterized by at least three conditions: student involvement, high expectations, and assessment and feedback" (Astin 1985, 36).

*The Context From Which Astin's Theory Arose*

At the time of its development, most educational theories were falling into three broad categories. *Content theory* hailed "student learning and development depended primarily on exposure to the right subject matter" (Astin 1984, 299). Astin writes:

> In the subject-matter approach to learning, those professors with the greatest knowledge of a particular subject have the highest prestige…. The most serious limitation of the subject-matter theory is that it assigns students a passive role in the learning process: The "knowledgeable" professor lectures to the "ignorant" student so that the student can acquire the same knowledge. (1984, 299)

The *resource theory* of pedagogy "maintains that if adequate resources are brought together in one place, student learning and development will occur" (Astin 1984, 299). As a result, administrators in these institutions devote most of their time to gathering ever more resources and financial costs grow exponentially. Since "high achieving students" are perceived as being a resource as well, because of the finite nature of these resources one institution can only benefit "at the expense of other institutions" (Astin 1984, 300).

The *individualized or eclectic theory* espouses "no single approach to subject matter, teaching, or resource allocation is adequate for all students. Rather, it attempts to identify the curricular content and instructional methods that best meet the needs of the individual student" (Astin 1984, 300). He explains "the most obvious limitation of the individualized theory is that it can be extremely expensive to implement, because each student normally requires considerable individualized attention" (Astin 1984, 300).

"The content and resource approaches to pedagogy tend to favor the well-prepared, assertive student. In contrast, the concept of student involvement emphasizes giving greater attention to the passive, reticent, or unprepared student" (Astin 1984, 305). "Not all passive students are uninvolved in their academic work, nor are they necessarily experiencing academic difficulties. But passivity is an important warning sign" (Astin 1984, 305).

*The Drop Out Phenomenon*

"The theory of student involvement has its roots in a longitudinal study of university dropouts (Astin 1975) that endeavored to identify factors in the university environment that significantly affect the student's persistence at university" (Astin 1984, 302). Astin believes "the persister-dropout phenomenon provides an ideal paradigm for studying student involvement" (1984, 303). If one "conceives of involvement as occurring along a continuum, the act of dropping out can be viewed as the ultimate form of noninvolvement, and dropping out anchors the involvement continuum at the lowest end" (Astin 1984, 303). Scripture sends a similar message that dropping out is detrimental to one's spiritual growth and development (Heb 3:12-13; Heb 10:23-25). Although Astin developed his theory decades ago, the theory of involvement is still proving to be relevant in promoting development and positive educational outcomes (Astin 1999, 587; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005, 53-54; Gellin 2003, 753; Huang and Chang 2004; Flowers 2004; Berger and Milem 1999, 641).

## Mentoring Communities

Sharon Daloz Park's concept of developing "mentoring communities" is another lens to view challenges facing twenty-somethings in the evangelical religious market place (2011, 174-202). While mentorship is frequently cited in literature surrounding emerging adulthood, often the term is used to represent a one-to-one relationship between an older mentor and a younger protégé. Parks posits that a personal mentor is what one needs if he or she is going to enter a profession or organization "as it is presently defined" (2011, 174). However, "if one is going to be initiated into a profession, organization, or corporation and the societies they serve as *they could become*, only a mentoring community will do" (Parks 2011, 174).

A mentoring community is a network of belonging which provides physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual support in tangible ways (Parks 2011, 176). Mentoring communities might last for brief periods of time or they may extend for years. Despite how long they last they can be extremely influential (Parks 2011, 176). The features of mentoring communities include networks of belonging, big-enough questions, encounters with otherness, specific habits of the mind, and vision for the future (Parks 2011, 176-196). Encounters with otherness provide transformative moments of perspective taking and opportunities for examining deeply held but often tacit assumptions. The specific habits of mind necessary are those needed to create "habits of discourse and inclusion that invite genuine dialogue, strengthen critical thought, encourage connective-holistic awareness, and develop the contemplative mind" (Parks 2011, 185).

Mentoring communities challenge emerging adults to reach their potential. They are places where people listen, seek to understand, and are willing to be affected and change their minds (Parks 2011, 185). They are living examples of humans sharpening one another (Prov 27:17). They provide safe places to "reach for the ideal" and begin to imagine how life might be (Parks 2011, 190-197). Without that challenge emerging adults can remain in default settings, "busy and stressed but distracted from matters worthy of their interest, concern, and practical engagement" (Parks 2011, 180).

In university settings mentoring communities incorporate the voices of peers as well as a professor (Parks 2011, 174). "Without question, the "mentoring gap" in emerging adulthood is one of the most significant factors blunting spiritual formation in these years" (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 212). "The absence of mentoring means that emerging adults are left vulnerable to the all-pervasive influence of media, advertising, and consumer culture" at "the very time when a future-driven anticipation should be beckoning them forth to kingdom living" (Setran and Kiesling 2013, 212).

### *Summarizing Precedent Literature*

The first half of the literature review highlights the identity formation process. It includes insights from the Human Life Cycle, the Identity Status Model and the Bioecological Theory of Human Development because they are referenced so frequently in literature about emerging adulthood. Ethnic identity formation is also briefly mentioned because half of the people in the research sample are from minority cultures within the United States. Theological reflection about *imago Dei* is included for it can provide a bridge for relating to ethnic and generational "others." Identity

interventions, self-authorship and identity capital are highlighted as examples of educational models that can shed fresh light on the developmental process during this pivotal time in the lives of emerging adults.

The second half of the literature review is focused on sociological research about the meaning of evangelicalism and its historical path in the United States. It also includes background about the most salient research being conducted with faith communities in the United States. This information is shared to give context to comments made by researchers regarding the situation emerging adults, also referred to as twenty-somethings or millennials, are facing in evangelical faith communities. Since a person's religious identity is often shaped by engagement in a faith community, the literature review briefly highlights patterns and trends about what is impacting twenty-somethings' engagement and participation. The construct of marginality and mattering, the theory of involvement, and the construct of mentoring communities are briefly addressed as examples of educational approaches available to practitioners who would like to help twenty-somethings transition more easily into faith communities after they graduate from university. The nature of how these themes connect with the research sample of InterVarsity graduates and their interview data will be elucidated in the following chapters.

# CHAPTER THREE

# INTERVARSITY POPULATION AND SAMPLE

InterVarsity is known by various names around the world. In the United States its full name is InterVarsity Christian Fellowship but in other countries it is known by others such as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (Lowman 1984). Its earliest roots are British and the ministry began "with a group of Christian students" at "the University of Cambridge" in 1877 (InterVarsity 2013, 1). As the ministry grew its "chapters" began springing up at campuses across England. The movement spread to multiple countries and InterVarsity in the United States began with staff on loan from Canadian InterVarsity (Hunt and Hunt 1991, 21-85). The global movement has campus ministries "in 154 countries around the world" (International Fellowship of Evangelical Students 2013, 1).

InterVarsity officially incorporated in the United States in 1941 and "almost immediately" it sensed a "need to contextualize literature from England for the North American setting" (LePeau and Doll 2006, 22). In 1947 the board determined InterVarsity "should undertake its own deliberate publishing program" and from this decision InterVarsity Press was formed (LePeau and Doll 2006, 22). "As an extension of InterVarsity" in the United States, it "serves those in the university, the church and the

world by publishing resources that equip and encourage people to follow Jesus as Savior and Lord in all of life" (InterVarsity Press 2013, 1).

### *InterVarsity's Values In The United States*

In many ways engagement in InterVarsity is, whether one calls it by this name or not, participation in an identity intervention. InterVarsity's vision is for all of their students to see themselves as *world changers* and they educate for such an outcome (InterVarsity 2013). They believe everyone matters and everyone can make a difference. They believe following Jesus as Savior and Lord in all of life means individual lives, as well as institutions and societal structures can and should be transforming for the better. Their core values include:

- seeking to be a redeeming influence among the people, ideas and structures found at universities;
- seeking formation by encountering the living God through Scripture, prayer, spiritual formation, community, discipleship of mind and leadership development;
- expressing faith through evangelism, whole life stewardship, ethnic reconciliation and justice, and
- partnering with churches in such a way that students, faculty and staff are equipped to be lifelong active members in local congregations (InterVarsity 2013).

Although space precludes covering each of these points in detail, what follows is a brief overview of InterVarsity's value system in light of the literature review and research findings.

## Spiritual Formation

InterVarsity is committed to spiritual formation in the lives of its members. It is best known for two forms of spiritual discipline: the daily quiet time and inductive Bible study. Daily quiet times are for meditating on Scripture, personal prayer, and listening to God. They are viewed as essential for ongoing spiritual growth (Hill 2002, 1). The inductive Bible study method focuses on in depth study and meditation of Scripture before consulting commentaries or other resources. This method is used because of the great emphasis the organization puts on the inspiration and authority of Scripture. There are many additional spiritual disciplines which fall into their emphasis on spiritual formation. For instance a high value is placed on being a community of lavish love and blunt truthfulness (Hill 2003b, 1). Discipleship of the mind, the formation of Christlike character, and leadership development are all included within this focus. Books InterVarsity Press has published in this area are far too numerous to cite.

## Social Justice

Whereas many evangelicals might not be concerned or engaged with issues regarding racial inequity or social injustice, InterVarsity is praised for being an exception (Emerson and Smith 2000, 65). From its earliest days in the mid-1940s InterVarsity Christian Fellowship "began to take steps to face racism" in itself and on campuses throughout the United States (Rendal and Hammond 2013, 1). Racial segregation was the prominent social issue in the first two decades of the ministry's formation and today InterVarsity remains active in providing challenging opportunities for their students to grow in understanding, empathy and awareness of the complexities surrounding poverty,

racial injustice, sex trafficking and other societal and global concerns (Richardson 2007). For instance, "InterVarsity's Global Urban Trek" is a short-term mission "initiative which began in 2001 to help students engage with issues of global poverty in an urban context, and to engage in a model of ministry where students live and minister alongside the global urban poor" (Nelson 2013, 64). InterVarsity Press is also a leading voice within evangelicalism in the United States by publishing books that will challenge not only their own students about issues of social justice, but will influence pastors and Christian leaders as well.

## Ethnicity

Long before the identity capital model was formed to urge educators to prepare students for a globalized workforce, InterVarsity was hard at work training their students to work well in multicultural contexts (Neff et al. 2004). InterVarsity has been able to recruit talented staff workers from diverse racial backgrounds who have helped to shape its philosophy and organization. From their efforts Asian American Ministries, Black Campus Ministry, and LaFe (The Faith or Latino Fellowship) were formed in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Rendal and Hammond 2013, 2-3). Native American ministries are emerging. In the early 1990s former Canadian President Samuel Escobar co-chaired a task force comprised of people both within and outside InterVarsity to "develop a theological foundation for multiethnicity" for the movement (Rendal and Hammond 2013, 3). Each region of the country develops its own training curriculum for InterVarsity staff; however, staff workers in Illinois are regularly required to read and critically reflect upon books about issues of ethnicity as well as social justice

(InterVarsity 2010). In many ways InterVarsity's curriculum helps students progress through the stages of ethnic identity development noted in Chapter Two (Phinney 1990; 2000; Atknison et al. 1983). As a result, by graduation InterVarsity alumni tend to be "thoughtful and comfortable with complexity" (Kirk 2011).

## Women In Leadership

InterVarsity has never tried to "side or interfere with church and denominational convictions about women's ordination but from its beginnings in 1941 InterVarsity had women on its Board of Trustees, and women were given the same responsibilities and pay as men" (Fryling and Fryling 2010, 84). One sociologist believes InterVarsity enables women to develop "complex, innovative, and empowering strategies that allow them to remain loyal to evangelicalism" while still actively participating and leading within the organization (Bramadat 2000, 101). Although it takes no official stance on the issue of female ordination, InterVarsity Press does not shy away from the debate about the role of women in church leadership (Mickelsen 1986; Tucker 1992; Creegan and Pohl 2005; Husbands and Larsen 2007). Catherine Kroeger, founder of the organization Christians for Biblical Equality, is a leading voice for theologically conservative egalitarian beliefs in the United States and she cites her involvement in InterVarsity as a student (Kroeger and Kroeger 1992, 30). InterVarsity's goal has always been to develop "both women and men as leaders" (Hill 2003a, 1), yet it is an inclusive organization that lets students and staff members with diverse views about women participate in the ministry.

## Evangelism

InterVarsity focuses on evangelism but it is careful to emphasize that people should be loved regardless of whether or not they ever convert to become Christians. InterVarsity "facilitates constructive interaction between its members and non-Christians" and that interaction "is not oriented primarily to witnessing" (Bramadat 2000, 140). The organization frowns upon befriending people just so they will become a Christian or so they will come to a Bible study and, as a result, they tend to engage culture without losing their ability to witness (Bramadat 2000, 52). The focus is on both proclamation of the gospel and living it out as well. In this way evangelism is tied into the other areas of focus and is seen as integrally connected to social justice, worshiping together as a multi-ethnic community, fully developing one's God given talents and gifts, living a spiritually transformed life, and even using inductive Bible study methodology (such as Groups Investigating God or GIGs) to talk with people about Jesus.

### *Preparing For The Transition*

As stated a core value of InterVarsity is for their students, faculty and staff to be equipped to be lifelong active members in local congregations. Although the specific nomenclature "self-authorship" would not be viewed as being theologically sound, many of the organization's educational programs are designed to help students develop and discern their own individual voices and unique God-given callings. However, InterVarsity has developed two additional opportunities which prove helpful as their students transition from universities as well.

## Linking At Urbana

"Urbana is a large-scale, empowering missions event held every three years and is the most diverse gathering of students, recent graduates, missions practitioners and church leaders in North America" (Urbana 2012, 1). It offers numerous and diverse sessions and workshops that challenge students' perspectives and urge them to seriously consider how God might want to use their lives to respond to the needs of the world. In addition to the formally planned and facilitated plenary sessions, workshops and small group times, Urbana provides ample opportunities to link students with other ministries and graduate schools when they leave university. Hundreds of representatives from various groups set up displays and meet and talk with students throughout the conference. Many InterVarsity students begin working with these agencies or enter these graduate programs as a result of connections made at Urbana conferences.

## Graduating Faith

InterVarsity staff members talk about "graduating faith" and they provide advice and counsel to their students about how to navigate the transition to faith communities after graduation. They offer this as a specialized track during their Winter Fest conferences. InterVarsity staff members have also written books to help their students during the transition (Tokunaga et al. 1999; Yep et al. 1998). The advice speaks into issues such as the role of ethnic identity formation in church selection (Cha 1998, 145-158) and the discouragement alumni might face during the transition process (Gross 1999, 70-77). Alumni are encouraged to actively participate in faith communities by sharing their time, talents and financial resources. Some staff members develop

additional training for their students; however, this varies tremendously from campus to campus.

### *Statistics About InterVarsity In The United States*

Each year statistics regarding InterVarsity vary somewhat and the information which follows is taken directly from their website (InterVarsity 2013, 1). At the time the interviews were conducted 38,580 students and faculty were actively involved in InterVarsity. Fifty-nine percent were women and forty-one percent were men. In total there were 909 chapters on 590 university campuses. Thirty-six percent self-identified as being ethnic minority or multiracial students. There were 17 Black Campus Ministries, 31 Asian American Ministries, and 9 Latino Fellowships (Le Fe). InterVarsity had 191 chapters with the primary focus being graduate students, professional students and faculty members. There were 95 Nurses Christian Fellowship Groups. There were 54 fellowships devoted specifically to international students and 75 campuses had Greek InterVarsity for members of sororities and fraternities.

The six week Global Urban Trek designed to immerse university students in urban slums around the world had 90 participants. Global Projects which sent out short-term mission teams had 189 participants. Urban projects ranging from one weekend, one week, two weeks, all summer and two year projects had a total of 1,958 participants. Approximately 16,000 attended Urbana and 7,058 people at that gathering made commitments to serve in global or cross-cultural mission. InterVarsity has retreat and training centers around the country and 20,883 people attended these. InterVarsity reports 3,279 people made first-time professions of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. A

total of 3,626 students attended 1,656 GIGs (Groups Investigating God), and 47,936 seekers participated in evangelistic events. InterVarsity Press published 105 new books and now has over 1,800 titles in print. They consistently win awards for their quality and many of their books have been translated into more than 60 languages. InterVarsity Arts is also growing in its engagement with students and churches alike but statistics are not published for that ministry (InterVarsity Arts 2013). This data provide a picture of the broad population from which the research sample was selected.

### *Describing Research Participants*

The next chapter will describe in detail the process by which research participants were selected. However, what follows is an overview of the people who agreed to be interviewed for this study.

### Gender And Ethnicity

The research sample was comprised of 14 women and 14 men. Of the women, 7 self-identified as being ethnic minority and 7 self-identified as being majority culture which is the term InterVarsity uses for Caucasian. Of the men, 7 self-identified as being ethnic minority and 7 self-identified as being majority culture.

### Pseudonyms

Table 1 categorizes the research participants based upon gender and ethnicity. Rather than prefacing each quote with whether an InterVarsity graduate was male or female or if he or she was from a minority culture or not, this table provides an

easy reference for readers who desire this information. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of alumni who were interviewed.

Table 1. Pseudonyms For Research Participants.

| | Female | Male |
|---|---|---|
| Minority | 1. Hannah<br>2. Lilly<br>3. Sarah<br>4. Victoria<br>5. Danielle<br>6. Becca<br>7. Angela | 1. Jack<br>2. Chen<br>3. Adam<br>4. Xander<br>5. Marcus<br>6. Paul<br>7. Joel |
| Majority | 1. Ashley<br>2. Bethany<br>3. Julia<br>4. Dawn<br>5. Sophia<br>6. Nell<br>7. Cassie | 1. David<br>2. Timothy<br>3. Andrew<br>4. Ben<br>5. Jeremy<br>6. Cole<br>7. Stephen |

Of the 14 who self-identified as being ethnic minority, 2 were international students. Several came to the United States as children with their immigrant parents. Their families are from five nations in Asia, one nation in Africa, one nation in Latin America, and one person is African American. Table 1 can be used for easy reference as research findings are shared in chapter five.

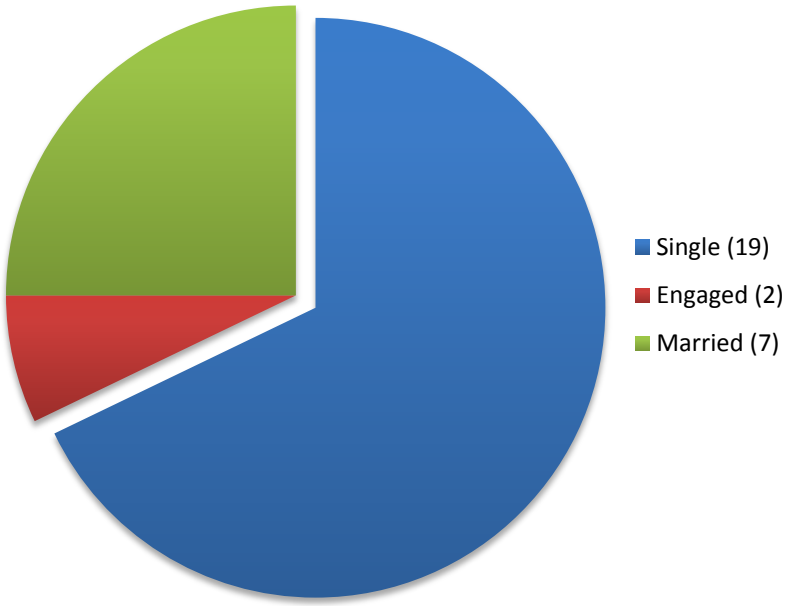
## Faith Commitments

Of the alumni interviewed, 6 made first-time professions of faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior while involved in InterVarsity at university. These six had never been Christians before and most of their families did not attend faith communities. One of these individuals was later involved in his parents making first-time professions of faith. An additional 3 came back to faith in Christ through InterVarsity's ministry after leaving their faith years earlier. One explained to the researcher that she came to faith after graduating from university. Prior to that she was simply following the faith of her family and InterVarsity friends. The other 18 were Christians prior to entering university and InterVarsity was influential in helping them to continue growing in their faith.

## Marital Status

Since the literature indicates faith communities in the United States seem to market themselves primarily to married people, it is helpful to look at the research sample in light of who is single, engaged and married. Figure 2 provides this information. Approximately two-thirds of the participants are single. Of those who are married or engaged, just over half met their current or soon-to-be spouses through InterVarsity. Only one person from each couple is included in the research sample. All but two of the married and engaged people are from the majority culture. The minority ethnic couple in the research sample now has two small children.

Figure 1. Marital Status Of Research Participants.

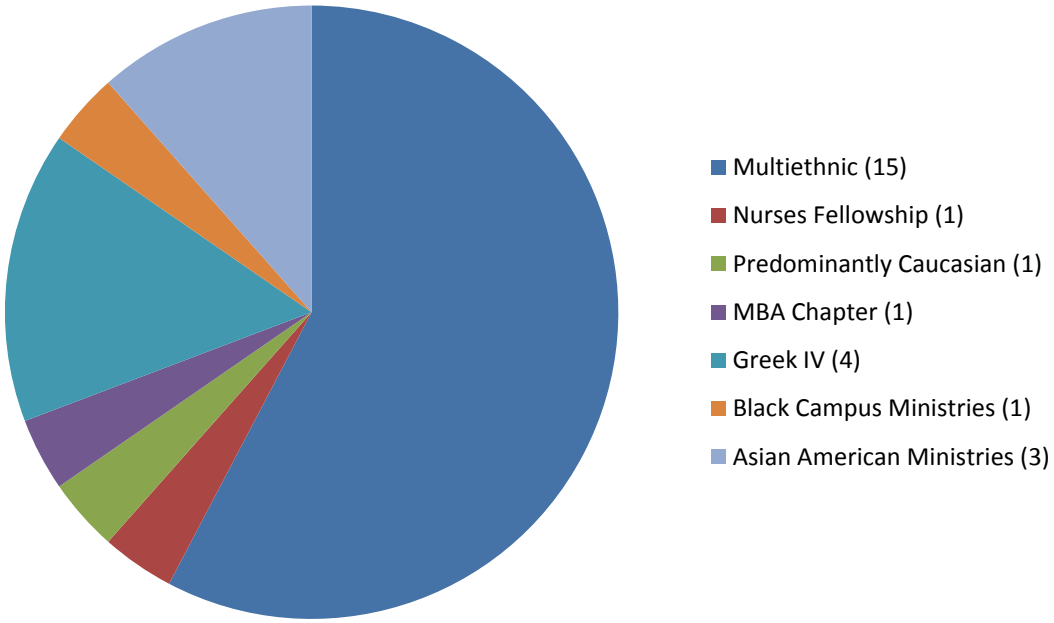



## Chapter Information

Only 2 of the 28 people participated in InterVarsity as graduate students. One was male and the other female. Both self-identified as being from minority cultures. The remaining participants were involved with InterVarsity as undergraduate students, however several of those students have since gone to graduate school or are starting to pursue graduate studies. Of the 28 interviewed, one person was not involved in a chapter because at her university there were hardly any people of her ethnicity attending the local InterVarsity chapter. However, since she became a Christian through an InterVarsity national retreat for people of her ethnicity, she continued to attend their national gatherings but on a weekly basis she engaged primarily through her local church. Figure

3 illustrates the types of InterVarsity chapters the research participants joined while attending university.

Figure 2. Type Of InterVarsity Chapter Graduates Attended.




What is important to understand about the data is people might have attended a chapter that is not representative of their ethnicity. When this is the case it was because of the nature of the InterVarsity chapter nearest to them or they were actively seeking to have community with people whose ethnicity differed from their own.

## Geographic Location Of Chapters

It order to protect anonymity it is not possible to share the specific names of the universities attended by interview participants. However, it is possible to share a broad overview of the geographic locations from which they came. The 28 participants

attended 16 different universities. The sample includes 18 who studied in Illinois and 10 who studied in other states. Table 2 provides more detailed information about this. It affirms the researcher's premise that the Chicago area would be an optimal location to conduct the research because so many InterVarsity alumni come here to live and work after graduation.

Table 2. Locations Where InterVarsity Graduates Attended University.

| Geographic Location | Number Of Universities | Number Of Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Chicago Area | 5 | 11 |
| Other Parts Of Illinois | 2 | 7 |
| Other Midwest States | 3 | 4 |
| East Coast | 2 | 2 |
| South East | 2 | 2 |
| West | 1 | 1 |
| West Coast | 1 | 1 |

## Level Of Involvement

InterVarsity is effective at getting their students involved in ministry. Of the 28 people interviewed, each was asked if he or she participated in the following InterVarsity events or programs. Table 3 provides a clear picture of their level of engagement. This chart illuminates what is meant when those in the research sample are described as being active or fairly active in InterVarsity during the last two years of their university experience. They regularly participated in Bible studies, outreach programs, and all but one attended a local church during this season of their lives. Almost three-quarters of the people who agreed to be interviewed served as student leaders within their campus chapters.

Table 3. Level Of Engagement While A Student With InterVarsity.

| | |
|---|---|
| The number of people interviewed for the research study | 28 |
| Participated in one or more small group Bible study | 27 |
| Led one or more small group Bible study | 20 |
| Served as a student leader in the chapter | 20 |
| Served as part of the worship team | 8 |
| Participated in campus evangelism and outreach | 23 |
| Participated in justice ministries | 15 |
| Attended one or more Urbana conference | 16 |
| Attended an InterVarsity camp | 21 |
| Participated in a short-term mission trip | 8 |
| Attended one or more Urban Plunge | 12 |
| Engaged in other InterVarsity programs or ministries | 7 |
| Attended a local church while at university | 27 |

The "other" programs or ministries ranged from participating in retreats, attending the InterVarsity Leadership Institute, Greek Conference and participating in InterVarsity Arts.

## Professional Choices

The sample is also professionally diverse even though this was not a criteria of diversity the researcher intentionally sought. The group included 1 nutritionist, 2 nurses, 2 social workers, 3 engineers in different fields, 2 business consultants, 5 teachers or educators in various fields, 2 IT specialists, 1 scientist, 2 people in advertising or marketing, 2 accountants, 4 business people or administrators, 1 medical student, and 1 entrepreneur. Of the 28 interviewed, in the course of telling the researcher their stories 10 mentioned a strong desire or intention to switch into careers in totally different fields from which they were currently employed.

*Summarizing InterVarsity Population And Sample*

Positive deviance was a term first utilized in another area of academic research (Wishik and Van der Vynckt 1976); however, the researcher believes it aptly describes many members of InterVarsity. She believes this assessment is affirmed in social science literature (Emerson and Smith 2000, 65; Bramadat 2000) and is born out in the research data. Often their students and alumni are concerned about spiritual growth, social justice, evangelism, mission and having a positive impact within their communities during a season in life where many of their peers remain apathetic or self-indulgent (Smith et al. 2011). The organization focuses on helping students develop their own internal voices and find their own unique callings so after graduation they will be able to make a difference in the world.

Côté urges further study of certain segments in society that already engage in active responses to personal development in ways that equip people to work well in a globalized world (1996, 423-424). InterVarsity students and alumni would seem to qualify. The organization attracts ethnically diverse students who are also diverse in many additional ways. A significant aspect of their developmental path is to learn how to navigate culture and diversity well in a globalized world. Although it would be erroneous to assume every InterVarsity student or alumni qualifies as being a positive deviant, in comparison to prevailing social norms with emerging adults the researcher believes there is adequate support to place many of them in this category. The next chapter will outline the research methodology which was followed and how these participants were selected for the study.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The legitimacy of any study hinges on the research methodology which is employed. This section provides a concise review of issues referenced in earlier chapters as well as the many details which went into designing the study.

## *Research Concern*

Emerging adulthood is a "a rapidly growing area of research (Schwartz et al. 2005, 201). However, most of the research surrounding emerging adulthood has been done with university students. Little has been done to illuminate the transition period shortly after graduation (Fox 2011). Even less is known about what the transition is like for students who seek to find a faith community after they graduate from university.

The goal of qualitative research "is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of human experience" (Licktman 2010, 12). Qualitative methods are ideal when research is being done with emerging adults because of their capacity for self-reflection (Arnett 2006, 326-328). However, for qualitative research to be interpreted and evaluated, there must be transparency in the research methodology. What follows is a detailed description of the methodology and processes which undergird this study.

### *Research Problem*

The purpose of this research is to investigate the transition process InterVarsity students experience after graduation from university as they seek to find their place in faith communities, and what helps and hinders their transition process.

### *Research Questions*

During the dissertation proposal stage, three research questions were approved as the queries which would undergird the data. However, after successfully defending the dissertation proposal but prior to conducting interviews, the researcher realized adding an additional question would likely be an even more effective way of illuminating research data. At that time she contacted her readers. She was given permission to add a fourth research question if after gathering data the additional question would be advantageous for understanding the transition process. After conducting the interviews, the addition of the first research question was deemed to be beneficial for understanding the phenomenon. Below are the four questions which undergird the study.

1. What are InterVarsity graduates looking for in faith communities and why are these qualities important to them?
2. What are InterVarsity graduates experiencing as they seek to transition to faith communities?
3. How do InterVarsity graduates describe the responsibility of stakeholders in helping or hindering their transition to faith communities?
4. How do InterVarsity graduates describe their own personal responsibility in the transition process?

*Population And Sample*

Chapter three provides a detailed description of InterVarsity alumni. It also provides a clear picture of the twenty-eight individuals who comprise the research sample. What follows is the methodology by which the sample was chosen.

## Sample Criteria

The research sample was selected from the broad population of InterVarsity alumni based upon the following three criteria:

1. They self-identify as being active or fairly active in their InterVarsity chapter during the last two years of their university experience, or they self-identify as being moderately active in InterVarsity and very active in a local faith community during this period.
2. They graduated from university between 2009 and 2011.
3. They are Illinois residents living within a 60 mile radius of a designated landmark in downtown Chicago.

## Delimitations

This section outlines the conscious decisions the researcher made regarding who would and who would not be included in the study. It also provides the rationale for each of these decisions.

### *Explicating Sample Criteria*

The most notable delimitation is that the population is comprised of InterVarsity graduates. As Chapter Three illustrates, this group was selected because they are positive deviants in comparison to trends present within their generational demographic. Because they were involved in activities such as attending or leading Bible

studies, campus ministry and social justice during their university experience when this was not a common experience for most students (Smith et al. 2011), this group would seem to comprise people who would want to find their place in faith communities after graduation.

The research delimited alumni who self-identity as being active or fairly active in InterVarsity during the last two years of their university experience, or alumni who self-identify as being moderately active in InterVarsity but very active in local faith communities during the last two years of their university experience. The second part of this delimitation was created during the research process when it was uncovered that two people who were interviewed were not active or fairly active in their InterVarsity chapters for reasons largely beyond their own control. One was a graduate student participating in an InterVarsity chapter which was newly formed but was only moderately functional. The other was an undergraduate student who became a Christian through InterVarsity and who attended all the national InterVarsity gatherings for people of her ethnicity. However, there were few students from her ethnic heritage in the InterVarsity chapter on her campus. Both of these research participants, however, were extremely active in local faith communities during the last two years of their university experience. The rationale for this delimitation is if InterVarsity students were active or fairly active in Christian community prior to graduating, it is more logical to assume this behavior will continue after graduation. Thus, the delimitation makes it easier to study the actual transition process. Without such a delimitation, it becomes far more complex to identify patterns and salient issues in the transition process.

The study delimited alumni who were residents of Illinois and who live no more than sixty miles from the designated landmark, which was Buckingham Fountain in Grant Park. The researcher was willing to travel to other parts of the country to conduct the study but for several reasons delimiting the research to the Chicago area seemed strategic. In Illinois, Chicago and the surrounding suburbs offer a host of diverse faith communities from which to choose. Also, there are many InterVarsity chapters at universities across the Midwest and the Chicago area is a place where many people come to find employment after graduation. From this geographic location it became possible to find a diverse sample of InterVarsity alumni to interview.

The study delimited InterVarsity alumni who graduated between the years 2009-2011. This delimitation was made to ensure the transition period was recent enough that interview participants would be able to readily and accurately remember it. Also, this time period allowed a chance for alumni to reflect back upon this season in their lives and discern trends and patterns which arose in their own journeys.

*Additional Choices*

InterVarsity has two general areas of classification with regards to their students. One is gender and the other is ethnicity. In external publications they share demographic information about the percentage of males and females involved in the ministry as well as the percentage of people who self-identity as being from ethnic minority cultures or the ethnic majority culture in the United States. In an effort to represent the broader population of InterVarsity, the research was delimited to 7 women

from ethnic minority cultures, 7 women from the ethnic majority culture, 7 men from ethnic minority cultures, and 7 men from the ethnic majority culture.

People who were on staff full-time with InterVarsity continuously from the time they graduated until the time the interviews were conducted were not included in the research. These are individuals who have now been serving on staff with InterVarsity for the past two to four years. This delimitation was made because it is likely many of these staff members' spiritual needs are being met by InterVarsity rather than through local faith communities. It is common for many InterVarsity alumni to volunteer occasionally with the organization after graduation or even to serve as an intern or on staff for one year right after graduation. This latter group of individuals was included in the research because they have needed to rely upon local faith communities to meet many of their spiritual needs.

Lastly, the study delimited otherwise qualified alumni who were already widely represented in the sample. This occurred whenever there were more than four InterVarsity alumni from the same church or the same InterVarsity chapter. This delimitation was employed to ensure the sample was diverse.

*Original Delimitations Not Followed*

Originally the researcher was going to delimit people who were currently involved in faculty ministries or active in ministries to professional nurses. This delimitation was made for the same reason as excluding full-time staff members. However, in actuality none of the survey participants fell into these categories. The only one who came close was an interview participant who had been involved in

InterVarsity's professional nurses fellowship while attending university. However, since graduation the person has not been involved.

Also, during the dissertation proposal hearing the issue was raised that frequently commuting students have a different experience in InterVarsity in comparison with those who are residents living on or near campus. It was suggested that it might be beneficial to have a delimitation with regard to residency. However, the researcher checked back with her readers to ask if there might be flexibility with that delimitation. She requested permission to include commuters in the study and, if their responses deviated significantly from those in residential situations, a new category would be formed when the data was analyzed. Two participants were commuting students but their responses during the interview were not noticeably different than alumni who had been living on or near campus during their university experience.

## Limitations

The greatest limitation in conducting this research was InterVarsity's privacy policies and protocols. The InterVarsity alumni program falls under the purview of the Advancement Department. The Director and Associate Director of the Advancement Department affirmed the research and stated they would do everything they could to support it (Ginsberg 2013; Nickelson 2013). However, the organization had privacy policies and protocols prohibiting it from distributing lists of student or alumni information to people outside the organization. As a result, the researcher was unable to search lists from InterVarsity's data base as a means to select research participants.

## Sampling Technique

A purposeful convenience sampling technique was employed. Due to privacy protocols InterVarsity's Associate Director of Advancement and his staff worked with the researcher to design an electronic piece to invite alumni to join the study. They took the core information which the researcher wanted to convey and contextualized the message in a way that would best ensure alumni would read the invitation and respond. A sample from the first batch of invitations is provided in Appendix 1. Most of the participants who were interviewed responded to this invitation. However towards the end of the study, in order to ensure that the sample was diverse, the researcher utilized a snowball method of sampling. She asked people who had already been interviewed as well as other people she knew if they could link her to people who met the sample criteria and delimitations.

### *Basic Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research seeks to "understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective" (Merriam and Associates 2002, 6). It is uniquely well suited to uncover depth of understanding about unique "slices of life" (Charmaz 2000, 522). It "is inductive; that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively testing hypotheses" (Merriam 2009, 15). "The central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds. Constructionism thus underlies … a basic qualitative study" (Merriam 2009, 22). The goal is to understand "how people interpret their experiences" as well as "how they construct their worlds" and "what meaning they attribute to their

experiences" (Merriam 2009, 23). One research scholar prefers different wording, allocating constructivism to the individual meaning making process and constructionism to group meaning making (Crotty 1998, 58). The central concern of this research is to determine how "people in this setting constructed reality" about their own transitions and what helped and hindered them in the process (Patton 2002, 96).

"The most common "type" of qualitative research is a basic, interpretive study" (Merriam 2009, 22). While there are many approaches a researcher can utilize with a basic qualitative research study (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Lichtman 2010; Merriam 2009; Merriam and Associates 2002; Patton 2002), for this research data were collected through interviews as the way to uncover recurring patterns which shed light on the phenomenon. The methodology enabled participants to "cast their stories in their terms" (Charmaz 2000, 525) by using semi-structured, open ended questions. What follows are details about how the research process was conducted.

## Instrumentation

How data is collected affects *which* phenomenon" a researcher sees, "*how, where* and *when"* the researcher "will view them, and *what* sense" he or she "will make of them" (Charmaz 2006, 15). In this study a few different forms of instrumentation were utilized.

### *The Primary Research Tool*

"Data collection and analysis have traditionally called for "objectivity." But today" qualitative research is rarely seen in that light (Corbin and Strauss 2008, 32).

"*The researcher is the primary instrument* for data collection and data analysis …. However, the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that might have an impact on the study" (Merriam and Associates 2002, 5). The researcher conducting this study utilized memos and periods of silence and personal reflection to remain sensitive to potential biases which might color her analysis. Also she determined to only list findings if they were mentioned by several participants, and after each "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973) comprising participants' own words are provided for transparency sake. At this time the researcher will also disclose her relationship with InterVarsity and details of her personal and professional journey which might influence her interpretation of data.

The researcher first learned about InterVarsity when she was a freshman at university more than thirty years ago. Although she was never a member of the organization, she did attend an Urbana Conference in 1981 that had a profound impact on her own spiritual journey. Many years later she worked on staff of two large churches in the Midwest running singles ministry programs. She worked at the second church while pursuing a graduate degree to equip her for work in global missions. At that time in 1996 she again visited Urbana and was recruited by Wycliffe to serve in Asia. She has worked with what is now known as the Wycliffe Global Alliance since that time and she has traveled extensively with the organization. Throughout her travels the researcher has frequently met people serving in leadership in churches and mission organizations who became Christians or developed their love for mission and outreach when they were students in InterVarsity. In 2010 when the researcher published her first book, she did so

with InterVarsity Press because she respected their integrity as a ministry and organization.

For these reasons the researcher is passionate about InterVarsity. However, she is not naïve. She realizes the organization and its staff members make mistakes. Some of these emerged during the interviews with participants. However, she believes the organization does significant work that has a global impact. Her time serving in singles ministry at two churches has also created a deep passion for single people in general, and single women in particular. It is likely that the depth of these convictions and passions have impacted the findings which emerge from this research study. However, by listing only issues which were mentioned numerous times and by providing many direct quotes from participants as thick description, she intends to be transparent, thus lessening potential biases which might distort the research.

*Interview Protocol*

The research was conducted through recorded face-to-face interviews since this methodology is effective for understanding "past events that are impossible to replicate" (Merriam 2009, 88). Broad, open-ended questions were used to gather data for each research question. The full Interview Protocol, including all the background questions which were asked, is available in Appendix 2. What follows is a grouping of each query under the research question to which it corresponds.

Research Question #1

a. Would you describe the qualities or criteria you hoped to find in a faith community? What were you looking for?

b. Why was it important for you to find a faith community that had these?

c. Did the qualities or criteria you expected to find in a faith community change as a result of your involvement in InterVarsity? Please explain.

Research Question #2

d. What have you experienced as you've tried to find a faith community after graduation?

e. What words or what metaphor would you use to describe this transition period of trying to find a local faith community after graduation? Would you explain why those words or that metaphor captures your experience?

Research Question #3

f. Who are the primary people who have helped you in the process and how have they helped?

g. Who are the primary people who have hindered you in the process and how have they hindered you?

h. What advice would you give to pastors and church leaders based upon what you have learned so far in the journey?

i. What advice would you give to InterVarsity based upon what you have learned so far in the journey

Research Question #4

j. What impact do you think your actions have had on your experience during this transition period after graduation?

k. What impact do you think your attitudes have played on your experience during this transition period after graduation?

l. If you could go back in time would you do anything differently? Why or why not?

m. What advice would you give to future graduates based upon what you have learned so far in the journey?

The interviews ended with one final question that could relate to any one or a combination of the research questions. The researcher asked, “Is there anything else you would like to say about this topic of transitioning to a faith community after graduation?

*Testing Protocol*

The interview protocol was tested and refined in interviews with four people from a newly created singles ministry at a church in the Chicago area. All were in their twenties and had needed to navigate the transition to a faith community after graduation from college. Two had studied at state universities and two studied at Christian universities. One had visited an InterVarsity camp and another had attended an Urbana Conference. However, none were members of InterVarsity. The interview protocol was adapted slightly based upon their feedback but no material changes were made. None of the data obtained through the testing phase has been included in the research findings.

During the dissertation proposal hearing one of the readers recommended a two-fold testing process. After testing the protocol with people who were not members of InterVarsity it was recommended that the researcher interview five to six people who were representative of the population and research sample to test the interview protocol again. After that was completed the researcher was to bring together these same people and interview them again as a focus group using the same interview protocol.

The idea was this process would provide an extra check of the interview protocol to be sure questions were clear and would be able to elicit thick data that answered the research questions. Based upon that experience the researcher would edit

the interview protocol again if it was necessary. If no significant changes were made to the protocol based upon this additional round of testing, data obtained through these individual interviews and the focus group would be included in the study. If significant changes were made to the interview protocol, data obtained during this additional round of testing would not be included in the research.

The researcher made sure the first five or six people she interviewed would also be willing to join the focus group. People who did not want to also be a part of the focus group were scheduled to be interviewed later. She interviewed each of the five individually and the interview questions solicited rich data which answered the research questions. However, when the researcher tried to find a time and location where the five could meet, the plan for a focus group became impossible to implement. Each participant had totally different constraints. One worked during the week and was free on the weekend to do a focus group. One worked weekends and was only available during the week. One worked the midnight shift and could only meet very early in the morning. One worked during the week but was soon heading out of the country. Another could only meet if the location was on a train line yet others worked in diverse parts of the Chicago area and did not want to have to travel far to attend a focus group. As a result of these challenges, the dissertation readers said it was not necessary to do this additional step to test the interview protocol.

*Interview Process*

Knowing that people are busy and might not be willing to travel far to be interviewed, the researcher agreed to meet participants at locations near where they

worked or lived. She also agreed to treat them to breakfast, lunch, dinner or coffee at their favorite restaurant. The alumni seemed to genuinely appreciate this offer. And, in retrospect, the researcher thinks one of the reasons they were so honest and open with theirs stories was because the interviews were held over meals or in settings which were relaxing and welcoming. Most interviews lasted approximately sixty minutes.

## Ethical Issues

Trinity International University required that all research be guided by a Human Rights Research Protocol. This form was filed and submitted (Appendix 3). Each participant was asked to read and sign a consent form (Appendix 4). No interview was started before InterVarsity graduates had a chance to read and sign this form. If they wanted a copy, one was provided immediately. Verbal authorization was also sought before any interviews were recorded. The researcher sought to honor the *"*major principles associated with ethical conduct" by doing no harm, practicing anonymity, and honoring confidentiality (Licktman 2010, 54).

## Analyzing Data

Developing a "manageable classification or coding scheme is the first step of analysis" (Patton 2002, 463). The plan for coding data was to first obtain a word-for-word transcription of interviews whenever possible. A transcription service was utilized for this purpose. The researcher selected a company that had strict privacy protocols in place, as well as one which safeguarded data. When the transcription was completed, the researcher carefully checked the company's work. She made it a practice

to listen again to the full interview and check to be sure the transcription was accurate. In a few cases the transcription company declined doing the transcription citing there was too much background noise at the restaurant where an interview was held. In these few instances the interviewer did the transcription personally.

Once interview data was available in written format, analysis began. Transcripts were coded for words, phrases and concepts. After coding was completed, similar phrases and concepts were compared and larger categories were created. NVivo software was also used to analyze patterns in the data. Memos were written and coded throughout the process as well to aid in analysis. Once approximately half of the interviews were completed, the researcher looked for theoretical constructs which were emerging from the data. At that time she took a break from data collection to revisit literature which spoke to the themes which were emerging. Once additional literature was selected she returned to data collection and finished the remaining interviews. What follows in the next chapter are the findings which emerged.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this research is to investigate the transition process InterVarsity students experience after graduation from university as they seek to find their place in faith communities. Special attention is given to what helps and hinders their transition process. Four overarching research questions undergird the study. These will serve as broad categories from which to share the research findings which emerge from interview data.

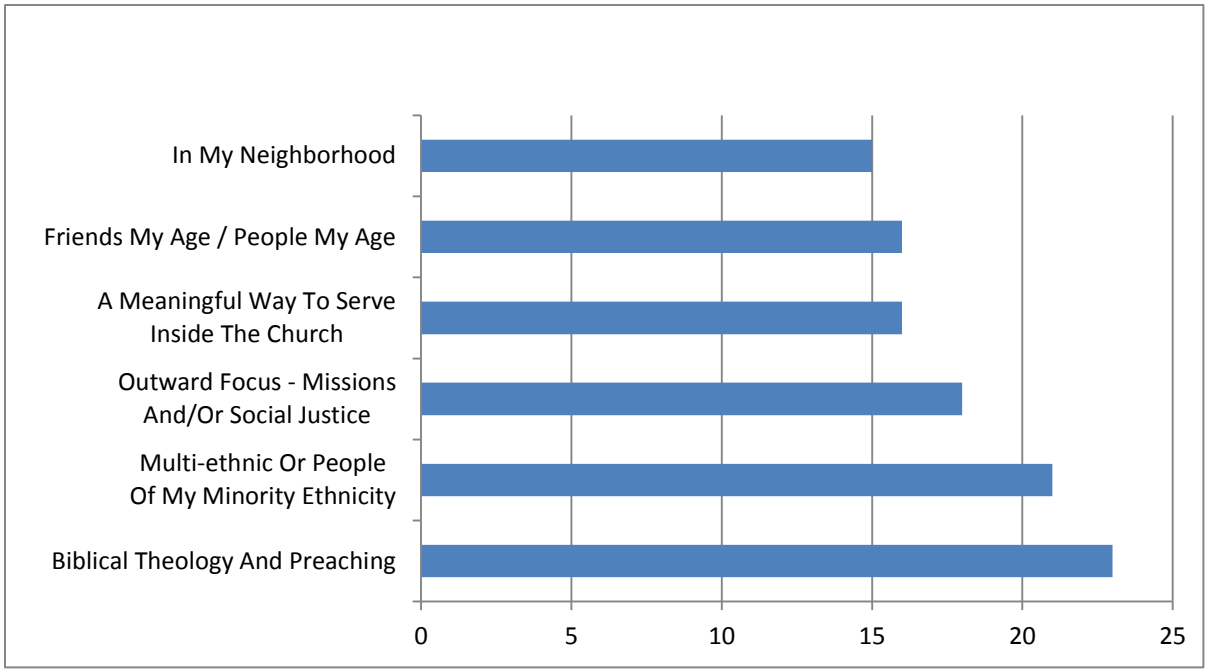
## *First Research Question*

The first research question has two components. It asks what InterVarsity graduates are looking for in faith communities and why these qualities are important to them. The first finding relates to the desired qualities most frequently mentioned during interviews. The second, third and fourth findings illuminate why specific qualities are so important to InterVarsity graduates.

### Qualities Most Frequently Mentioned

Many qualities or criteria are cited in the interview data as being important to InterVarsity graduates in their search for a faith community. However, after analyzing the data, six are mentioned far more frequently than others. These are shown in Table 3.

Table 4. Most Desired Qualities.




The maximum count for any single quality or criteria is 28 since that is the number of InterVarsity alumni in the sample. As the table reflects, theology and preaching rooted in Scripture are the most frequently cited in their search for a faith community after graduation. Next is a desire for a multi-ethnic faith community or a faith community comprised of people primarily from the graduate's minority-ethnic culture. Third is an "outward focus." This phrase means a faith community cares about missions, evangelism, outreach and/or social justice concerns. Next is a desire to serve inside the faith community in a meaningful way that utilizes the graduate's talents and abilities. The fifth most frequently cited quality or criteria is a desire to find a faith community with friends or people near the graduate's age so he or she can make new friends. However,

the researcher believes this is understated and she will explain her rationale in the third finding. InterVarsity graduates also frequently mention a desire to find a faith community located in their own neighborhoods.

One criteria that was only mentioned six times, the desire for a faith community with a contemporary form of worship, is likely understated as well. It is not reflected on this list because the researcher sought to include only those qualities or criteria that were mentioned most frequently by InterVarsity graduates. However, as the researcher reflects upon the faith communities where InterVarsity graduates in the research sample are attending, she is not sure if more than one attends worship services which do not incorporate contemporary music and songs. From what the researcher knows about many of the faith communities mentioned, most regularly incorporate contemporary worship into their weekly services.

## Finding An Identity Match
## Do I Fit Here?

For InterVarsity graduates, joining a faith community is intricately connected with their identity formation process. The vast majority of InterVarsity graduates have a fairly clear sense of what they are wanting and needing in a faith community. Only one graduate, Julia, claims to be in a moratorium phase where she has purposely chosen a faith community that is in her words "outside of my comfort zone." She moved to Illinois for a one year position and is returning to her home state after her contract is completed to enter graduate school. She says she wants to use the year to attend a faith community that is radically different than what she would normally choose

in order to learn more about herself and another culture. Yet, even in the midst of the moratorium, Julia is emerging with a fairly defined sense of the qualities she desires in a faith community in the next season of her life as a graduate student.

The chart of the most desired qualities is consistent with an evangelical identity, such as valuing the authority of scripture (Marsden 1991, 4-5) and engaged orthodoxy (Emerson and Smith 2003, 3). As a whole InterVarsity alumni are looking for faith communities which focus on the "need for personal conversion, demonstrating the gospel through activism, having a high regard for Scripture and stressing the need for Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross for redemption" (National Association of Evangelicals 2013). So deep is their evangelical identity that Hannah mentions despite her incredible loneliness and frustration at not being able to find a faith community near her home which values social justice ministry, she has chosen to not attend other faith communities which value social justice yet teach "all faiths are going to lead to one." The general sense of InterVarsity alumni is if a faith community is not remaining true to scriptural teachings in general, and true to biblical teaching about Jesus Christ in particular, it is inconceivable for them to join.

Yet, as the chart of most desired qualities also indicates, the identity match being sought goes well beyond broad evangelicalism for it includes additional components such as ethnicity, age cohort, and vicinity. The most desired qualities paint a picture that resembles InterVarsity's organizational identity as an evangelical and ethnically diverse ministry of emerging adults who seek to live near one another so they can have deep relationships and live out their faith within their own collegiate

communities. It is as though InterVarsity alumni are searching for faith communities which make it possible to maintain a stable sense of self within their own personal narratives (Giddens 1991, 54-55). They understand it is not possible to have a perfect match but they desire a faith community which values many of the same qualities they have internalized during their journey as university students with InterVarsity.

As Erikson writes, their search appears to be linked with a desire to "deal with a changing Self which demands to be synthesized with abandoned and anticipated selves" (1968, 211). They are seeking congruity between who they have been in the past and who they will continue to be and will become in the future. Unlike the critique that Erikson's theory is only based upon "Eurocentric male model normality" (Archer 1992, 29), this process seems to play out in both genders. For those who find a faith community congruent with InterVarsity's identity, the transition is relatively seamless. This has been the case for people such as David, Andrew, Xander, Sarah, Ben, Victoria, Danielle, Cassie and Marcus. For the others, in the process of realizing the unlikelihood of finding a faith community which embodies all of their values, many InterVarsity graduates are engaged in sorting through which qualities in a faith community they are willing to compromise and which they are not. In this sorting process it is as though they are working through a process that identifies what they will stand for in the world (Josselson 1994, 12). Aside from holding to the basic tenets of evangelicalism, for these individuals who have to compromise the situation often involves selecting which core areas will define who they are and what they will become. As such, in many ways their search for a faith community resembles the achieved identity status that Marcia discusses

for they seem to have "reevaluated pasts beliefs and achieved a resolution" (1996, 552), and they are now "actively seeking out opportunities for growth" (1994, 41). What follows is a sample of some of their identity journeys.

*Ashley's Identity Journey*

Ashley searches for a faith community that values mission and making a difference in the world. She says, "We were taught to be world changers and I believed it! But, the world is cynical. If you are not with people who believe that, it is so easy for cynicism to leak in." During the interview there is a sense she feels as though she is changing into a different person than she wants to be because she is not around others with the same belief system. She also searches for a faith community that values her as a multi-talented single woman. She says, "When I was in InterVarsity I developed all of these skills. I have all of these skills, and nobody wants to use them. Nobody even wants to hear that I have them." While in InterVarsity she grew in her skills as a public speaker and also as a leader of groups such as for in depth Bible study, yet when she volunteers to help at church people want her to work in the nursery. She senses that the only purpose for singles in the churches she has attended is to get them married and then once they are wives they can become more involved in the church. Ashley grieves over the fact that the company she works for is benefiting more from the skills she developed in InterVarsity than churches are. She desires to find a faith community where the person who she is now will be valued, and she also wants to find a place where she can continue to grow into becoming an a multi-faceted woman who can have a positive impact in the world.

*Timothy's Identity Journey*

Timothy's story is a bit different from the others. Aside from basic tenets of the faith, one word best sums up his identity. It is the word "welcome." As he speaks of the most recent church he has found he says, "It felt a little bit weird at first, but they're all so welcoming. Everyone wants to know who you are and what you do, and what makes you, you." Timothy is deeply involved in an unconventional sport that hosts gatherings in various locations. He says,

> One thing that bothers me in the whole search process is I can go anywhere in the world and not only find a time and place to go and play a pickup game, but those people, I can guarantee, will invite me out afterwards. They'll say, "You can stay at my house," get my number and call me up later; like guaranteed, anywhere in the world. And it doesn't matter if I was the best player there or the worst player there, they're still going to do that. And then I get into like looking at that from a faith perspective. Why can't the church be like that? Why is it so hard for me to find a place, you know? To find like an inviting, welcoming community?

Timothy says *welcome* "reflects who I am already" and he says wanting that trait in a church "reflects who I realized I needed to be." He expresses the overall sentiment that if he doesn't surround himself with welcoming people he will never be able to grow in this area that is so vital to his own identity.

*Hannah's Identity Journey*

Hannah's struggle in finding a faith community has already been alluded to in the earlier comment about evangelical identity. However, in addition she explains that she struggles going to her family's church because "it's very traditional in the way they see gender roles." However, the identity piece that best captures the complexity of

her journey is the need to align with a church that strongly values social justice. This became a core value for Hannah through her involvement with InterVarsity and it has since shaped the selection of her professional occupation.

Hannah finally found a church in the area that had some good sermons but in her words it "was so steeped in what I call whiteness, which is a culture within itself." The church was celebrating the work of someone from the congregation and Hannah was horrified by what was presented. She recounts:

> I went to one sermon and they had talked about this one man who had this great thing for kids in Africa. I have so many problems with just that phrase in general, because first of all, Africa is a very diverse place, and when they were saying Africa, they had a very specific meaning of what that meant. That meaning had to do with, I assume they're poor black kids, and so then on the screen they'd show these poor black kids, and this guy is getting this great applause for working with these poor black kids.

She says there was "the sense of which we as rich, privileged white people are the ones that need to take care of these poor black people, and with really no understanding of the process that I just went through. None of that was going through their heads."

Hannah's training in InterVarsity and in her profession has enabled her to see the complexities of race and social justice. In her search for a faith community she is bumping up against the "deficient tool kit" many white evangelical churches have when it comes to these issues (Emerson and Smith 2000, 115-133; 153-168). When the researcher asks why an understanding or commitment to social justice is so important in her search for a faith community, Hannah replies that without this understanding "I think that they will be doing some harm, and I just don't want to be part of the harm." In this way, Hannah sees her identity as being integrally tied to the faith community. Damage

the faith community does and positive actions the faith community takes are integrally connected with her own identity.

*Dawn's Identity Journey*

Finding a multi-ethnic church was crucial for Dawn. She was profoundly impacted by a summer internship with a different campus ministry. It was this experience which led her to become involved in an InterVarsity chapter when she returned to campus because it was the simplest way to start forming friendships with people of a different ethnicity. (Her campus ministry was largely Caucasian.) While attending university she also met her husband who is from an ethnic background different from her own and the InterVarsity chapter she attended. When the researcher asks why attending a multi-ethnic faith community is so important to her she says:

> Because I think my husband and I both, he and I come from different cultures but we very much believe that that's a picture to the world of, you know, of the changes that Christ brings into someone's life. The fact that you can get along with someone who is a totally different culture than you, serve together, live together, love together, study the Bible together even though you approach it from different angles- that was something that I was looking for."

In this way the identity she and her husband are forming through their marriage is something they want their faith community to also model in the world.

*Cole's Identity Journey*

Cole's journey is unique because he lived abroad for a while. He worked with a missional congregation that had many outreach ministries. Now that he is back in the area, he finds few churches near where he lives that are focused on outreach to the

poor and sacrificial living. He feels "it's kind of like a waiting period" because he hopes to "go back overseas on a much more permanent basis, maybe for two or three to maybe six or seven years or something like that." He explains relating "to the poor in the community is important to me. It's a huge thing for me. That's probably why I connected so well with the church overseas, because they were very very intentionally missional about reaching out to the community, those in the community that were less fortunate." When asked why this was such a strong value Cole says:

> Well just from a scriptural standpoint, I think that the Bible is pretty clear that's one of the foundations of a biblical life. I guess I think of Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats. Then I think of James 1:27, where they say true religion is this, to be unstained from the world and to care for orphans and widows in their distress. I think that's … if you're not doing that, that's one of the main marks I think your life should be marked by if you're a Christian.

Yet, during this season Cole is living at home with his parents in one of the most affluent communities in the Chicagoland area. He explains, " I feel very disconnected from a lot of younger people sometimes because I'm more conservative than them in a lot of ways. I think that is a big separating factor with me. I'm talking about even amongst Christians." Cole wants to live a sacrificial life helping the poor and those who are suffering, and he wants to live a holy life. He wants to find a faith community committed to those values because it represents who he is and who he wants to become.

*Stephen's Identity Journey*

Stephen became a Christian the second half of his time in university. Before that he had never gone to church except maybe once a year at Christmastime. He

describes how challenging his life was at university being pulled between living in the Greek system and trying to be a Christian who was involved in InterVarsity. He explains that especially in university "when you're in the midst of all this sin and it's part of your lifestyle and then all of the sudden you become a believer and it's like, "Why am I still sinning?" Well because it's who you are. You don't just change a lifetime of patterns overnight." Stephen's greatest desire was to find a faith community after graduation that would help him to grow into becoming the person he wanted to be. When he speaks of his time at university he says, "I kind of had a double life. I had the one life I wanted to live and then I … I'm like "Okay." I guess at least going to this will count for something for now." He explains, "I just wanted to learn because I haven't been in this world for that long." He says, "I guess it's just finding my own identity in the church and knowing that everybody's a sinner. So even if you don't put on a face, everybody's going through the same thing as you are, so I also don't need to have that face." He says "putting time into my heart is an investment for my future and my family later. Every time I go I'm like putting money in the bank I think." Stephen is looking for a faith community that will help him live out his desired identity of being a faithful Christian man.

*Paul's Identity Journey*

Paul's story is unique in that although he came to the United States as an international student and he self-identifies as an ethnic minority, he is now actively serving in a largely homogeneous Caucasian faith community even though there are churches locally for people from his homeland. When asked about this he replies before

he left his homeland he had a strong calling from God. He felt he heard God speaking to his heart saying, "You are going to be a missionary for me in Chicago." As a result Paul says, "One of the big things that I made a point was to surround myself with people who were different from me." He has been part of a church planting team that has started one of the fastest growing faith communities in the area. It is primarily reaching people who are not Christians or those who have not gone to church for many years. It has grown incredibly quickly and Paul has been responsible for prayer ministries and integration of new members. The challenge for him at this time is praying and being Spirit-led are critical to his identity but as the new church plant grows exponentially, the church seems less agile and open to the Spirit's leading than it was in the beginning. As such he does not know if he can continue there for much longer. He needs a faith community that will enable him to be a missionary and also grow in his ability to faithfully and obediently follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

*Joel's Identity Journey*

Joel continued serving in his family's immigrant congregation during his time at university. InterVarsity trained him extensively and Joel was always welcome to wholly use his gifts and skills in various leadership and service roles within the congregation. Being active was part of his identity. However, throughout his life Joel has wrestled with his sexual identity. He began attending another faith community in his free time that welcomed and ministered to people with same-sex attraction. Joel wrestled with what to do as his family's congregation did not seem to embrace singleness as a viable

path. Over the course of his life he only heard the topic preached upon once. Joel and his parents were often questioned as to why he was not dating and getting married since he was so handsome and had such a good job.

Over time Joel came to believe that maybe he could simply remain single even if such a choice would never be affirmed by others within his faith community. However, as he attended this other church he met his boyfriend Edward. He said:

> Suddenly when this opportunity came up and I'm like sure, I'd love to explore that. We dated for a month and then we gave a title for the relationship at the end of the month. So it was very intentional throughout the entire time, but even now after two years, we are talking about getting married. We are talking about having kids."

Recently Joel came out to his church leaders and to his parents. His parents have been accepting but now he explains he is "technically under church discipline where they have removed me from all forms of service" including "Sunday school teaching, reading scripture on the pulpit you know before the pastor comes up to give a sermon, to even doing Power Point slides. And, they even asked me not to participate in the Christmas choir, so it's pretty intense." He says, "I'm allowed to occupy a pew, yea. I'm allowed to go to small group. I'm not allowed to lead a small group. It's basically like a glass window effect. I feel like I'm that Christian that people keep on criticizing and saying you come but you don't do anything. It's like well, in my case, I really can't do anything." He explains "I feel like I'm almost like a moral liability to them." By the time we spoke he was preparing to move to a different state in two weeks. There was no way to reconcile his sexual identity with the faith community he had loved and served throughout his life.

*Angela's Identity Journey*

For Angela, finding a church that reflects her ethnic identity is so important it didn't matter how far she has to commute to find it. She says:

> I'm high identity African American. I looooove my culture. I love it! I love what we represent. I love who we are. I love going to a church where I can see people that look like me worshipping God. We're on the same battle field. I love to see that. I love to see that solidarity. And it's important to me to see in a world where we are minorities, it's important for me to see that solidarity. It's important to see that we are different than what people say we are. You know, and I can see that in my church. Not everyone in my church is a statistic. So to me, being part of that community combats what the world would tell me that I am. It combats that completely.

Anglela chuckles and says, "And so, that's why I realize I search for these places because I do not want to believe what someone else will say that I am. And, I want to have my own identity as an African American person. And I feel the freedom to grow in that identity and have that identity when I'm in that place."

## Finding Companionship For The Journey
## Can I Make Friends Here?

A desire for companionship is woven throughout the stories as InterVarsity alumni describe their search for faith communities after graduation. They want to find people who will understand the unique struggles and challenges they are facing. Since many of those are related to their age and stage in life, finding an age cohort is important to them. As illustrated in the table of most frequently mentioned qualities, sixteen people interviewed verbalize this desire. However an additional seven people who did not mention needing to find a faith community that had their age cohort are involved

in churches where a large percentage of the congregation is comprised of young adults. Two more who did not mention needing an age cohort are involved in para-church organizations that are meeting this need, and one of these individuals is working with her pastors to help their church design ways to reach out to people from her age cohort.

For others finding companionship is a more nuanced process. It involves not only finding an age cohort of Christians, but people who also understand the individual's cultural identity. There is a sense if their ethnic identity is not understood, it will be extremely difficult to form friendships. Thus, the situation for ethnic minority graduates is more complicated (Phinney 1990, 499; 2006, 121; 2010, 36).

Regardless whether the concern is merely for an age cohort or if it is intertwined with ethnic identity issues, the desire for companionship is similar. Highlighting data from a few of their journeys illustrate why such a quality is desired in a faith community. Nestled within most of their stories is a yearning to find good company for their journeys so they can keep growing (Magdola 2009, 11).

## Lilly's Relational Journey

Lilly faced some unusual challenges in her journey. She became a Christian during her time at university through InterVarsity but was returning after graduation to the area where her atheist friends from High School and atheist family members lived. She wanted to find a faith community to keep growing. She was looking for a multi-ethnic community so there might be some people who would understand what she was struggling with as she sought to interact within such diverse relational worlds. At

this time she was also working in a high powered business atmosphere and she was traveling a great deal. She explains, "Yeah, I'm actually a really new Christian. I really need the support and I've been looking for quite a while." She tried some churches in the area and attended one for several weeks. She says, "It was not very multi-ethnic" and "when I got to know some of the women there, they were all like … they all did great things, where they were nurses or they were serving in their community in some way. But there was nobody I could really, truly relate to. That was such a hindrance for me. No one understood." After trying she lost hope and stopped searching. She went back with her atheist friends and moved in with her boyfriend who is an old friend of her family's. Now she is trying again. She has recently found a multi-ethnic community where there is diversity within the congregation and for the first time she feels like she fits and is starting to make friends.

### Sophia's Relational Journey

Sophia also became a Christian at university through InterVarsity. She is ethnic majority and as she describes her church she says, "I love it! That's where I've met my friends, and it's been such an answer to prayer. They are my best friends. We hang out all the time." She expresses gratitude that there are kickball tournaments, volley ball and "stuff like that" which enable her to easily get to know people. The church also has "a big young people's group" for singles. She says at times "it feels a bit like a meat market sometimes, and there's people there that you kind of wonder" about their motives for attending. However, in spite of that, there are many opportunities to make friends. She

recognizes that "for a lot of people, it's a very lonely period" because of financial challenges and being "at the bottom of the totem pole at work." She realizes that for many it is really difficult to "make friends in a new city." She is happy her faith community has made it so easy. Right after graduating from university Sophia moved home and lived with her parents before later transferring with her job back to the Chicago area where she had gone to university. The faith community she attended during that earlier period of her transition was also set up in a way that made it easy to make friends.

## Chen's Relational Journey

Chen had been involved in a new InterVarsity chapter at his university which was not very active, but he was extremely active in his local church at that time. What he loved most about it was that it was an Asian American church, it had good teaching, and there was real depth in the community. While there he and his wife became parents. He said at that time "if anybody got pregnant or had a baby there would be a meals program set up and when we had our baby we got all sorts of hand me downs from these folks. And you know, without any questions asked. Hey, do you want this, do you want that?" He said it was "exactly that kind of passing the torch if you will. Meals, hey come over whenever you want, we're just having a dinner Friday night so. Yes, things like that were (pause) nice."

When Chen moved to Chicago after graduation he and his wife were looking for an "Asian-American minority focused church" because he says "it just seems like we have more in common in general when we speak about our past and struggles and

things like that. They have an understanding of what I'm going through." He has tried some different faith communities but gave up looking because they could never find a place that had good teaching and deep community. It seemed like one or the other had to be sacrificed. Finally they joined a large mega-church because it had solid preaching, but he wishes he could find that sense of community again. Chen says, "I keep going to church, thinking I might meet somebody. Maybe a parent will smile or we'll get talking within the same class. Maybe those parents around us we'll kind of get to know." Yet he says "it becomes so transient and you rarely see two of the same people over and over again." Because of this "it's just tough to kind of establish that relationship going forward." When asked if there was a word or metaphor that best captures the transition period for him, he thought for a moment and said "agnostic." He yearns for deep community and companionship on the journey but there is a sense by the tone in his voice that he is beginning to despair that it will ever happen, and the lack of companionship is impacting his soul.

### Bethany's Relational Journey

Bethany became a Christian through InterVarsity at university. She grew in her faith during this period but after graduation she moved to another country where she never found Christian companionship. The closest faith community with young adults was far away. Bethany says, "I've always been a big prayer person, so I never really lost that. But so far as getting into scriptures, and really mediating on that, and pursuing holiness, like I kind of shrugged that off for a while. I was definitely more into going out

and drinking and partying, and being kind of wild and crazy." She says, "God or the Holy Spirit kind of keeps tugging at your heart, and kind of pulls you back home." She came back to the area to renew her visa and out of the blue she was offered a great job without even applying for it. Bethany had old friends from InterVarsity in the area who invited her to come to church with them. This was the turning point for her. Bethany says "if you have good solid Christian friends who understand your lifestyle, and are doing the things you need to do (pause) holiness, and aren't about going out and drinking and sex and drugs or whatever it may be, that helps you stay focused." In the faith community she now has not only her original friends but she has made many new friends as well.

### Andrew's Relational Journey

Andrew joined a faith community right away when he moved to the Chicago area to go to university, and after graduating he continued in that same community. He says, "I'm just continuing to go to church here. This is where I belong and I know many people here." He has made many new friends but he says "maybe like 25%" are also friends from university. Two of these people are his really good friends. He says the relationships he has formed are so meaningful that "I look at those and I say like I couldn't really have that at another church" because "it takes me time to warm up to people." He says "to live out my faith, I would need other Christians around. And not just for me, but also just participating in that for others." Andrew is grateful to have the companionship of friends who have helped him through transitions such as job changes and getting married. Because he realizes "building community in the adult world is so

slow" he is grateful for the overlap, the chance to build new friendships while having some of his old friends in the faith community too.

## Xander's Relational Journey

Xander became a Christian while he was a university student. He had friends from InterVarsity who invited him to attend "this thing for spring break." He said it included "rock climbing, basketball, volleyball. Name pretty much anything cool under the sun and like it was there." He says, "I came to know the Lord" and "gave my life to him." As soon as he got back his friends invited him to go to church with them. He was going to turn down the offer but it was only five minutes from where he was living, and many of his friends attended the church even though it was a long commute for them. He talks about how important it has been for him to have friends at the church with whom he can be honest. He says, "At the time I was a baby in the faith." But he says his friends there could "feel my pain, reach out, show me love. It's like a concept I never really understood. So I think it was, a big part of it is like having people around me that were more mature in the faith. I think I would have fallen very hard if there weren't people around."

For a short season he stepped away from those friends because he was dating a woman who was very jealous and he wanted to show her that she could trust him. However, Xander says, "This was like the most miserable year of my life. I just felt so bad about everything and I was just so miserable without my community." After several months he says:

> I wasn't going to go back and beg them to hang out with me. But then after 10 months with no community, you get a little humble and God breaks that in you. You know what I mean? And you get a little (pause) desperate for your community that you had. So like- screw it or whatever. In my eyes I find it's like begging but I'm OK with that. I was broken enough in my eyes, but in their eyes it's like I apologized. But, in my eyes, it was like begging. Be my friends, please! I'm sorry!

He explains that his friends thought he was happy with his girlfriend and the decision he had made so they never contacted him when he left. But, the absence of their companionship was unbearable for him.

## Cassie's Relational Journey

Cassie became a Christian through InterVarsity's ministry at her university. Shortly after that she says "I met the man who would become my husband and he invited me to start going to this church that he was going to." She said this was her first home church and since she was a new Christian she had nothing to compare it to. She explains after graduating and getting married "we tried for several months to stay with that church. We stayed in Chicago and we kept trying to blame different things on why we didn't feel like we belonged, when in university we felt very strongly about it. We really wanted to end up in that church. It was the right church for us while in university, but it took us a while to realize that it wasn't the right church for us anymore." She says that "one of the pastors there had baptized both of us and it had been my first church so I kind of had them on a pedestal."

Cassie explains that later they went out to dinner with their former InterVarsity staff worker. When the staff worker asked how everything was going at their

faith community Cassie says “I actually started crying.” She says she tried to make excuses why it didn’t feel like it was going well and why they were not attending very regularly. “We’ve been traveling. We’re really busy.” The staff worker asked her, “Has anyone noticed that you have not been attending much?” Cassie said at that point she couldn’t help herself and she just “started bawling.” She said “the first thought in my mind was does such a place exist where people would notice if you weren’t there?” It was at that point when she realized she didn’t have friends at the church. She and her husband switched to a different faith community where they now have many close friends and they feel as though they are growing.

## Calling Into Question The Homogeneous Unit Principle

Although for the last several decades many congregations within the United States have been formed under an assumption that the homogeneous unit principle is the most appealing model for faith communities (McGavran 1970; Wagner 1979; Wright 2010, 82), data from this study suggests such an assumption might be unwarranted. Comments contradicting the homogeneous unit principle are sprinkled throughout the majority of interviews. They come from Caucasians and minority culture graduates alike, and are mentioned even when minority culture InterVarsity graduates are looking for companionship with ethnic others like themselves.

David desires a worship community that is diverse “racially” and “socio-economically.” The homogeneous nature of his own congregation is deeply troubling to him. However, since congregants regularly interact with a culturally diverse faith

community nearby, he can tolerate this aspect in his own community. Julia believes diversity in cultural upbringing is no excuse for not having ethnic diversity in faith communities. She explains, "The church is people who are bound together by Christ, following God." She says the church should not be like "a country club." The goal is not to be comfortable but to reflect the work of Christ in the world. Andrew deeply appreciates his ethnically diverse faith community because it is congruent with the ethnically diverse neighborhood which surrounds the church building. He also thinks it is a better reflection of the "Body of Christ as a whole." Other majority culture graduates seem ashamed at the lack of ethnic diversity in their congregations. For instance Sophia explains that although she has made a lot of friends at her faith community "it is soooo homogeneous it is almost embarrassing." Nell explains the lack of ethnic diversity is one reason she and her husband almost left their congregation in the beginning, but over time she has made peace with it by seeking to be a change agent.

Although Lilly desires to find people who will understand her cultural heritage, she explains her campus fellowship "had many different ethnicities there." As a result she made friends with people from different cultures. Even though after graduation her friends moved to different parts of the country, they still stay in touch regularly through video chats. Because of the quality of ethnically diverse friendships she made during her time in InterVarsity, she wants to be part of a culturally diverse faith community. Sarah explains that although she grew up going to a Chinese church, "since university" she has "been going to an American or multiethnic church" and that is how she "connects with God most." Many others from immigrant homes express they have

been navigating cultural diversity since childhood and it seems abnormal to be in a setting with no ethnic diversity. Others like Victoria explain that they are in multi-ethnic marriages so they want to find a multi-ethnic church.

### *Second Research Question*

The first research question asks what InterVarsity gradutes are looking for in faith communities and why these qualities are important to them. The focus of the second research question is to understand what InterVarsity alumni are experiencing as they transition to faith communities after graduation. The first finding within this section reveals some of the difficult emotions and experiences InterVarsity alumni have encountered, even when on the outside it looks as though their transition process is going relatively smoothly. The second illustrates the majority of InterVarsity graduates over time are finding a place in the religious marketplace and, once they do, they begin serving and making a contribution. However, finding their place in a faith community alone does not guarantee they will thrive. The third finding highlights a pattern from the data which reveals the power of mentoring communities in determining whether or not there will be ongoing growth or stagnation during this transition period.

### Difficult Emotions And Experiences

As in Schlossberg's research (1984; 1989, 5-15) many InterVarsity graduates struggle during the transition with feelings of marginality and a sense they do not matter. Just as "the most elementary form of mattering is the feeling that one commands the interest or notice of another person" (Rosenberg and McCullough 1981,

165), at times there is a sense that no one will notice if they cease growing or if they stop attending church. Many feel as though they are invisible (Turner 2001, 48), especially if they are not married and if they do not have children (Ingersoll 2003, 61-97; Chaves 2011, 52-53; Wuthnow 2007, 214). Until they find their place in a faith community many experience a sense that their ministry roles during their time at university are disconnected or fragmented from their life after graduation, even though development occurs best in settings where "role demands in different settings are compatible" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 212). Many experience sadness over the loss of their InterVarsity community and some struggle with feelings of being alone in their search for a new faith community. The words and metaphors used to describe the period often capture the difficulty of this season, even if on the surface things appear to be going relatively smoothly. What follows is a sample of the types of comments which were shared during the interviews.

*Invisibility And Not Mattering*

Adam uses the word "challenging" to describe what the transition process has been like for him. He explains during his time in InterVarsity he was deeply committed and faithful in practicing spiritual disciplines, and as a result he experienced a great deal of spiritual growth. Of this period of life in InterVarsity he says, "I felt if I don't do something, if I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing there, I'm not just letting myself down I'm letting a lot more people down." But he explains now, no one really notices. Adam says, "I guess I'm the perfect do as I say and not what I do person. I

serve others and I serve the community and you would never know that I don't pray, or haven't prayed. You wouldn't even tell. It's rather sad." He explains that he has learned how to pretend to have a vibrant relationship with God when in reality this is not the case, and whether his spiritual life is vibrant or withering doesn't seem to matter or make a difference.

Dawn explains how painful it was to try to get involved in a couple's Sunday School class at her church. It was like she was invisible because she and her husband did not have children. They kept persevering because they didn't want their commitment to only be based upon getting their own needs met. However, she says the "straw that broke the camel's back was when" it was time to select a new book to study. She says:

> A couple of us suggested Tim Keller's *Prodigal of God*. I was really excited for that. I thought that's the book. That's what they'll choose. Well, someone else in the group suggested a book on parenting and I was like (laughter), I was like surely- I told my husband surely they won't pick that. They know we're in the group. Why would they vote for that? Sure enough, that's what they voted for.

Dawn said they told her, "We're not trying to exclude you, but this is very applicable for the rest of us." Dawn and her husband left the group and she joined the choir where she now sings with the elderly people in the congregation.

Ashley comments many times in the interview how much support she had when she was in InterVarsity. She exclaims, "I had a ridiculous amount of support." If she was tired in the dorm someone would come by, knock on her door, and encourage her to go to an InterVarsity meeting or Bible study. She says it was a ridiculous amount of

support and “it was a shock to my system when I graduated. Sometimes I wake up and make myself go to church, but sometimes I just don’t. Nobody will call or know.” She went from people caring about her and feeling like she mattered greatly to no one caring or even noticing if she shows up or not.

Timothy says it is really hard once you leave university to find “a supportive group of people who all know each other and care about each other.” He talks about visiting faith communities “and you’re one of like 500 people there. Maybe there’s like someone whose job is to greet you at the door, but you know they don’t really know you, and they’re not really going to try.” He then goes on to say if you get a response of any kind when you visit it is likely just a form letter that goes out to everyone. He feels no one in these settings truly sees him.

Cassie tells the story of being away from the faith community where she and her husband were baptized and married for months before anyone even noticed. Long after they had switched to a new church she says “two staff members of the church reached out to us and basically said, hope you are doing okay. We’ve been thinking of you.” She says she and her husband “sent a very carefully constructed e-mail reply saying we’re doing great, thanks for asking. We’ve been thinking of you too.” Cassie says they explained that they had switched to a new church and told the two church staff “we would love to talk to you. We’d love to meet you for coffee.” However, neither staff person from the church ever responded. Cassie and her husband were left feeling like it didn’t matter what they had experienced. Cassie believes “remembering people and being

remembered" is critical because "that's the first step for community to be created." She says:

> I feel like that's the spark that starts the fire. In order to be invited to things or in order to want to invite people to things, you need to feel like (pause) you know that feeling like, they remembered my name. There's something like that. If I'm going to a movie that weekend, I'm going to invite people I know, and you're not going to invite people from church unless you remember who they are.

Andrew talks about visiting his parents faith community which is a mega-church. This is the faith community he attended faithfully before going to university. He says that anyone between "18 and like 32, I felt like was completely ignored in the sermon. Really from like 14 to 32. Unless you have kids or you're in junior high, anywhere in between that, we don't really, we're not going to really talk about you in the sermon because we don't think you're here." From his tone there was a sense of sadness as he reflected upon those experiences. Danielle also talks about the void of interest in many faith communities starting immediately after graduation from High School. She says, "I don't think pastors do it intentionally but let's give them the last hurrah speech, and then, now what? (laughter) I think it's hard, because with a lot of churches it seems to be geared toward, I mean, mostly geared to a lot of families or kids, you know? So it's just kind of this awkward gap of where do all the young 20s folks go?" She lived with her family in the suburbs for a while and she comments "a lot of people who live in the suburbs are families, and what they want in a church is to be family centric." There is a sense in her comments that singles and twenty-somethings are largely invisible to them.

*Disconnected Or Fractured Ministry Roles*

Dawn says, "There has been a disconnect between people from my generation. I know part of the reason or I assume part of the reason you are doing research is because people from my generation don't go to church a lot of times even if they were involved in campus ministry. I know that because I remember people that I was involved with in campus ministry and they don't go to church. I think it's difficult."

David talks about how difficult it has been to make the role switch from being involved in campus ministry to figuring out what his ministry really is after graduation. He says he was working in campus ministry even after graduation "and so it's been hard to kind of change my perception and think about how I'm witnessing, or like how my work is a mission field, or like (pause) or anything else, like our neighborhood, our neighbors." He says, "But I don't know; it was a hard adjustment." He describes the process as difficult even though his transition appears to be far smoother than most.

Cole describes the times since he has graduated as being "like little blocks of time." There are all kinds of different experiences and none of them are connected. Nothing relates to anything else. He says "it's kind of like a waiting period. On a broad scale it's like that, but then there are intermittent phases." In his journey some of those intermittent phases like serving overseas were extremely positive and other intermittent phases have not been positive.

*Sadness And Feeling Alone*

As Lilly's story earlier indicates, her transition has been extremely challenging. She says, "In High School I was very atheistic so when I reconnect with my friends, all of my friends are not Christians. My boyfriend isn't Christian. I feel like I'm standing in two very different buckets. And it's actually, considering all the things, it's amazing that I did not just fall off and not continue to be a Christian anymore. But I feel pulled in two different directions." Lilly says for much of the time she has felt all alone in her search for a faith community because she attended university in a different part of the country.

The loneliness has led Hannah into dating a non-Christian as well. She says, "I have a boyfriend and he's not Christian and it is totally hard for us, because we are trying to break up and we can't break up. It's so hard for me now to figure out, to navigate the space of what is it that is really important to me, and really to face myself in the mirror and find yourself at this crossroads. Is this a choice now?" In essence she cannot comprehend how she went from being so involved in her faith and Christian community in InterVarsity to a place that has been so lonely and isolating that she is making these types of choices and might actually marry a guy who is not a Christian.

In many ways Nell's transition journey was much more seamless than most yet when she is asked to pick a word or phrase to describe this period she said "it was scary in some ways. I never really felt overwhelmed but I think just the prospect of wanting to find a place like InterVarsity or a community, like what we had known and

felt really comfortable with was daunting. I think I felt more frustrated or sad about the loss of community that we had, than I did feel frustrated about the church search."

Aside from stepping away from his faith community to help his girlfriend cope with jealously, it would seem that Xander had a fairly seamless transition period. He found his faith community shortly after becoming a Christian, he went there with InterVarsity friends, and he stayed after graduation. However, of the period as a whole he says "I would say if there is a hole in the transition, like there's a bigger hole in the transition of minorities. You know what I mean? But that's a general thing. I think purely addressing the transition between InterVarsity after graduation, my experience was definitely like massively supported and then completely on my own. There's no soft incline." He goes on to explain that everyone starts working and many people move away. As a result he is lucky if he sees his old InterVarsity friends even once or twice a year. Of the transition he says, "We don't have people to talk about it with or people to go through it with. We're so isolated."

Angela's transition story seems extremely positive yet this is how she describes the early part of it. Of the first few months she says:

> Completely lost! I come back here. My community is gone. I'm devastated. Literally. I'm devastated. Everything is different. I was a student for all my life and I'm no longer a student. I didn't have a job to come to at the time. I'm back in the home with my family, and I had recently lived on my own for three years. The transition was very difficult and I found myself in a place just asking God- "what next?" all the time. And feeling almost a little depressed because I couldn't hear from him. I wanted to go back. I wanted to figure out how I can get back into this community, you know, something that I love so much. It was very difficult.

Paul who also in many ways would seem to have experienced an easier transition describes it this way. “There were people who were there. There were staff workers that guide and help you out, but all of the sudden (he clicks his fingers) that’s gone. Within the course of twenty-four hours it feels like, wow, you are starting over. Not starting over, but wow, I’m all alone.” He seems to express sadness yet acceptance that this is simply the way it is.

## Finding Their Places In The Religious Marketplace

A premise of Wuthnow’s book is churches “provide *almost nothing* for the developmental tasks that are accomplished when people are in their twenties and thirties (2006, 12). Although this seems to be the case more frequently in suburban areas of Chicago when faith communities are focusing primarily on families with children, within the city itself and occasionally in the suburbs, over time InterVarsity graduates seem to be finding their places. The religious marketplace Finke and Starke allude to (1992) has spawned a variety of diverse types of faith communities, and a number of these have figured out a way to appeal to the needs of twenty-somethings. Rather than being compatible with only one type of faith community, InterVarsity graduates who joined this study are landing in congregations of all shapes, sizes and ethnicities. Once they find their places, they readily begin serving and making a contribution.

### *The Types Of Churches They Are Attending*

From interview data the researcher distilled seven fairly discrete categories of faith communities where people in this sample are regularly attending and

participating. The first term, *twenty-something churches*, is being used in this study to represent congregations founded upon the premise of reaching a specific demographic of young adults in the city. These tend to be primarily Caucasian congregations and they offer many ways for people to connect, serve, and form new friendships. Although there are twenty-somethings in all of the faith communities, *twenty-something churches* seem to focus primarily on reaching out to and facilitating the development of this specific age cohort.

The *multi-ethnic churches* mentioned by InterVarsity graduates in this study vary a bit. Most are in the city. They tend to have a large Asian-American presence, although one is comprised primarily of people from Europe and the Middle East. Multi-ethnic congregations provide affirmation for one's ethnic identity while simultaneously serving as a bridge to other cultures. *Immigrant churches* seek to foster spiritual growth while also helping to preserve aspects of the immigrants' cultural heritage. Although they are usually comprised of people from one ethnicity, two InterVarsity graduates attend these types of congregations in order to purposely engage with people from another culture.

*Established denominational churches* in this study represent those which have been in existence for a long time and were not originally formed for the primary purpose of marketing to specific immigrant or multi-ethnic communities or to twenty-somethings. This is the least discrete category for many of the churches mentioned in other categories are also tied to specific denominations. However, the researcher created this category to further illuminate the diversity which arises in the interview data.

InterVarsity graduates attending these churches mention their participation in older, established congregations. In this study the two mentioned are largely comprised of Caucasian members and they are located in the suburbs.

Although the definition of a *mega church* can mean a congregation in excess of 2,000 people, the churches these InterVarsity members attend are many times larger. The sheer size of these congregations tends to put them in a different category. One is a predominantly Caucasian congregation that is becoming more multi-ethnic over time and the other is designed to minister to a specific minority ethnic population but it is not an immigrant church. Mega churches offer the broadest array of ministry opportunities and programs because of the size of their congregations and church staff. *Very small churches* for this study fall in the range of 25-40 people. Often they are house churches meeting in a person's home. However, they might also meet in a public location. The benefit of house churches is everyone knows everyone else and every person's contribution and service is needed. Lastly, *church plants* are new churches which are being formed or have been formed in the last few years. These vary in size and ethnic composition.

Table 4 reveals how many of the twenty-eight InterVarsity graduates attend each type of faith community. The three people who are now involved in planting new churches are counted twice in this chart for each participated in a church in one of the first six categories before they joined a church planting team. Joel is listed as still

searching even though for much of the transition period before coming out about his sexual identity he was integrally involved in his immigrant congregation.

Table 5. Types Of Churches Alumni Are Attending?

| Type Of Faith Community | # Attending |
|---|---|
| Twenty-Something Churches | 4 |
| Multi-Ethnic Churches | 9 |
| Immigrant Churches | 4 |
| Established Denominational Churches | 2 |
| Mega Churches | 2 |
| Very Small Churches | 3 |
| Church Plants | 3 |
| Still Searching | 4 |

Table 5 reveals which InterVarsity graduates are attending each type of faith community. Since leaders of different types of faith communities might be interested in tracking the types of comments which arise from people attending congregations like their own, this table provides additional information for interpreting alumni comments.

Table 6. Involvement In Types Of Faith Communities.

| Type Of Faith Community | Those Attending? |
|---|---|
| Twenty-Something Churches | Bethany, Sophia, Nell, Becca |
| Multi-Ethnic Churches | Dawn, Andrew, Lilly, Xander, Danielle, Marcus, Paul, Sarah, Victoria |
| Immigrant Churches | Jack, Julia, Adam, Ben |
| Established Denominational Churches | Jeremy, Stephen |
| Mega Churches | Chen, Angela |
| Very Small Churches | David, Timothy, Cassie |
| Church Plants | Jeremy, Paul, Jack |
| Still Searching | Ashley, Cole, Hannah, Joel |

*Ways InterVarsity Graduates Are Serving*

Although there was not a specific question in the interview protocol asking InterVarsity graduates how they were serving in their faith communities, during the course of telling the researcher their stories a number of people shared this type of information. Many of the graduates mention being very involved in their faith communities in areas such as leading worship, helping with youth ministries, working with the poor, helping with children's Sunday school programs, leading small groups, welcoming and helping to integrate new people who are visiting their church, providing IT services, and making a commitment to financially tithe. As such, it seems once they

start feeling "at home" in a faith community they are often eager to find ways to serve and give back to the faith community and surrounding neighborhoods.

## Mentoring Communities And Their Link To Thriving

In many ways it would seem if an InterVarsity graduate is able to find a faith community that "fits" with his or her identity, and the graduate is able to make friends and find ways to serve in and through the faith community, thriving would naturally follow. However, as the data are sifted a pattern emerges which reveals thriving is an unlikely outcome unless one additional element is incorporated into their transition journeys. The construct which best captures what InterVarsity graduates say they need is found in Park's idea of a mentoring community (2011, 172-202).

Sometimes InterVarsity alumni speak of a desire to join a small group when they are trying to find a faith community. When they use the term it can represent a number of options along a spectrum. It can mean simply a place where they can make friends easily, to an inductive Bible study group, to a mentoring community. Many churches also have small group programs and these too can mean almost anything. It is Park's construct of a mentoring community which best captures what InterVarsity graduates are experiencing when they are thriving during the transition. Within this construct many of Bronfenbrenner's ideas about human development can be found as well (1979, 56-82). InterVarsity graduates describe needing a place of belonging where they are seen and known. Within that community of belonging they feel the need to be confronted with challenging questions. Innate in the challenging process is a need to be

held accountable. They need support and encouragement for the journey, and they also need a safe place for vital habits of the mind such as critical thinking and personal reflection. When such a place exists they thrive. When a mentoring community does not exist for them, even if they seem to have found their place in a faith community, most appear to wither over time. What follows is a sample of their comments to reflect the pattern.

Marcus's Experience

On the surface Marcus's transition journey looks seamless. He found his faith community while he was studying at university. He first came with several of his InterVarsity friends and a number of them are still there so he sees people he knows regularly when he goes to church. Yet he says, "The second year out I started considering going to different churches just because I had been going to my church for four to five years and I felt like my growth, like within the church, I'd come to a plateau." However, before he left he felt he should try joining a small group. He says, "Our small group is interesting because everyone is, more or less around my age, pretty young and came out of university ministry." Through the group he says he can really "connect with people on a pretty deep level and kind of understand their lives, and they can understand mine. We speak into each other's lives so I felt like that kept me staying the past half year." When asked how the group helps him to grow and how it broke the plateau he says:

> I think I am a very, very independent person …. There was more room for me to make myself vulnerable. So what I think the small group helps with is it takes me out of my comfort zone. I think it has helped me grow out of my independence and be more vulnerable. Like I needed a group of people

> that I didn't know going in. We don't know each other but we feel like God is calling us to grow together.

Sarah's Experience

On the surface Sarah's transition journey seems fairly seamless as well. She moved to the Chicago area for graduate school and she was focused and disciplined in her search for a faith community. Sarah always attended a church service regularly. However, she says "I think after the first year I was feeling spiritually dry, and I really missed having that accountability and having Christian friends to talk to about stuff happening in my life." As a result she decided to join a small group even though it meant sacrificing time that was already in short supply. When asked what this experience was like Sarah says:

> Yeah. So it's like a safe place where you can share struggles right. So from that then, you give small group members permission to ask how you are doing. To come back the next week and say so, this is what we talked about last week- steps to help you come with "blank," right? And to point out areas in your life that aren't fruit producing. Or, help you through things. I think that would help me use them, knowing about my struggles and putting everything out in the open, so nothing is hidden. They know about it. And, in my conscious mind if I do something contrary to what I told them, that doesn't sit well with me. So, that's part of it. I have an accountability partner in small group and we meet every two weeks and talk about what we've been praying for each other.

Sophia's Experience

When Sophia speaks of her transition journey she says "it's been very easy." She found a faith community that doesn't match all of her identity needs because of its lack of cultural diversity. She deeply values multi-ethnicity but her faith community is primarily Caucasian. However, she has found ways to supplement that through social

justice ministries and outreach programs she volunteers with through the church. As noted earlier, she has also formed a large network of friends. However, she says when she was at university "I always had more close guy friends, too, for some reason. That was difficult and isolating. Now, my small group are my best friends, the best friends I've ever had, I think. There is accountability that comes with that, and encouragement, and fun." When asked about the accountability she says:

> I guess it's funny that I said that. I just started a few months ago. I had my first actual accountability partner. I had heard it, and always dodged being held accountable. The way we operate is that there's 12 girls in my small group. So they have us in pairs. I'm with one of my closest friends. The point is kind of to have a conversation where you ask questions, the hard questions, and follow up on what you mentioned a couple weeks ago.

She says the questions are like- "How's that going? How's the relationship with this guy that seems a little dodgy? What are you struggling with?" When asked why accountability is so important Sophia replies:

> We are in a season of life and a stage of life where sin abounds. And not like, life gets easier, but for years I drank way too much. I was on the leadership at InterVarsity and was not sleeping around, but close to it, and hoping no one would find out. Especially in a big city, it's really easy to get away with, and no one will ever know. That's been really big, to have those Christian friends saying, "It's 2 o'clock, we need to go home" kind of accountability. I know for guys, honestly, a lot of it is about porn. Often they have software actually that monitors you, that's what a lot of their conversations are about. It's like the hard stuff of life that most people don't talk about."

Bethany's Experience

As mentioned previously, Bethany had a difficult start in her transition experience. She moved abroad and was not involved in a Christian community. As a

result she describes spending her time "drinking and partying, and being kind of wild and crazy." But, when she moved back to the Chicago area one of her mentors from InterVarsity invited Bethany to her faith community where she got connected. Later Bethany joined a small group and now leads one. She says, "Ever since then, that got me back on track and I feel like I've been growing by leaps and bounds ever since then, in my faith." She says she's "loves it." She says:

> If you have good solid Christian friends who understand your lifestyle, and are doing the things you need to do (pause) holiness, and aren't about going out and drinking and sex and drugs or whatever it may be, that helps you stay focused. There's a good accountability piece to it as well. I know I'm lucky enough to have a good couple of girlfriends who are able to ask me hard questions, and keep me accountable to certain things, which is really important as well. Yeah, and I think just the ability to be involved in a church and community with other people. Like, that's why you know, God has a church. We can't do it alone.

Bethany says when she lived abroad, "I lived alone, and I struggled a lot through that. So, I think support and keeping each other accountable makes a world of difference."

### Victoria's Experience

Victoria describes how different life is after graduation. "In the university so many people are around, there is constant community. Just living in such close proximity people always know how you are doing. If you didn't show up at a meeting someone will come by and get you." She says after graduating, "I can't expect to be a baby anymore. I have to take ownership of my faith." As a result she carefully checked out a handful of churches and then made her choice and "got plugged in immediately." She says that "because no one's going to know if you didn't go to church and no one's

checking up on you," they made the decision to join a small group. She says, "We're in a small group, so we would definitely be missed. We're in a marrieds small group now, but I was in the singles small group before. We have accountability partners so we check in on each other. Our small group is really close. We really share real real stuff."

Victoria explains, "It was not like that before. We were really good friends, we always hung out, but I think sometimes people would individually grab meals with each other. Then out of those meetings everyone was mentioning the same thing where I feel like we want to go deeper and we want to be more real with each other. We want to be able to confess things to each other and keep accountable to each other." She says, "We knew it was something that we're all feeling so let's (pause) it's going to be very hard but let's just do it. Let's be real with each other, go really deep into each other's lives." She says "in our particular group we really felt that and we pursued it. We wanted it. I think it was instigated by a lot of things too." She mentions that "some things happened" and out of "that situation we're like if we were keeping each other accountable from the start, this wouldn't have happened. So we felt a sense of urgency to do this.

Ben's Experience

Ben's transition experience has been very positive. He lived at home and went to his parent's church as soon after he graduated. A little later he saw some old InterVarsity friends who told him they were looking for a roommate in the neighborhood where he had lived when he attended the Chicago Urban Project as a student. Ben jumped

at the chance to live with them and plug back into the faith community he attended as a student. Of his experience he says, "I guess I never had the desire to not be involved in a church. There were challenges along the way but there were always people there who I felt would keep me accountable if I didn't do anything. Would keep encouraging me along the way I guess. People would notice when I wasn't there." At the faith community where he is attending Ben is a part of a young adult group "led by two former InterVarsity staff." He mentions that this group has been helpful to him during the transition.

Additional Experiences

Xander credits his growth specifically to his involvement in his small group "hands down." It is the place where he has his closest friends and it's the place where his machismo exterior can come down and he can be truthful and vulnerable about what is happening in his life. Although Dawn was not able to find a mentoring community within her church, she did find it in a para-church organization. Within that group of women she has found a sense of connection, belonging and challenge to keep growing and developing. For some the very small churches are in and of themselves mentoring communities because everyone is seen and everyone is personally challenged. Of his faith community Timothy says, "One thing I really appreciate, they do ask the hard questions. At church on Sunday I was talking with one of the ladies there, and she just kind of straight-up asked me, you know, because I was doing all this stuff" with my alternative sports league, and "that's a big part of my life." He said she asked what his

mission was in all that activity and Timothy said "I was like, called out. I hadn't really ever put that in words, and I still don't know. But I know that God's leading me, you know, with all that. But that's another story. But her just like willingness to ask that tough question, and just like make me honest to myself, you know. I think that's really great, in solid community." He appreciates it because he says, "I challenge myself. I just want to be more. So you know, when someone else is trying to get me there too, I respect that a lot."

Lilly says one of the reasons she is not growing is that because of her travel schedule for work she isn't able to join a small group. She says "almost all small groups meet during the weekdays," yet she wants support. When asked what support looks like to her she says, "I think there's three things with support. The first is holding me accountable; reminding me that God is good, and what our message is. The second is prayer for somebody. The third is being able to share life's ups and downs with you." Lilly says she still hasn't been able to find a small group that she can attend that does not conflict with her travel schedule. Others who are struggling such as Cole or Hannah seem to be yearning for this type of community as well, where they can be challenged to become the people they want to be, and ask and wrestle with honest questions of their own. Chen had a mentoring community in the past and has not found in at this stage of his life, and he uses the term "agnostic" to capture the feelings in his soul. He still believes in God but it's as though something inside him is withering. Adam's comments are similar as he struggles with a lack of what he frequently refers to as "structure" for his internal growth and development. The structure he used to have with InterVarsity met the

qualities of Park's construct of a mentoring community. While he loves being engaged in all types of social justice ministry through his immigrant church, service alone is no substitute for this.

The primary places where the data are inconsistent in matching positive and negative experiences in the transition with engagement in, or lack of engagement in, a mentoring community is with Julia, Joel, Jeremy, Paul, Nell, and Angela. Analysis of data from Danielle's and Becca's interviews is inconclusive. Julia's situation is unique given she is in a moratorium situation for one year. Joel's situation is unique as well given coming out to his immigrant faith community regarding his sexual orientation. The researcher believes there is a high likelihood the church planting teams of which Jeremy and Paul are a part have functioned in some ways as pseudo-mentoring communities, although with the defined task objective of also planting a church. Nell and Angela remain tightly linked to InterVarsity friends for their ministries and it is likely these friendships have served the same overlapping purpose as a mentoring community.

### *Third Research Question*

The third research question asks how InterVarsity graduates describe the responsibility of stakeholders in helping or hindering their transition to faith communities. Data reveal a distinction in how they view three primary stakeholders. They believe InterVarsity has a responsibility to help them network to find a faith community after graduation. They believe church leaders need to have a place for twenty-

somethings to land where they can have a voice and lead. Lastly, parents are not being looked to for advice during the transition.

## Networking

Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development focuses on transitions or "shifts which occur throughout the life span" (1979, 6). He believes development is optimal when there are supportive links between the various microsystems and settings where people are engaging (1979, 214-215). InterVarsity alumni seem to agree with this premise for many say a significant factor in the transition is whether or not a network exists which connects their life before graduation to their life after they leave university. When supportive links are present, InterVarsity graduates tend to navigate the transition fairly well. When supportive links are not present or identified, it can be an incredibly difficult process wrought with a great deal of discouragement. Many graduates express the need for an online site they can easily navigate to find the support they need during the transition period.

### *Where Supportive Links Are Present*

If a person studied in the Chicago area and stayed in this same geographical area after graduation, the graduate likely received a great deal of support and advice from InterVarsity staff workers about how to find a faith community. This was the case for Bethany, Xander, Sophia, Nell, Cassie, Marcus, Paul, Joel and Angela. All had a chance to get advice about churches with InterVarsity friends and InterVarsity staff members, and they were appreciative of the support. For example Bethany says

advice from her InterVarsity mentor "really helped me." Nell says, "I think in some ways it was our close friends, that we were, in a lot of ways, looking for the same thing, so we kind of did it together. I would say that our staff were really supportive and helpful." During his transition Joel found it helpful to be able to talk with InterVarsity staff as he sought to discern whether to stay with his immigrant church or go somewhere else when he first graduated from university. He was happy with the choice he made to stay with his immigrant church.

*Where Supportive Links Are Not Present*

Data reveal, however, that the network is too restrictive to a graduate's own staff members and his or her own InterVarsity friends. If the person goes to university in one location but later moves to the Chicago area, the transition can become extremely difficult. This has especially been the case for Julia, Chen, Lilly, Cole, and Bethany before she moved back to the area. It can also be difficult if a person studied somewhere else in the state but needs to settle in the suburbs because of his or her job.

Ashley discusses how challenging it has been for her because she has needed to move out of state for her job. She says she could not contact her "old staff and ask – "Do you know anybody?" because her staff members had no personal connections in the state where she was being transferred. Danielle says "a lot of people move to huge cities, and new places, and they don't know anyone. And it's even doubly hard." Hannah describes her situation metaphorically. She says:

> I understand that InterVarsity cannot do everything and that they are limited, for the most part, to the university level. In education, a lot of

> parents send their kids to amazing pre-K programs and they have gains beyond their normal levels. And, once they go in, even just two years into a regular program, it un-does everything. Some parents think of it as an inoculation of the system- "Whatever we put them through, they'll still be fine because we put them through this amazing pre-K program." But, it's not an inoculation. It's more like nutrition. And, just because you're getting great nutrition for a couple of years, it doesn't mean that you're not going to turn out horribly under-nourished even two years later if you do not have access to that same level of nutrition.

*The Need For A Virtual Network*

Moving to a new state and a new city is what Victoria faced in the transition. She felt fortunate that she was not totally alone. Her boyfriend from university was also in the area, although at the time he was traveling all the time with his job. She expresses frustration about the situation. She says:

> There's a huge number of us, but you just don't know unless you talk to them. You don't know how big that network is and you don't know how to use it. I just feel like there's (pause), I mean I went to my university and there's a huge alumni network, and I know how to use that network. I found my job through that networking. I actually didn't apply the traditional way. I passed on my resume to the alumni, she passed it on to HR, and I got an interview. I feel like when it comes to a job search, when it comes to professional things, you know how to utilize those networks. But, when it comes to your faith, you don't really know what to do."

Victoria expresses deep frustration that she couldn't access this type of network to find an InterVarsity roommate. She says:

> A lot of people move here. They don't know anyone to live with. They can't afford rent on their own, so they look for a roommate on Craigslist. They don't even know who the person is. Is there a better way to connect with other believers, with similar lifestyles? They're probably not doing drugs and probably not having crazy parties and things. Is here a way we can use that to an advantage?

Others like Chen and Timothy also mention the need for an online network, especially when people are moving to different states or to different parts of the country. As a whole the InterVarsity graduates appreciate the personal help of their friends and staff members. They just see the process breaking down when their transitions take them to places where their staff members' personal relationships are insufficient to reach. They know InterVarsity likely has alumni throughout the country. They simply have no way to connect with them.

## A Place To Land, Have A Voice, And Lead

InterVarsity graduates believe churches have a responsibility to provide a place for twenty-somethings to land, have a voice, and lead within the congregation. When this is not present they feel their demographic is marginalized and, as Schlossberg's theory indicates (Schlossberg 1984, 28; 1989, 9), it lessens motivation to engage. If there is no place for twenty-somethings to land, have a voice and lead it sends the message that they are not welcome in the congregation and that their contribution is not valued.

Also, Bronfenbrenner's theory claims development is enhanced if "role demands in the different settings are compatible" (1979, 41-42). During their time with InterVarsity, alumni regularly dialogued about a myriad of complex issues and they are used to leading ministries. If the leaders of faith communities are serious about their development, InterVarsity graduates believe they have a responsibility to make space within their congregations so these activities and roles can continue.

*Addressing The Void*

InterVarsity graduates believe church leaders have a responsibility to address the void which is present in many congregations. Often there is nothing for twenty-somethings and it sends the message that church is not for them. Ben says, "I feel like the biggest advice I would say is to try to have some sort of landing spot for young adults and people out of university. It can be as simple as a young adult group." Marcus says just providing university students and graduates with "a place where they can get together" is a big start. Angela urges church leaders to go a bit further. She say, "Have a space for them. Have a space that looks different than what the church offers to everyone else. Because, the reality is many university students do not come into a church community because it is not attractive. It looks completely different than what they are used to now. It looks like the church our grandparents go to. (chuckle) It's for our grandparents."

InterVarsity graduates want church leaders to understand they are educated and thoughtful human beings who deserve to be heard and included in the dialogue. Their time with InterVarsity has helped them to "develop their *internal voices"* (Magdola 2009, xix), and they desire a place or platform where this development can continue. They need a forum for critical thinking. When Hannah shares about her frustration with the church she was visiting which seems steeped in white privilege she says she would have been okay staying there "even if they were doing harm, if I had some voice to be able to say- "what are we doing here when we talk about Africa and

saving these poor kids? Is this really coming from a place of white privilege?"" However, in her situation she felt there was no place to have a voice. She says:

> I think that there should be more power given to our young adults, a.k.a. me, to have a voice to say, "You know what? When you said this, I thought it was bogus." There's no forum for that, there no place where I can go up and say blah, blah, blah. It's just a belief that young adults don't know what we are talking about. You don't know what we are thinking, and now we have to do something on our own and now we're all lost little sheep. That's just a personal opinion.

She shares how frustrating it is that InterVarsity's goal "is to create world changers" and you graduate as "someone with a voice" but then you find out "there's no place for me to come with a different perspective."

Danielle explains, "I like having open conversations. You just assume that this is great, this is awesome, and when you go out" from university you realize that "it just doesn't feel like that is going to continue." Paul shares about the frustration that it is hard to have genuine dialogue about concerns or struggles because "sometimes pastors kind of gloss over that. They are like – oh you are too young to go through that or you are too young to deal with that." Sophia says "for me, I feel like sometimes we are still getting treated a little bit more like a youth group and not like young adults." She shares about how there is no dialogue about practical issues like premarital sex but instead the message is "Don't do it, okay? Moving on, next topic." InterVarsity graduates feel there need to be forums or avenues for genuine dialogue in churches about genuine issues that are concerning their age cohort.

InterVarsity graduates desire a place to land and have a voice in what happens in a faith community. The third theme of deep concern to InterVarsity graduates

is the responsibility for leaders of faith communities to have ways twenty-somethings can engage in leadership. Adam alludes to how frustrating the transition has been when he says, "I didn't have a say in a lot of things" when he returned to his immigrant church after graduating from university. However, in InterVarsity he was a competent leader. Nell appreciates that in her faith community she "actually had the opportunity to start a new ministry." Jeremy, who started at a traditional denominational church and later joined that congregation's church planting team, reflects on his experience. "I got to preach a couple of times and that was a lot of fun; I led worship a couple of times and I really enjoyed that." Sarah says "a lot of InterVarsity friends start when they are at university and are student leaders. I know for a lot of people they have enjoyed that. So, the way to care for graduates is find a way for them to lead. Small group, worship, hospitality things that make them feel part of something. It helps them to take ownership for being at that church." Angela urges integration of twenty-somethings into the "leadership structure so that they can care for the needs" of others like themselves who visit the church.

## Parents Not Looked To For Advice

Whereas most of the research findings result from a thickness of data in the form of participants' quotes, what makes this topic a finding is the *lack* of comments and references InterVarsity graduates make about parents being viable stakeholders during their transition process. Emerging adulthood is a time of recentering or differentiation from a person's family of origin "which constitutes a shift in power,

agency, responsibility, and dependence" from parents (Tanner 2006, 27). It appears as though involvement or selection of a faith community is one area where such differentiation is occurring and, as a result, they are rarely looking to parents for advice during the transition.

Joel is the person who speaks the most about his parents and everything he says reflects well upon them. He says, "I think my parents were really good examples of what it looked like to serve. I mean my parents raised my sister and I while serving and I actually get really critical when I see parents with one kid, maybe two, who don't serve. My parents did." He continues to tell how his "Dad helped start a sports tournament" and he credits their modeling as a significant reason he why he stayed in his immigrant church after graduating from university. Ben also seems to appreciate the informal accountability living with his parents afforded. He says "Like I don't think it was ever directly mentioned. But, living at home if I didn't go to church I knew my Mom was going to have a conversation with me." Chen says that he guesses his mother is helpful in the transition. He says, "She bugs me to keep finding, to keep trying, to find something. So, I guess her nagging would be one way" of helping. Angela says her step father agreed to take her to a church that she wanted to visit when she moved back in with her parents after graduation, and that is the faith community she now attends.

Those are most of the positive comments shared about parents during the transition. However, just as many people say their parents have hindered them in the transition. When asked if anyone was helping or hindering her in the process Julia responds, "Not really" but then she proceeds to mention that her parents seem less than

excited about her decision to attend the Latin church in her neighborhood. She says, "But they are not telling me not to go." Stephen says after becoming a Christian through InterVarsity, "I would basically drag my parents" (to church with me) "when I was home for the summers. It was liking dragging your kids to church! (laughter) Now they are going on their own there but the second I graduated I decided I need to get my own community so I have my own group." Stephen left the seeker congregation he took his parents to in order to become part of a traditional denominational church where he could get more in depth Bible teaching. Becca's comment illustrates the differentiation process well when she says:

> I think my parents might have hindered me a little bit, not in like a … I love them to death …. But they would call me every single Sunday and they'd be like, "Did you go to church? And I'd be like, "No." And they'd be like "why didn't you go to church?" I'd be like, "I'm not going to go now." So it was just … it wasn't like hindering rather in a way like trying to rebel from them. It was more so the reason I didn't want to is because I felt so much pressure to fit into this mold of what the church wanted me to be. It's like I mean they are a huge part of my walk with God now, but I think at the time I was trying to like, you know, financially support myself and support myself and really break off from them, because they paid for university, they paid an allowance. I was very much like dependent on them up until the point I graduated. I think it was … yeah, I was just differentiating myself from them."

### *Fourth Research Question*

The fourth research question asks how InterVarsity graduates describe their own personal responsibility in the transition process. The first finding reveals they feel a tremendous amount of personal responsibility, frequently noting there is no excuse for a lack of intentionality in the process. The second finding highlights their belief that

they are responsible for having reasonable expectations of faith communities during the transition period. The third finding underscores their belief that it is their responsibility to get involved, for only through the process of getting involved will they grow.

## Holding Themselves Personally Responsible

The identity capital model argues for an agentic or active, rather than a passive, approach to the identity formation and the developmental process (Côté 1996, 425). The same sentiment is found interwoven throughout the research data. Words such as *intentionality*, *initiative*, or *proactive* are sprinkled through the majority of interviews. Many say such an approach is even more important at this stage of life because it is not like university. No one is pursuing you or watching out for you. Other times these exact words might not be used but the sentiment remains the same.

As a whole InterVarsity graduates seem to hold themselves responsible for making the transition to faith communities even if it is far more difficult for some than others. The transition process appears to be more difficult for ethnic minority graduates, singles, women who are not mothers, and for those who are living in the suburbs. Even for these individuals who have far fewer faith community options to choose from which align with InterVarsity's core values, they still hold themselves personally responsible if the transition is going poorly.

### *Requires Intentionality*

Some of the graduates mention intentionality is needed more than ever at this time in life. Becca says, "It's not like university where you have, like, people

corralling you." She says finding one's place in a faith community "definitely takes a lot of discipline because you have to pursue relationships, you have to maintain them, you have to (pause) like it requires effort rather than it's in front of me" as it was at university. Victoria says "initiative" is what is needed more than anything else during this period. She says:

> I want to explain why I picked that word. When you're at university there are so many Christian organizations. There's InterVarsity, there's CRU. There's so much. There are campus churches and all these things. There's clubs. I feel like everyone comes after you. I feel like even if you're just hanging out, everyone's like- "Come to church with me." But one thing I realized coming out of university is that there's a lot of churches in this city, but no one's going to come knock on your door and tell you "let's go to a coffee house" or "let's go to this evangelism event we have going on on Saturday." All these different fun, cool events… there's really none of that. You have to go look up churches and go there on Sunday by yourself. I feel like a lot of people (pause) and I feel like when I left university, I look at my peers who all left with me, and there are a lot who fell away because they didn't take initiative. They were waiting and nothing ever came because they're just sitting at home and no one ever came to get them. One thing I realized immediately is I have to check out churches immediately and get plugged in, because no one's going to come and drag me in.

Dawn expresses a similar sentiment. She says:

> The one word that would maybe encapsulate my experience after university is "proactive." I think you have to be proactive after university. When you're at university, you have all kinds of people coming up to you saying "we need help with our ministry." You could be so passive and still go to the campus ministry and maybe that's why, you know (pause) that's why so many people fall away from the Lord, because they're passive, because someone really reeled them in. But (pause), I certainly found that after university if I wanted to be involved in a church I had to be very proactive, make the time to do it. Work around my schedule, and not fit it into my schedule because it was at a convenient time. I had to say, "Okay, I'm tired and I worked last night, but I will wake up at 8:00 in the morning and I will go to church, you know?

Danielle talks about the decision to be "more intentional in putting myself out there." She says "it's definitely been a challenge that you have to be a lot more thoughtful with your time" at this season in life especially if you "don't have anyone who is keeping you accountable." Others like Jack, Cassie, Victoria and Jeremy talk about how they are introverts but that is no excuse for not being intentional about stepping out of their comfort zones to meet people and get involved in a faith community. Jack says "it's kind of a little bit of a struggle for me" but "it is a choice you know. I can't really say" that "it's my personality." Stephen shares a similar sentiment. He says, "I think it has all to do with a combination of God's will for you and your maturity because if you… I don't know. You just have to realize one day that you're an adult and if you want to believe in God you have to do certain adult things." He thinks being a part of a faith community requires being intentional. Andrew feels the same. He believes InterVarsity graduates should go to their faith community "rain, shine, snow, you know. Don't let anything stop you from going to church. Just show up. Like, you know, even if all they can do is bring their butts to the seat on Sunday."

Joel speaks of how he was "very intentional" about where he lived in the city and he believes this is imperative. He thinks "whether you find where you're going to live next or where you go to church next, make sure that they're both in very close proximity." Otherwise, there is a sense that you will never be able to form close relationships or integrate deeply into the faith community. Sophia says there is no excuse for not growing given that we "live in an age of Jesus apps, and on-line sermons and everything else. There's no reason for not being fed." So even if the transition is moving

slowly a person should still be growing "because it's all out there." Julia also talks about the need to be "thoughtful" about choices regarding "moving" and roommates. She says "whenever you have a choice, whenever you're given options- be thoughtful about them and be prayerful about them" because those decisions will impact graduates' ability to integrate into a faith communities and their ability to continue growing.

*Ultimately No Excuses*

For the people who are struggling to find a faith community, a deep sense of personal responsibility causes them to blame themselves even if there are far fewer options for them because of their ethnicity, marital status or geographic constraints. Chen is struggling in the transition because of the lack of deep and meaningful community, yet he doesn't blame others. He says "I think it's just more myself," and he cites "lethargy" and "some general laziness" for not searching more. Even amidst sharing about her deep frustrations and sorrow over not being able to find a faith community where she feels comfortable, and her desire that church leaders would approach things differently, Hannah still seems to blame herself for not finding her place in a faith community. She says that she should have found "a way to live in the city." From her words and tone there is a sense she feels if she had made that choice she would have found a place where she could be herself, find friends near her age, and be encouraged to keep developing her faith and the values she internalized while in InterVarsity. Instead she chose to live and work in the suburbs and because of her profession it is now extremely difficult to switch. In some ways there is a sense Cole is blaming his own

identity for the difficulties he is facing in his search. He seems to indicate the problem is partially his fault because he is more conservative than many twenty-somethings. Because his focus is living out Matthew 26 and James 1:27, and because he wants to go into missions, he is not interested in going to bars and other things that a lot of twenty-somethings enjoy. However, all of these individuals are living in suburban parts of the Chicago area which afford them few faith community options which align closely to InterVarsity's core values and their achieved religious identities. This is not the case for many graduates who live in the city.

## Need To Have Reasonable Expectations

Several InterVarsity graduates mention they are responsible for having reasonable expectations about faith communities. David explains somewhere along the way others passed on to him that "you're never going to find the perfect, picture perfect church, and you know, you need to commit and not be selfishly consuming church." Sarah speaks of how positive her InterVarsity experience was but that she realizes the need to "keep your heart and mind open to the differences that come your way in terms of Christian community. You can't bring InterVarsity back."

Jeremy echoes this theme. He says, "I think a lot of it is that you change your expectations and you kind of unlearn a lot of things that you've learned and eventually you can get back into it but from a different direction." He illustrates his point by reflecting upon his expectations about small groups. He says it took him a while to realize that "in the dorms, there was so much community happening in the cafeteria, in

prayer groups, you were in each other's lives a lot. The small groups didn't function as community building." Jeremy says when he entered his faith community the first few small groups he tried to lead failed because he was trying to recreate small groups that looked like InterVarsity's. He had to change his expectations. He says, "Now there's very little content and it doesn't matter. I don't care if we get to it. It's a lot easier to stick around after a small group event and build community when you live three doors down, not 45 minutes away. There's been a lot of shifting, lowing my expectations of what I was going to be able to accomplish."

Jeremy explains, "InterVarsity expects a lot out of you and supports you to do it. Outside of InterVarsity people have much lower expectations and don't offer a lot of support, and you have a lot less time and a lot less energy to do anything." He says it helped when he changed his thinking and decided he would focus on leveraging what he did have in order "to reach the moderately poorly reached young 20s and 30s white people that I hung out with." That was a turning point for him. Later from that same faith community he has been able to lead a church planting effort which seems to be quite fruitful. People are coming to the church plant from many different ethnicities. He is finding several desires he had to be involved in a multiethnic community and lead multiethnic worship are now becoming possible. Many coming to the church plant are people who never went to church or who left their congregations years ago, so that new ministry has been deeply fulfilling for him.

Nell shares how she struggled at first with her faith community because it seemed "too white." She and her husband are passionate about social justice and they are

living in an under resourced community. However, many in her church had no interest in that part of the city. She says, “So there are things that are a little frustrating at times, but I think that’s also a gift we get to give to people. It’s part of why God has us there for sure. I think at some level you just need to make a decision and admit there’s no perfect church. So that was, I think also, somewhat intentional.” Becca shares she needed to adapt her expectations. She says, “I feel like I came out expecting to meet all these friends” and build a community “and it would look exactly the same. And it wasn’t. And then you know, you start looking for the perfect church and I think you have to realize it’s not out there. You just have to commit to something and throw yourself into it and that’s how it works.”

### Need To Get Involved

InterVarsity graduates seem to have a strong sense that it is their responsibility to get involved in their faith communities, and often they view involvement as critical if the transition is going to go well. Involvement seems to lessen their sense of marginality and lack of mattering during the transition (Schlossberg 1986). There is a sense that because they are involved and engaged, people “see” them. In addition, comments from InterVarsity graduates mirror Astin’s theory that “students learn by becoming involved” (1985, 36). Many tie their personal growth and development during the transition period to their willingness or lack of willingness to get involved. They also seem to affirm the aspect of Bronfenbrenner’s theory that development is enhanced “as a direct function of the number of structurally different settings in which the developing

person participates in a variety of joint activities" with others (1979, 213). If they express regrets, it is usually for holding back and not becoming involved sooner.

Victoria says, "I think one thing that really helped is that I got plugged in right away and even though I was afraid to meet new people, because I'm an introvert, I just have to tough it out. I just know that it will be rewarding and there will be a blessing later on. I got plugged in right away in their kid's ministries. I started to do Sunday School and then at the same time I was also in a singles group." Regarding the importance of getting involved Victoria explains:

> Being involved makes you feel at home, because it makes Sundays easier when you go to church and you recognize faces, you have someone to sit with. Serving, I feel like what serving does though when you join a team in terms of the church, is it makes you take ownership of why you are there. It gives you a purpose of why you are at that church. It gives you ownership, so you're not really in and out any more, because you are just going on Sunday.

Nell echoes this as she speaks positively about the chance to lead a new ministry in the church. She says, "The new spaces that I would move into felt like, oh, I know more people now; like oh, I might run into you on Sunday. That feels good, to know a familiar face instead of just feeling like no one sees me."

Adam shares about how his heavy involvement in InterVarsity helped him to practice personal spiritual disciplines regularly because others were counting on him. If he had the chance to do the transition from university over again, he says "I would probably have volunteered to teach in the youth department of my church." Although he feels he has grown in some ways because of the outreach programs he participates in through his church, he feels like a lack of involvement in the area of teaching and

developing others has hindered his own development. Sophia speaks of her involvement in many different types of ministries such as being a camp counselor, teaching Sunday school, "working with these high schoolers" and "teaching ESL with adults." She says it is because of her involvement in these types of ministries that she realized her calling and changed her profession. She says, "It just never occurred to me. The people who know me and love me were like, "That makes so much sense. Why is this just occurring to you?" I felt very affirmed that's what I should do." She says her philosophy is "get busy living or get busy dying." She does not understand why people sit on the sidelines and do not get involved.

Ben talks about going to his parent's Catholic church during the period when he was living at home. He went with them very early in the morning, the Mass older people attended. He became involved even though he knew it was not where he would continue going to church once he moved out on his own. He says:

> I've never thought about this before but getting involved in the Catholic Church while I was at home, I think that helped me. I was involved in a book study type thing. I was involved in those for about two months. I never thought about this before but I think that got me used to interacting with older people in the church. So on Sundays (now) when I meet people here, it doesn't feel so strange to interact with older people.

Ben credits his involvement even for that short period of time at his parent's church as developing in him an ability to interact easily with older members in his new congregation. As such, it has broadened "the number of structurally different settings" in which he "participates in a variety of joint activities" with others (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 213).

Jack, David, Andrew, Jeremy, Cassie, Xander, Paul, Joel, Cole, Stephen, Marcus, and Angela all mention with enthusiasm the role that involvement has played in helping the transition to go well. None express regret over getting involved. When Julia moved to the area and knew she would only be here for a year, she says she "tried to be transparent with people." She says that she told them in the beginning she would only be in the area for a short time; however, during that period she wanted to be involved. Julia says during her time with InterVarsity she gained skills in working with audiovisual equipment and "it turns out that's a really big need in churches." She says it has been "a great way to be committed and to help them and to get to know people better." As such, involvement has enabled her to cross cultural and ethnic barriers in the church she is attending. As she reflects on the period right after graduating from university when she lived with her parents, her only regret is she chose to not get involved during that period of her journey.

### *Summarizing Research Findings*

Interview data reveal InterVarsity graduates cite six qualities most often as being important for them in their search for a faith community after graduation from university. They desire a community with biblical theology and preaching, a multi-ethnic congregation or people from their own minority ethnic background, an outward focus with concern about missions and/or social justice, a meaningful way to serve inside the church, a place where they can make friends their age, and a faith community in or their own neighborhood. The qualities cited broadly mirror an evangelical identity, and they

specifically mirror InterVarsity's organizational identity. If the faith community does not closely align with InterVarsity values, a selection process ensues in which the graduate determines which unique set of qualities will not be compromised. These are linked to his or her identity formation process and illustrate what the person will stand for in the world. InterVarsity graduates also look for companionship within their age cohort, and at times with ethnically similar Christians. In faith communities they are looking for an identity fit and companionship so they can keep growing. They also frequently desire to be a part of multiethnic faith communities for a number of reasons, thus calling into question the homogeneous unit principle which has been a foundational premise upon which many congregations in the United States have been built.

Often the transition is wrought with period of feeling marginalized and invisible, especially in the early stages. Over time the majority find their places within the religious marketplace and begin serving and making a contribution. However, whether they thrive or not is often dependent on their ability to participate in a mentoring community. Many believe InterVarsity is responsible for helping them to find a faith community after graduation which aligns with the values they internalized at university. They believe churches are responsible for providing a place where twenty-somethings can land, have a voice, and lead. Parents are rarely mentioned as being influential stakeholders in the transition period, most likely because the twenty-somethings are seeking to differentiate from their families of origin. In the end InterVarsity graduates hold themselves most responsible for the transition and they blame themselves if it is

going poorly, even if the deck is partially stacked against them. Many believe it is their responsibility to be intentional and get involved, and only by doing so will they continue to grow.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the transition process InterVarsity students experience after graduation from university as they seek to find their place in faith communities. Special attention is given to understanding what helps and hinders the process, with the goal of providing "thoughtful scaffolding" (Masten et al. 2006, 188) to InterVarsity graduates and all who care about supporting them through the transition. The thoughtful scaffolding which emerges from the research is comprised of both educational and sociological implications. However, these two types of implications are at times so tightly integrated it becomes impossible to tease them apart and speak of each in a discrete fashion.

## *Development Depends Upon "Seeing"*

Interwoven throughout the research findings regarding InterVarsity graduates is *their deep-seated desire to keep growing*. Development is what is at issue in their journeys to find faith communities when they leave university. It is not a search by narcissistic people to meet petty or superficial needs. The individuals who participated in this research yearn to keep growing. They yearn that the development they experienced during their time with InterVarsity will continue. They do not want to go backwards. They want to keep growing and maturing so they can become the people they sense God

desires for them to be. Noticing and paying close attention to people is a potent catalyst for development (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 65); however, as the literature reveals (Schlossberg 1989, 7-8) many InterVarsity graduates who are going through this transition struggle with feelings of invisibility and marginalization. *Ongoing development seems to be linked to whether or not their unique situations and struggles are seen by people in faith communities*, yet further research is needed before generalizing or transferring findings from this data to other populations.

### *Reflections About The Religious Marketplace*

Evangelicalism in the United States is best represented "by the metaphor of a religious marketplace" (Emerson and Smith 2000, 136). "Competitive marketing theory" seems to represent "the best orienting framework and set of assumptions with which to construct an explanation for evangelicalism's vitality" in the United States (Smith 1998, 85). It spawns "entrepreneurial leaders who promote an immense variety of religious products" (Smith 1998, 86). Does the evangelical religious marketplace *see* the transition? Does it care about twenty-somethings and the unique struggles and situations they face?

### A Mixed Review

Data from this research study are mixed. What follows is an explanation of the data from three vantage points or perspectives.

*Wuthnow's Argument*

Wuthnow's statement that churches "provide *almost nothing* for the developmental tasks that are accomplished when people are in their twenties and thirties" (2007, 12) does not seem to be affirmed by this research data. What is affirmed is his statement that "congregations *could* be a valuable source of support for young adults. They *could* be places where young adults gravitate to talk about the difficult decisions they are facing or to meet other people of the same age" (Wuthnow 2007, 13). Many of the InterVarsity graduates interviewed are finding this type of support in their faith communities.

*Entrepreneurial Response*

Entrepreneurial leaders (Smith 1998, 86) have developed a variety of churches in the religious marketplace (Finke and Stark 1992, 17). Faith communities that reach out to the niche market of twenty-somethings who live in the city have been established. These leaders *see* twenty-somethings and they value their contributions. Although largely homogeneous in nature, they offset this short-coming by providing meaningful ministries to at-risk youth or other opportunities to engage in social justice ministries. Other faith communities have been established which distinctly mirror the values of InterVarsity. They have solidly biblical theology and preaching, are multi-ethnic, are outward focused, have meaningful ways for twenty-somethings to use their skills inside the church, they have other twenty-somethings attending, and they are focused on making a difference in their neighborhoods. Two of the faith communities

which mirror these values most closely have drawn seven of the twenty-eight participants, or one-quarter of the people interviewed.

*Geographically Spotty*

Although the religious market place is seeing and paying close attention to some of the needs of twenty-somethings during this season of transition, research reveals the market response is geographically spotty. If a person lives in certain parts of the Chicago area, it is likely he or she will be able to find a faith community easily. In these areas there is enough of a market presence for people to be able to locate a faith community which provides continuity in their developmental process. However, if InterVarsity alumni live in the suburbs or other locations within the city, their search for faith communities which will provide continuity for their development is far more challenging. This is the case for people such as Eunice, Ashley, Chen and Cole. In these situations their age, ethnicity or marital status is likely to render them as largely invisible in the eyes of leaders or key gatekeepers within evangelical faith communities.

## Identity Interventions Needed For Gatekeepers

Josselson speaks of identity interventions with "social gatekeepers" who have the power to "greet and orient" new people or make entry into a community more difficult (Josselson 1994, 23). Astin references the control and power of administrators or gatekeepers in setting policies and establishing practices which can profoundly impact involvement, though often these individuals or groups of people do not seem to recognize the full impact of their actions (1984, 301-302). Josselson explains identity interventions

can take place at the individual level or "in the social climate within which identity formation takes place" (1994, 16). Since identity formation is taking place within faith communities, identity interventions in these communities can help congregational leaders to grow in perspective taking and become more cognizant of the things they are doing which might be helping or hindering twenty-somethings' development. From the research data three areas seem especially rife for such intervention.

*Valuing Twenty-Somethings*

Paying attention to twenty-somethings and noticing who they are is the first step in the process. If people do not notice them, development in the lives of twenty-somethings is circumvented. One area of intervention lies in helping leaders of congregations to value the identity of twenty-somethings and see them as people who are no longer children but who can and should be leading within faith communities. As *imago Dei* indicates, they too are made in the image of God and they have dignity. If twenty-somethings are not valued, it is likely that their presence in faith communities will rarely be noticed or given much consideration. Twenty-somethings will sense that they are not noticed and do not matter, and they will not return. Thus a damaging cycle ensues.

In Bronfenbrenner's theory "the developing person is viewed not merely as a tabula rasa on which the environment makes its impact, but as a growing, dynamic entity that progressively moves into and restructures the milieu" (1979, 21). The InterVarsity graduates who were interviewed could sense whether it would be possible to both grow and also influence a faith community. When InterVarsity alumni are thriving

in faith communities, there are meaningful ways for these twenty-somethings to shape the milieu. For older members of congregations it might be easy to think twenty-somethings need to wait until later in life before they earn the right to help shape a faith community; however, the idea that influence goes both ways is a crucial aspect of human development. Such mutuality is necessary given the priesthood of all believers and the biblical call to mutually minister to one another as members of the Body of Christ. Identity interventions can help gatekeepers in faith communities to see skills twenty-somethings bring and why their contribution is so essential to the health and vibrancy of a congregation. Identity interventions can help gatekeepers to be able to see themselves and twenty-somethings in new ways which will foster collaboration and mutual development (Bronfenbrenner 1979, 56-57).

*Genuine Affirmation Of Singleness*

Trends in emerging adulthood indicate people are marrying later and having fewer children (Arnet 2006, 5-7), and this changing marital trend seems to identify "where the decline in religious attendance has occurred" (Wuthnow 2007, 55). Churches which seem to be most effective at reaching twenty-somethings do not view singleness as an anathema. Groups are developed to address unique needs of single people and they are also welcomed and incorporated into the other ministries of the congregation. In InterVarsity the majority of its students are women who have been valued and treated with respect and dignity. They were not treated as second class citizens, yet at times they are entering congregations and the message conveyed is they are only welcome if they are married and mothers of children.

"Care needs to be taken to ensure programs, practices, and policies are helping people feel they matter" (Schlossberg et al. 1991, 201). Identity interventions can help people begin to engage in perspective taking and "see the world imaginatively from the perspective of someone other than themselves" (Markstrom-Adams and Spenser 1994, 85-86). Such an intervention can be especially beneficial if married parents comprise the majority of the congregation. If people in congregations do not affirm and genuinely respect singleness, it only makes life more difficult for twenty-somethings like InterVarsity graduates who might be positive deviants. They are already a minority within their demographic because of their faith commitment and their desire to live godly lifestyles. Both single women and single men need to sense that they are seen and valued for who they are in order for them to develop fully within a faith community. Also, if a congregation does not affirm same-sex lifestyles as is the case with Joel's congregation, singleness is the only viable path remaining. Yet, if singleness is also disparaged, there is little else for these individual to do other than leave the evangelical faith communities they love.

*Valuing Voice And Critical Thinking*

The third area for creative identity interventions with gatekeepers of faith communities lies in helping them to understand and value twenty-somethings' need for critical thinking and voice. Their entire educational process up until that moment in time has urged twenty-somethings to hone their "still fragile voice" (Setran and Keisling 2013, 65). The very process of becoming an adult is requiring them to find and include their "own voice in the arena of authority" and develop an inner sense of their own truth that

they themselves, and others, can trust (Parks 2009, xvi). Self-authorship involves the continual process of finding those parts of oneself that are not readily visible (e.g., family expectations), pulling them out to reflect on them, and deciding "what to make of them" (Magdola 2009, 3). This aspect of growing in self authorship and learning to find and develop their own voice cannot happen without platforms for critical thinking.

Magdola speaks of the need for "good company" from people who have learned "how to respect peoples' thoughts and feelings" from the *back seat* (Magdola 2009, 12). Identity interventions are needed so others within the congregation will not feel threatened when twenty-somethings engage in critical thinking because it is essential for their development. Identity interventions are needed so people can learn to change how they see themselves not only as gatekeepers of existing knowledge but as truly good company to help twenty-somethings develop to their full potential within faith communities.

## Additional Research And Experimentation Needed In The Marketplace

Noticing and paying close attention to what is happening in various parts of the religious marketplace will be essential in the nascent field of research surrounding the transition to faith communities after graduation from university. Bronfenbrenner explains that by creating quasi-experiments in various systems it is possible to impact development and also alter aspects of the systems (1979, 41-42). What follows are ideas for future research or experimentation based upon data which arises from this study.

*More Congregational Studies*

A logical next step for research is to study positive deviant churches. These are nested within denominations or networks which are normally not appealing to twenty-somethings, but these individual congregations are becoming effective places for the ongoing development of twenty-somethings. Within these congregational studies questions about leadership attitudes, styles and practices would be beneficial along with examination of explicit, implicit and null curricula. Comparing creative approaches being employed which differ from other congregations in the same denomination or network which are not effective at ministering to twenty-somethings would illuminate the research concern and add significantly to the literature.

*Location Of Faith Community "Deserts"*

This research would focus on discovering where the greatest need is for new entrepreneurial activity. It would look at various regions of the country or various communities within specific urban areas where twenty-somethings are spiritually languishing. Surveys as well as census data could be utilized, along with mining data from many of the surveys listed in the literature review. Just as identifying food deserts in locations around the country has led to the growth of the number of grocery stores in these areas, so identifying the location of faith community "deserts" will enable strategic entrepreneurs to resist the pitfall of planting new churches in areas which might already be saturated while other geographic locations remain in desperate need of their entrepreneurial endeavors.

*Involvement For Optimal Development*

Astin's theory espouses that if students become involved they will also develop. This appears to be affirmed by comments made by InterVarsity graduates and the corollary seems to be affirmed as well, as those who have not become involved in a faith community seem to be suffering. What is not clear and where more research is needed is in determining if certain types of involvement are more closely linked to more increased or optimal development. This question arose in the researcher's mind as she considered Adam's journey. He is very involved in outreach and social justice ministries within his church yet he seems to be spiritually languishing. If Astin's theory is wholly true, that would not be the case for Adam is deeply involved. Yet, even Adam admits that if he had become involved in teaching teens, that would have caused him to be more faithful in his own spiritual disciplines and he would be doing better spiritually. A comparative study of different forms of involvement and perceived spiritual growth in the eyes of twenty-somethings would be insightful. Also, a longer term comparative study that also includes third party observation and assessment of development would add richness to the literature base.

*Reflections About InterVarsity's Transition Process*

InterVarsity is a recognized leader in facilitating student development for engagement in a complex and multicultural world (Emerson and Smith 2000, 65). It is also known for doing an exceptional job at preparing and linking students with mission organizations and ministry opportunities after graduation (Urbana 2012). The organization pays close attention to the process of helping their students become "world

changers" (InterVarsity 2013), and people who will embody other qualities mentioned in this research. Because of this it is common knowledge many of their students continue on to become leaders in the global evangelical mission movement.

Although InterVarsity clearly sees and appreciates the transition students make into mission and ministry organizations, it is unclear if they see as clearly the processes needed to prepare students so they can transition well into faith communities if they are staying in the United States after graduation. Currently they seem to compartmentalize this training as an "add-on" track at their Winter Fest conference or they see it as merely the responsibility of their advancement department which works with InterVarsity alumni. Greater integration regarding the transition into their core curriculum is essential. This level of focus is warranted given one of their core values is that their students will be "equipped to be lifelong members in local congregations" (InterVarsity 2013). Also, given the uniqueness of the identity intervention process their curriculum facilitates, InterVarsity needs to take greater responsibility for the networking process after graduation.

## Greater Integration Needed

It is possible to integrate into the current curriculum ideas, constructs and skills which will make it easier for InterVarsity graduates to traverse their journeys to faith communities after graduation. Although there might be several creative ways to accomplish this goal, what follows are three ideas for seeing this process in a new light.

*From "Telling" To "Debriefing"*

InterVarsity gives excellent advice to its students. The Graduating Faith module at Winter Fest is appreciated by those who can afford to attend the conference. So too are the books, or contributions to books, which are written by InterVarsity staff members (Tokunaga et al. 1999; Yep et al. 1998; Cha 1998, 145-158; Gross 1999, 70-77). These are helpful in supplementing student learning; however, each focuses on "telling" students what to do or how to think about the transition. Rather than making the primary training for the transition a "telling" process, it would be far better if it was integrated into the whole campus ministry experience through a debriefing process.

All but one of the InterVarsity graduates interviewed attended a church service regularly while they were students. However, during this period InterVarsity is usually students' primary place for service and ministry. As such, these experiences do not tend to mirror what alumni experience after graduation. Their times away from campus during summer breaks are more likely to mirror what they will experience after graduation. InterVarsity staff workers could give students assignments to practice over the summer by challenging them to try out faith communities on their own, without the luxury of going with their InterVarsity friends. These students could be given assignments to attend regularly and interact with church members of different ages or distinct ethnicities. Then, when they return to campus after summer breaks, staff workers could include in those early weeks of the school season debriefing times to help students learn how to more effectively navigate challenges they are facing. Following this process would not require a drastic change from InterVarsity's current ministry programs but it

might better equip students for the transition they will face after graduation. After weathering a few challenging situations, students might be more open and receptive to the helpful advice that is told to them by staff workers through books or conference tracks like Graduating Faith.

*Navigating Church Identity Markets*

A primary focus of the identity capital model is equipping students to more effectively navigate diverse identity markets after graduation (Côté 1996, 423; Côté 2000, 207). InterVarsity has been ahead of the curve with regards to training in this area (Rendal and Hammond 2013, 3). However, insights from the identity capital model can be beneficial for helping students to prepare for the transition to faith communities after graduation given many churches are so homogeneous in nature (Wright 2010, 82; Chaves 2011, 28-29).

Côté speaks of developing tangible resources that are "effective as "passports" into other social spheres, inasmuch as they are vital in terms of getting by "gatekeepers" of various groups" and "being accepted by established members" (Côté 1996, 426). Whether through debriefing experiences after summer breaks as students discuss what it has been like to try to participate in a faith community, or whether it is while engaged in debriefing periods after urban projects or intercultural experiences, questions can be added which help students consider how people they are meeting and concrete actions they are learning might apply to navigating diverse church identity networks after graduation.

Côté also mentions intangible assets needed for the transition into a globalized society after graduation. He mentions the need for "ego strength, self-efficacy, cognitive flexibility and complexity, self-monitoring, critical thinking abilities" and a sense of purpose (Côté 1996, 426). InterVarsity graduates are developing many intangible assets as they learn to do ministry together in multicultural environments. Occasional questions can be added to ongoing team meetings and training times which explore how these ways of thinking and being can be applied in the transition process of finding a faith community after graduation.

One intangible asset is the need to develop an ongoing personal narrative (Giddens 1991). Questions can be designed to help students think through how to develop an ongoing narrative which is strong enough to hold onto InterVarsity values such as multiculturalism even in the midst of an evangelical religious marketplace characterized by homogeneous faith communities. By doing so they might be able to develop a sense of self within the identity formation process that will better enable them to engage even if faith communities do not yet hold their same values. Helping students to see themselves as changes agents even in the midst of such challenging circumstances would seem to better equip them with the intangible assets needed to most effectively navigate diverse church identity markets.

*Skills In Forming Mentoring Communities*

In many ways InterVarsity serves as a mentoring community for university students. Through involvement in its various ministries, meetings, and Bible studies students are challenged to examine who they are and who they will become in the

future. Many reflect fondly on the level of support they experienced while attending university. However, this research data indicate graduates who participate in mentoring communities are most likely to feel as though their growth is continuing.

A new form of training InterVarsity needs to consider adding to its curriculum is how to help their students develop skills they will need to form and maintain mentoring communities throughout their lifetimes, including during difficult seasons of transition or in the midst of diverse identity markets. It seems as though InterVarsity staff members know how to facilitate the creation of mentoring communities for their chapters serve in this capacity for students. Also, many graduates talk of their staff person or other students as being their mentors. However, when it comes to forming mentoring *communities*, graduates rarely speak of knowing "how" to form these types of groups. Instead in some ways to the researcher it seems as though they have found them by "lucky conjunctions" (Masten et al. 2006, 188), yet their good luck might have been the result of intentional organizational development processes developed or encouraged by the leaders of their faith communities.

Parks writes that mentoring communities challenge emerging adults to reach their potential and they are places where people listen, seek to understand, and are willing to be affected and change their minds (2011, 185). They are critical for twenty-somethings' development and also for helping them to shape communities and societies "as *they could become"* (2011, 174). As such, her comments seem to mirror the value InterVarsity places on helping their students to become world changers. Adding this component to the curriculum would therefore not hinder InterVarsity in its desire to

facilitate student growth. It would only aid their development and increase their likelihood of becoming effective change agents.

## Greater Responsibility For Networking

InterVarsity has brought their students through an identity intervention process during a formative period in their lives. Because of this, many have internalized core values of evangelicalism as well as additional values affirmed by InterVarsity such as a passion for social justice and valuing ethnicity. Their InterVarsity environment has not only been around them but is "forever in them" (Erikson 1996, 24). Many now see themselves as world changers. They have engaged in years of critical thinking, they have honed their internal voices and they expect to be taken seriously. During their time in InterVarsity they have "reevaluated past beliefs and achieved a resolution" about who they are and who they want to become (Marcia 1966, 552), and now they are actively seeking opportunities for growth (Marcia 1994, 41). However, identity interventions have consequences that need to be taken into consideration (Waterman 1994, 233).

InterVarsity has a track record of developing leaders who are able to work amidst the complexities of a globalized world. However some of their graduates are finding in the transition that the values they internalized during their time in InterVarsity, values which are now an essential part of their very identities, are not affirmed in faith communities. When there is a significant disconnect between what they have spent years learning and what they experience in faith communities, the identity intervention they traversed can become a detriment to them. Many who find themselves in this situation

undergo a longer season of emotional and spiritual distress than those who do not have such a disconnect.

Sociologists point to InterVarsity as being a positive exception to discouraging data they uncover about how many evangelicals approach to social issues (Emerson and Smith 2000, 65). Their research seems to indicate that the educational process InterVarsity is pursuing is good for students and good for society (Smith et al. 2011, 4-11). The goal of InterVarsity should not be to "dumb down" its curriculum so their students will find it easy to attend any faith community, no matter how apathetic or unhealthy it may be. Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development focuses on transitions. He writes that development is enhanced if "role demands in the different settings are compatible" and development is optimal when there are supportive links between settings (1979, 212-215). What is needed is not a "dumbing down" of the curriculum but rather supportive links so there is some level of congruity between what these students experience through InterVarsity during their time at university and what they will experience in a faith community. Congruity is needed with regard to core values as well as the types of roles these twenty-somethings will be permitted to play.

InterVarsity does a stellar job at facilitating networking between their students and mission and ministry organizations (Urbana 2012). Also, from the interview data it seems individual staff members are encouraging students to attend faith communities while they are at university and they try to refer them to faith communities after graduation. These are significant accomplishments. However, as beneficial as those two forms of networking are, as stories indicate there are still people who are falling

through the cracks. Individual staff networks are inadequate to address the plethora of situations which arise in the lives of InterVarsity graduates from even one chapter. Because of the need to relocate for jobs or additional education, graduates can live in areas where their staff and friendship networks do not reach. However, InterVarsity has a national data base of its alumni and communicates with many of them regularly. In a situation such as Chen's, there might be InterVarsity alumni on his very street or in his neighborhood who also long for deep community but they will never be able to find each other. InterVarsity's board and senior leaders need to find a way through their focus on maintaining privacy protocols to creative networking solutions which enable their graduates to find other people like themselves. Otherwise, by focusing so intently on maintaining privacy to protect their alumni, they might actually be harming their potential for future development.

## Additional Research And Experimentation Needed In InterVarsity

InterVarsity has been extremely supportive of this research because they care about the well-being of their alumni. Also, as already stated, InterVarsity is referenced in a positive light by leading sociologists in literature about emerging adulthood. Paying close attention to and seeing what is happening in the various InterVarsity chapters as well as with alumni across the country in the recent past and in the near future will be essential in the nascent field of research about twenty-something's transitions to faith communities after graduation from university. The organization is positioned in such a way that they could make a significant and ongoing contribution to

this field of research. What follows are ideas for future studies or experimentation based upon data which arises from this study.

*Who Is Most At Risk?*

Schlossberg writes that educators need to seek to understand different types of transitions, diverse contexts, and the impact of these transitions on the lives of individuals (1984, 35). In such a way they will be able to uncover who is at greatest risk. Greater research is needed, both qualitative and quantitative, to uncover trends to identify patterns with InterVarsity alumni.

Are people in certain parts of the country at greatest risk for having a difficult transition? Are graduates from certain types of families or from certain denominational backgrounds at greater risk in the transition process? Are certain personality types at greater risk? Phinney speaks of the complicated nature of ethnic identity development (1990, 499) and Xander mentions his sense that if there is a hole in the transition process for majority culture people, the hold is much larger for ethnic minority graduates. Are ethnic minority and multi-racial InterVarsity graduates at greater risk in the transition? Although staff and alumni might have hunches about what is happening, carefully crafted research studies would be able to illuminate what is truly happening in the process. Even replicating this current study in different cities or regions across the country would be beneficial.

*What Is Already Being Done?*

The researcher identified two graduates, Julia and Ben, whose attitudes during the transition seemed unique from the others. At first she thought it was just a personality difference in the way they weathered some difficult parts of their journeys. However, as the interviews progressed she learned that these two individuals had additional training for the transition. Julia's staff worker seemed to add an additional component to her chapter's curriculum that went beyond what other chapters were doing. In Ben's situation, a campus pastor at a church he attended developed a six week curriculum to help students think through what the transition would be like, and it included an individual mentoring component.

Because of the sample size, it was not possible to know if the difference in their attitudes and the graceful way they seemed to be going through the transition was attributable to personality issues or this additional training. It would be extremely beneficial if InterVarsity investigated the many different types of training their students are getting for the transition in diverse chapters around the country. Once a comprehensive picture of that training is compiled, research could be done to compare and contrast how it impacts experiences InterVarsity graduates are having in the transition.

*Educating For Resiliency*

Another way to investigate the transition is to look at it through the lens of research about resiliency. Through qualitative and quantitative studies it would be possible to interview graduates and determine patterns for resiliency in the transition.

Innate in this process might be issues such as the role of transition mentors, creative ways to maintain support while new friends are being made, and the potency of processes such as meaning-making or self-talk when difficulties arise in this season of life. Once resiliency patterns are identified, InterVarsity would be able to better ensure that it will reach its objective that their students will become lifelong active members of congregations if they add education for resiliency into their core curriculum.

### *Impact Of Staff Modeling*

Another area of research that would add to the literature base is examining the role of staff modeling. Do graduates weather the transition better if they have watched their staff members actively engage in a faith community? What role does a staff member's honesty about his or her own journey within a faith community play in alumni behavior during the transition? Are certain forms of staff modeling especially potent or salient with regards to the transition process? Or, is biblical teaching on the issue or other factors more significantly linked to positive transitions journeys?

## *Generalizability Or Transferability?*

In qualitative research "purposeful sampling with small, but carefully selected, information-rich cases" are "studied precisely because they have broader relevance" (Patton 2002, 581). As outlined in the research methodology found in Chapter Four, this sample was purposefully and carefully selected. However, due to the nascent nature of peer reviewed research about transition journeys as twenty-somethings seek to

find faith communities after graduation, the researcher believes caution needs to be exercised before data from this study is generalized.

"The trouble with generalizations is that they don't apply to particulars" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 110). Having some familiarity with campus ministries, the researcher believes it is likely students who participate in InterVarsity will have internalized a different set of values from students who participate in CRU, Navigators, etc. Although some values will overlap if the campus ministry is evangelical, each group tends to have a few overarching values that their leaders want to see instilled in their students. For instance, one research participant emphasized her concern that she was not evangelizing much because of limitations in her workplace. She mentioned evangelism several times throughout the interview, and she thought faith communities should develop small groups comprised of people from the same profession so they could mentor and encourage each other to keep evangelizing. It was a significant idea but her primary focus on evangelism differed from others in the sample. CRU is known for focusing primarily on evangelism and this participant was involved in CRU all four years. However, she was also involved in InterVarsity because she wanted to grow in her ability to relate and minister well with people from other cultures. Thus, she met the parameters for being included in the study and many other ideas she shared were similar to patterns arising from data in interviews with the other InterVarsity students.

Generalization means "applying a statement to many or all cases" (Stake 2010, 219) whereas transferability applies more to fit and contexts. Of transferability Lincoln and Guba write, "If context A and context B are "sufficiently" congruent, then

working hypotheses from the sending originating context may be applicable in the receiving context" (1985, 124). Rich data has emerged from this research. However, because of the insights of experienced sociologists like Fischer and Hout, it is likely the picture it paints about InterVarsity graduates living in the Chicago area is overly positive. Almost three-quarters of the people who volunteered to join this research were leaders in their InterVarsity chapters and the vast majority are involved in faith communities. Yet, Fischer and Hout write that "people who are religiously active are more likely to answer surveys" (2006, 191). The researcher is deeply appreciative of the candid answers she received from participants she interviewed. However, even with such candor, because of this reality within sociology of religion research she is concerned the data might be painting too rosy a picture.

For these reasons the researcher believes it is far too early to make broad generalizations and apply these research findings to many situations. She is also hesitant about transferability unless InterVarsity alumni in other parts of the country, alumni from other campus ministries, or stakeholders who care about twenty-somethings find the thick data from this study matches what they are seeing and experiencing. Yet, even if that is the case, the wisest path is to encourage and fund far more peer reviewed research. Better still is if some of that research can be done collaboratively so the most accurate picture of what is truly happening can be seen.

## Collaboration In Additional Research And Experimentation

Much more research is needed to understand what is happening as twenty-somethings leave universities and seek to find their places in faith communities. Many of the same types of research studies mentioned for InterVarsity could be done with other campus ministries as well as with alumni from Christian universities. However, three additional studies or forms of experimentation seem especially salient to the research concern.

### *Identifying Distinct Identity Interventions*

InterVarsty is not the only ministry focused on educational processes that mirror identity interventions. Campus ministries and Christian universities also want their students to internalize key values and see themselves differently as a result of their ministry and educational experiences. Frequently a campus ministry's or Christian university's teachings are geared toward that end, although they might not call it an identity intervention process. An area of research which would add to the literature is comparing and contrasting what is happening in the identity formation processes at various campus ministries and Christian universities and how those processes are impacting graduates' transitions to faith communities. It would also be extremely beneficial to do longitudinal studies which examine trends regarding the various levels of difficulty experienced during the transition period because of the identity intervention process, and the person's ongoing involvement in faith communities over the course of

their lives. Such research would put the transition experience in perspective in light of the long-term impact and contribution of alumni in faith communities.

*Why Are Those With A Track Record Dropping Out?*

In this research study some participants spoke of knowing friends who used to be involved in InterVarsity but were not attending a faith community after graduation. One person mentioned seeing this same phenomenon with both her InterVarsity and CRU friends. The researcher has heard similar comments from people who have served as staff members in InterVarsity as well as in other campus ministries. If development happens through involvement (Astin 1984), care needs to be taken to understand why those with a track record of being involved have stopped participating and what is necessary for them to re-engage. Doing research or experimentation with different campus ministries and faith communities around this theme would be beneficial for many.

*What Is Happening In Other Countries?*

Ethnic diversity is a significant component of this research and that is why half of the sample is comprised of participants who self-identify as being from minority cultures in the United States. It would also be intriguing to look at this issue and how it is playing out in other countries. If researchers could work collaboratively on some projects, it might shed even greater insight onto the research concern for changes in the evangelical religious market place in other parts of the world might help leaders of faith

communities in a variety of countries find new and creative ways to integrate twenty-somethings into their congregations.

### *Final Thoughts*

The researcher understands concerns that people such as Wuthnow (2007) and Kinnaman (2011) have expressed regarding the situation twenty-somethings are facing in evangelical faith communities across the United States. She recognizes the truth in statements made by people like Côté and Bynner when they analyze trends and write that "with fewer and fewer children in each successive cohort being brought up in organized religion" one can expect religion "to continue to decline as a normative influence in the transition to adulthood and therefore as a less important source of adult identity" (2008, 262). However, these dire predictions are not the full story. There is an ever changing and dynamic evangelical religious marketplace (Fink and stark 1992; Smith 1998). The researcher holds out hope that entrepreneurs and leaders within that religious marketplace will take note of historic trends as well as what twenty-somethings are actually experiencing as they seek to transition to faith communities after graduation from university. If entrepreneurs and leaders in the evangelical market place refuse to *see* and respond, the situation is dire. However, the researcher holds out hope that they will *see,* and in *seeing* they will be moved with compassion to take action to ensure faith communities will continue to play a salient role in the ongoing growth and development of twenty-somethings.

APPENDIX 1

INVITATION

Chicago alumni — We need your help with a research project! View in web browser

**INTERVARSITY ALUMNI**

Greetings Doug,

We need some help with a research project that could benefit both InterVarsity and the Church.

Would you consider sharing your story for a research project focused on 2010 InterVarsity alumni in their transition from college to a faith community (church) after graduation?

Mary Lederleitner, a PhD student and InterVarsity Press author, is looking to conduct interviews and host a focus group with recent InterVarsity alumni in the Chicago area as part of her dissertation research. She wants to hear your thoughts, feelings, and impressions about your post-graduation experience (both good and bad). The interviews should take about 75 minutes or less and will be held at a time and location convenient to you. Your name and the names of any people or places you mention will be changed to ensure anonymity, and InterVarsity will not know of your participation.

**If you're interested in being part of this research, please contact Mary directly by texting or calling 630-667-7690, or emailing** mary_lederleitner@wycliffe.net. We ask you to respond directly to Mary, but you may contact us if you have questions.

We are thankful to have a ministry partner who passionately cares about InterVarsity alumni and their transition from student to life after college. And we thank you for considering how you can help future students who will follow in your footsteps.

Together in Christ,

Doug Nickelson
InterVarsity Director of Alumni Development

InterVarsity Alumni | 6400 Schroeder Road, P.O. Box 7895 | Madison, WI 53707
alumni@intervarsity.org | intervarsity.org/alumni | 608-443-3719

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Background Information*

1. What semester and year did you graduate?

2. What InterVarsity chapter did you attend? (Confirm the type of chapter and the college or university.)

3. Were you a resident or commuting student? If both, how many years did you live on our near campus and how many years did you commute?

4. Would you self-identify as being active or fairly active in InterVarsity when you were a student?

5. On the website InterVarsity share statistics as to whether people self-identify as being from the majority culture or from a minority culture. Which group do you self-identify with?

6. What types of InterVarsity activities were you engaged in?

_____ Participated in one or more small group Bible studies?
_____ Lead one or more small group Bible studies?
_____ Served as a student leader for the InterVarsity chapter?
_____ Served as part of the worship team?
_____ Participated in campus evangelism and outreach?
_____ Participated in justice ministries?
_____ Attended one or more Urbana mission conference?
_____ Attended an InterVarsity camp?
_____ Participated in short term mission experiences:
_____ One or more urban plunge?
_____ One or more summer internship?
_____ One or more overseas short-term mission trip?
_____ Other mission experience(s)? _____
_____ Other Activities? _____

7. Did you participate in a local church while you were a student? ____ Yes ____ No
   If yes, where did you attend and what was that experience like?

*Core Interview Questions*

The purpose of this study is to investigate the transition process InterVarsity students experience after graduation from university as they seek to find their place in local faith communities.

1. What have you experienced as you've tried to find a faith community after graduation (or as you've tried to make your family's home church your own? Would you describe what the process has been like for you?

2. What words or what metaphor would you use to describe this transition period of trying to find a local faith community after graduation (or make your family's faith community your own)? Would you explain why those words or that metaphor captures your experience?

3. Would you describe the qualities or criteria you hoped to find in a faith community? What were you looking for? (Or would you describe the qualities or criteria you hoped to find in your family's home church after you graduated? What were you looking for?)

4. Why was it important for you to find a faith community that had these?

5. Did the qualities or criteria you expected to find in a faith community change as a result of your involvement in InterVarsity? Please explain.

6. Who are the primary people who have helped you in the process and how have they helped?

7. Who are the primary people who have hindered you in the process and how have they hindered you?

8. What impact do you think your actions have had on your experience during this transition period after graduation? (Or what actions served you well in the transition and what actions didn't serve you well?)

9. What impact do you think your attitudes have played on your experience during this transition period after graduation? (Or what attitudes served you well in the transition and what attitudes didn't serve you well?)

10. If you could go back in time would you do anything differently? Why or why not?

11. Advice questions:

    (a) What advice would you give to future graduates based upon what you have learned so far in the journey?

    (b) What advice would you give to pastors and church leaders based upon what you have learned so far in the journey?

    (c) What advice would you give to InterVarsity based upon what you have learned so far in the journey?

*Closing Question*

12. Is there anything else you would like to say about this topic of transitioning to a local faith community (or making your family's church your own) after graduation?

# APPENDIX 3

# HUMAN RIGHTS PROTOCOL

APPENDIX 4

CONSENT FORM

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate the transition process InterVarsity students experience after graduation as they seek to find their place in faith communities, and what helps and hinders their transition process. The research is being conducted by Mary Lederleitner, a Ph.D. student in the Educational Studies Department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In this research you will be asked to reflect upon what you have experienced during this transition and what you have learned through the process. Please be assured that the researcher will take extensive measures to protect your anonymity and honor confidentiality. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses, nor will the name of your InterVarsity chapter, nor will the names of staff members, friends, family members, pastors, or churches be reported along with your responses. This research will be used as the foundation for the researcher's dissertation as well as in other venues or publications designed to equip stakeholders to better help students make an easier and smoother transition to faith communities after graduation. Your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study.

"I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate."

Name _____

Signed _____ Date _____

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