SELF-DISCLOSING RELIGIOUS IDENTITY:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN FACULTY

A Thesis in
Speech Communication

by
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ABSTRACT

Concerns for free speech, academic freedom and the value of diverse perspectives to the enterprise of higher education provide the background for this study which purposed to contribute to a better understanding of religious identity in the workplace. The specific purpose was to describe 1) evangelical Christian faculty members’ perceptions of what it means to be a Christian, 2) the circumstances under which they are more likely to self-disclose their religious identity at work, and 3) the tensions and constraints they experience when communicating it in the secular institutions of higher education in which they work. The qualitative methods used involved soliciting participant narratives which were transcribed and analyzed according to the Constant-Comparison Method in order to produce openly coded thematic units.

Analysis produced four themes describing what it means to be a Christian, and these findings suggest a possible extension of the Communication Theory of Identity to include the existence of “primary identity actions” within the personal frame of identity. Also, this study provided support for the theoretical supposition of a hierarchy of identities by establishing that the participants had a topmost identity. The findings extend what is known about stigmatized identities by providing a case in which a usually accepted identity becomes stigmatized within a specific context.
This study provides support for several aspects of the Communication Privacy Management Theory including the use of motivational, contextual, and risk-to-benefit ratio decision making criteria. However, the two most important revelations of the study with regard to self-disclosure suggest a critique of current self-disclosure theories. First, self-disclosure appears more complicated than presumed previously. Current theory characterizes the bases of disclosure decisions as mostly self-focused motivations, but the findings herein indicate communicators often use criteria for disclosing that are based on mutual concerns and even other-focused (i.e. altruistic) motivations. Second, the findings revealed a phenomenological gap between self-disclosure as conceptualized by scholars and self-disclosure as experienced in people’s day-to-day lives. Participants extensively reported nonverbal behaviors and superficial disclosures as important ways they communicate their religious identity in the workplace. The importance of this study will be reinforced if subsequent research uncovers similar findings.
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To God, be the glory great things He hath done. So loved He the world that He gave us His son. Who yielded His life an atonement for sin, and opened the life gates that all may go in. Praise the Lord!
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Two of the most basic pursuits of higher education are the acquisition of knowledge and its dissemination. Foundational to our current system of higher education is the idea that the understanding and application of various perspectives and worldviews benefits the educational enterprise and the acquisition of knowledge so central to it. In our society, education is key to the promotion of democratic ideals. Thus, higher education also plays a key role in our society by promoting core values such as respect for diverse peoples and the right to free speech.

There is a widespread assumption and belief that such values are rightly propagated by higher education organizations if we are to build a free society in which all peoples’ rights are protected, and all people are treated justly, regardless of who they are. Common to the policy statements of most public universities in the application of these values are clearly specified prohibitions of discriminating against individuals or groups on the basis of such characteristics as age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, national origin, political beliefs, race, religious creed, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status.

In the aftermath of 9/11, concerns about religiously based discrimination and intolerance have moved into the spotlight. General issues related to religion and spirituality have been mushrooming for over a decade, as the sales of religious books
have “skyrocketed,” newspapers have expanded their religious sections, and commercial sectors across the board scramble to cash in on the religious and spiritual trends in America, while organizations of all sorts struggle with how to promote tolerance and handle religiously focused employees (Duin, 1995; Watanabe, 1998). The Executive Order called Guidelines on Religious Exercise and Religious Expression in the Federal Workplace offers guidance, but the courts continue to hand down apparently conflicting decisions concerning the accommodation of religion in the workplace (Ettorre, 1996; Koral 1986; McSchulskis, 1996; Penalver, 1997; Roth, 1998). Many diversity trainers probably now include references to religion in their seminars and classes as a result of the inappropriate backlash experienced by Islamic members of our society. It is against the backdrop of such matters that the study reported herein gained impetus. The primary purpose of this chapter is to make clear the specific concerns the study addressed.

Statement of the Problem

There is a concern among some in higher education organizations that several types of religious individuals experience truncated rights when it comes to freedom of speech on campuses. As one writer has noted, orthodox religious voices in institutions of higher education are being discriminated against, are oppressed and “face an inquisition, with . . . assumption of guilt” (de Russy, 2002, p. B11). In her article, in the Chronicle of Higher Education, de Russy noted:
influential faculty members and administrators . . . aggressively propagated a radically new interpretation of the First Amendment: No longer should it stand as a declaration of neutrality among creeds but, rather, as a declaration of disapproval by the state of religious faith . . . . [There is an] arrogant rejection of the creeds of Christians, Jews, and Muslims as unworthy of respect in academe. (p. B12)

Considerable worth is placed on the notion of academic freedom in higher education so that people can openly discuss and debate differing and competing views in the interest of allowing for genuine learning to occur. The Supreme Court refers to “safe guarding academic freedom” as essential to our nation’s “deep commitment” to the “market place of ideas” (Whitehead, 2002, p. 1). However, many people now believe that the academy that used to be concerned with the possibilities of a “Protestant elite” discriminating against all sorts of religious minorities is now a secularizing force discriminating “against orthodox religious believers of all faiths” and giving “fundamentalist Christians . . . reason to believe that they might be passed over in admissions and promotions” in institutions of higher education (de Russy, 2002, B12). According to deRussy, cases of intolerance, discrimination, and oppression of conservative Christians’ views and rights abound on secular campuses across the country (e.g., Ball State, the Yale Law School, and Williams College). In college classrooms in which persuasion is taught, for instance, speech professors who could be educating students about the right to free speech are encouraged by an article in their national
association’s premiere education journal to limit religious speeches having evangelical purposes (Duffy & Duffy, 1984).

Instances of the infringement of basic civil rights on campuses have proliferated, and are due, in part, to ignorance among students and administrators of what rights the Constitution protects. A survey in 2003 revealed that only 30 percent of students knew that the First Amendment guarantees religious freedom, 21 percent of administrators knew, and less than half the responding administrators and students “strongly support allowing religious groups or individuals to advance their perspectives on campus” (Archibald, 2003, para. 10). Essentially, then, very few higher education administrators and students actually think the constitutional right to religious freedom should be protected on higher education campuses. The Supreme Court has held that “the Establishment Clause forbids the government from acting with the purpose or effect of advancing or inhibiting religion” (Whitehead, 2002, p. 5). While many people focus on the aspect of not advancing religion, few consider ways in which religion may, in effect, be inhibited. Court opinion rephrases this to say that government agencies, such as schools, are “to favor neither religion nor nonreligion”: however, nonreligion is highly favored from the perspective of many concerned people (Marty, 1990, p. 95).

A non-profit group called The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (i.e. F.I.R.E.) was founded to defend religious freedom, free speech, due process, and
academic freedom and has been instrumental in “more than six hundred cases at more
than 200 colleges and universities, private and public, large and small” (Foundation for
archive indicates that Christian student groups and conservative students are those whose
rights are most often impinged, but one case the foundation is currently working on
involves a Christian professor who lost his job for telling students how his religion
informed his perspectives of the topic he taught, which was philosophy (Foundation for
Individual Rights in Education: Case Archive, n.d.).

That public religious expression, and especially Christian religious expression, is
reportedly subject to illegal censorship is further evidenced by The Rutherford Institute’s
list of recent victories in defending religious freedom (The Rutherford Institute: Recent
victories, n. d.). The cases in which these two foundations have been involved are only
those for which people knew their rights, knew of the existence of organizations to
defend those rights, and decided to take action in the pursuit of free exercise of their
rights. From a behavioral perspective, little is known about how the atmosphere on
university campuses generally influences the daily lives of conservatives and strong
religious adherents in higher education.

From many points of view, conservative religious voices are being systematically
marginalized on secular campuses across the nation even though polls indicate that as
many as 95 percent of Americans believe in a higher power (Cimino & Lattin, 1998). Conservative or orthodox religious individuals, however, are actually a small minority in the United States. Point in case, conservative Christians known as evangelicals make up only 7 percent of the country’s population (The Barna Update, 2004). Marginalized people are those “who are viewed as socially, morally, culturally or in some other way inferior” (Meyer, 1997, p. 93). The reports of a tendency to marginalize evangelical perspectives in secular institutions of higher education makes clear in the minds of those who are concerned about free speech and academic freedom the need to give a voice to this minority group on secular campuses and to discover how they communicate their religious identity in an environment in which they have reason to believe it is not welcome.

It is not as if orthodox Christians can leave their religious identities at home. Evangelical Christians have a Biblical mandate to share their faith wherever they go in this world. Further, evangelical Christians see their Christian identities as one of the most central aspects of who they are, but religious identities are not well studied or understood. Ethnic, gender, gay, and professional identities have all received a good deal of attention in scholarly literature, but religious identities that are separate from ethnic identities are only rarely investigated and little understood (see Driedger, 1988 for a notable exception).
A number of books from Christian authors describe higher education organizations as being highly secularized and hostile toward conservative Christian perspectives (e.g., Anderson, 1998; Marsden, 1994; Monroe, 1996). The study assumed that evangelical Christian individuals perceive their workplaces as environments that in some way, may constrain free expression of their religious identities. Even though, as evangelicals, the participants would presumably want to communicate their religious identities, any actual and perceived discrimination among the faculty members relating to their religious perspectives could cause them to experience tension between disclosure and nondisclosure and, in the event that they decided to disclose their religious identities in the secular institutions of higher education in which they work, may alter the manner in which they do so.

To contribute to a better understanding of religious identity in the workplace was the general purpose of this study. The specific purpose was to describe evangelical Christian faculty members’ perceptions of what it means to be a Christian and how they bring that identity into the secular university setting. Of principal concern was how evangelical Christian faculty members define the Christian identity, how they see that identity emerging and being communicated to others, and what environmental influences affect their communication in their places of work. Thus, the following research questions arose: 1) What does it mean to be a Christian in the eyes of evangelical
Christian faculty members?; 2) Under what circumstances do evangelical Christian faculty perceive that they are more likely to communicate the Christian identity?; 3) What tensions do evangelical Christian faculty perceive affecting communication of the Christian identity in the secular institutions of higher education in which they work?

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 presents a review of pertinent literature beginning with a conceptual framework gleaned from scholarly literature related to identity, including theoretical perspectives, sensitizing issues, and self-disclosure as a domain of behavior, and then providing further rationale for the study as it relates to the research questions.

Chapter 3 describes the basic qualitative methodology used, which entailed interviews for identifying key themes and describing them from the perspectives of the faculty members along lines suggested by Merriam (1998). I briefly discuss who the participants were, and I also review the data analysis process, including descriptions of the use of transcripts and how I identified meaning units, as well as determined the credibility and reliability of the findings, while also noting the limitations of the study.

The findings appear in Chapter 4, which presents the emergent themes identified during analysis, as well as the larger conceptual structure to which they point. The theoretical perspectives covered in the review of literature serve to elucidate notable aspects of the themes and how they answer the research questions posed. In Chapter 5, I
discuss the results and suggest ways this study could advance scholarly understandings of identity and self-disclosure behavior, not only within the specific context of religious identity, but more generally as well. To this end, the chapter presents suggestions for additional research and avenues of inquiry.
Previous areas of scholarship related to the study reported herein include identity literature, self-disclosure research, and inquiries focusing on religious individuals and religious issues in organizations. In the review, I first offer a conceptual framework gleaned from scholarly literature that includes theoretical perspectives, sensitizing issues, and further rationale for the study. In the process, I explain what gave rise to each of the three research questions. The chapter closes with the expected contribution of the study.

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study drew from several theoretical perspectives that in combination provided a broad point of reference for viewing identity as the central construct. Theories, such as Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory, cannot be blended, but as Hecht (1993) notes, the perspectives they represent can be “layered” in such a manner that they “play off each other” (p. 76). The Symbolic Interactionist perspective provided the overarching basis for understanding the meaning, construction, and maintenance of identity. Under the umbrella of Symbolic Interactionism, Hecht’s (1993) Communication Theory of Identity provided the primary framework for viewing identity, while Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory each were sources of related sensitizing constructs. A sensitizing construct is one that comes from relevant literature
and can aid in the construction of instruments and/or help one to focus analysis. Given my reading of the literature involving identity, these served as useful guides for the study while not unduly restricting an exploration of religious identity. In addition, they provided useful lenses through which to view and interpret the data.

Symbolic Interactionism as the Overarching Perspective

Blumer (1969) has characterized Symbolic Interactionism in terms of the three premises on which it rests:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them . . . . The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows . . . . The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters. (p. 2)

The identity of the person is one of the “things” referred to that is interactively constituted. For this study, of interest was the Christian identity. Whatever meanings the participants held for what being a Christian is formed the bases for how they act as Christians. From the Symbolic Interactionist perspective, these Christians would have developed their understood meanings of what a Christian is from interactions. For the evangelical Christian, pertinent interactions include those with other Christians, church goers, Christian authorities, such as pastors, and especially interactions with God through the Holy Spirit and scripture. As Hecht (1993) points out, “[I]dentify is inherently a
communicative process and must be understood as a transaction in which messages are exchanged” (p. 78).

Midgley (1998) notes that from the time of birth, humans are capable of expressive behavior or communication and that we have the ability to interpret the behavior of those around us. These interactions/transactions can include ones whereby an individual engages in interactions with him/herself (Mead, 1934). Hence, from a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, there are multiple selves who communicate with one another, even as there are multiple identities that influence the interaction. For the participants in the present study, their Christian identity and their professional identity both undergird their interactions at work and are emergent in their communication.

Christian identity from a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, then, is a “thing” created from interacting with others and adjusted through intrapersonal communication, such that people use their identity based on their understanding of the phrase “I am a Christian.” The interactions influencing their understanding of what it means to be a Christian are ongoing. Consequently, although certain aspects of the meaning may be static, such as a state of being, each new interaction with God, others, and self can develop the depth of the meaning of what being a Christian entails.

Theoretical and Research Foundations for the Research Questions

Research Question One
Hecht’s (1993) Communication Theory of Identity focuses on communication as the process for how identities form and survive. The process has four levels or perspectives from which to view identity and how people create and maintain certain identities. In this respect, the Communication Theory of Identity is similar to the Symbolic Interactionist perspective as it applies to understanding identity. The theory’s four frames for viewing identity are: the personal frame, which deals with understandings of identity on an intrapersonal level; the enactment frame, which deals with identity behavior and communication; the relational frame, which deals with the identity as it belongs to the interactants and is constituted in their ongoing communication; and the communal frame, which deals with group understandings and communication of identity and what makes people holding an identity into a community.

The Communication Theory of Identity grew from Hecht’s (1993) use of the notion of layering ideas and related methods to arrive at the “alternative ways of knowing” we each use to understand our world. He layered various perspectives for understanding communication and human behavior gleaning essential elements of identity as it is understood from psychological and sociological perspectives in beginning his development of a communication based-theory of identity. In this way, Hecht’s (1993) Communication Theory of Identity derived and developed from layering assumptions of different perspectives into a collection of statements about identity that
one can organize into four basic frames for viewing the construct and basic assumptions about it.

Layering other constructs from Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory onto the Communication Theory of Identity for a more detailed understanding of identity makes sense, in that these two theories work into the four realms, which Hecht (1993) refers to as “frames” (p. 77), for investigating identity. Identity Theory helps inform mainly the first, second, and third frames, because it is a “microsociological” theory focusing on internal cognitions and interpersonal role relations (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 255). Social Identity Theory helps inform the fourth frame, in that it is a “social psychological theory” focused on “group processes and intergroup relations” (p. 257). Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory can thus be layered onto the Communication Theory of Identity to help inform various aspects of the individual’s understanding of self and the group-level understandings of self that emerge in discussions of identity. I explain and discuss each of the four frames, with Christian Identity as the exemplar case, in the following pages.

The first frame is the personal frame. Viewing identity through the personal frame entails seeing it as an attribute of the person, including “self-concept or self-image and provides an understanding of how individuals define themselves in general as well as in particular situations” (Hecht, 1993, p. 79). Individuals define themselves as Christian
according to their understanding of what being that means for them. “I am a Christian; hence, I have a relationship with God through Christ. I try to live like Christ, tell others about God, draw strength and guidance from God through prayer, etc. This is what and who I am.” Within particular situations, Christians may or may not act as they think Christ would, which could result in their negatively evaluating themselves. Regardless of the particular situation, accepting Christ also means that the individual accepts that God views him or her as having so much value that He gave His son’s life to assure that the individual believers could become children of God. The self-concept of Christians, then, is affected by how they behave, think, and feel as compared to Christ’s standard and by the demonstration of their worth, which they believe is given by God. Such self-understandings reflect the personal frame of identity.

The second frame is the enactment frame. Hecht (1993) notes that “identities are enacted in social interaction through communication and may be defined by those messages” (p. 79). Communication is, thus, identity in action. What a Christian says may not be about that identity or others the person has; however, identity is a part of all communication, such that we speak from the voice or combination of voices that are the self. For example, if one social behavior a Christian enacts is telling the truth, that communication, in part, enacts the identity of a Christian the individual has. In this way, the enactment frame provides another view or aspect of identity.
The third frame is the relationship frame. In this frame, identity is partially constructed by those engaged in participant communication, such that it belongs to the interactants and continues to issue from ongoing communication. According to Hecht (1993), there are three levels to the relationship frame. First, there is the self that “is influenced by who [sic] one is with” (p. 80). Having the Holy Spirit in one’s heart, for instance, would in the case of a Christian provide a presence that when interacting would influence that person’s social behavior. Second, there is the self-understanding attained from the relationship itself. A Christian may define this level of relationship with God as one of father and child, master and servant, or, in respect to Jesus, as savior and saved. Third, is the level at which the relationship takes on its own identity apart from a group (e.g., a mother and daughter within a church). Christian individuals, although part of the church body, answer particular calls in different ways in setting their relationships with God apart from those of others. For the Christian, “[W]ho we are is not defined by what we know. . . or the amount of faith we have. It is defined by the loving relationships we have and the love between ourselves and God” (Burkett & Osborne, 1996, p. 93). That love is part of the relationship frame of Christian identity.

The fourth frame is the communal frame of identity. People are often connected by the mutual identities they have, which, in turn, make them a group. The Church is the community to which Christians belong. They find themselves bound together as brothers
and sisters in Christ on the basis of their Christian identities and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Identity “communities define a repertoire of identities that are jointly held/remembered and taught to new members” (Hecht, 1993, p. 80). The Christian repertoire of identities may include, for example, teacher, deacon, and elder, as well as comforter, encourager, and discipler.

The four frames mentioned above are all connected, such that more than one frame can be explored at the same time. The communication of a Christian about his/her identity may enact the personal, describe the relational, and reflect a communal understanding frame.

Identity Theory focuses on cognitive and behavioral realms of understanding, whereas Social Identity Theory attempts to explain group tendencies by combining the cognitive, behavioral, and, to some extent, emotional realms of understanding (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). The Communication Theory of Identity provides a framework for understanding identity that can go beyond these more typical social scientific perspectives to embrace physiological and spiritual ways of knowing.

According to Hogg, Terry, and White (1995), Identity Theory views identity as mirroring society while also being individual and orderly, but having many aspects. From this perspective, the “structural role positions. . . [people] occupy” (p. 256) become the key to predicting their behavior in society. Although useful for its intended purpose,
Identity Theory does not address the importance particular identities may have for individuals and for their own understanding of their behavior across community, social, or organizational boundaries. However, one issue central to Identity Theory, which offers a sensitizing construct for this study, is the concept of identity salience.

Identity theorists (e.g., Stryker & Burke, 2000; Wiley, 1991) define identity salience as the likelihood that the role identity will be enacted in various contexts. From this perspective, a researcher sees a behavior, attributes it to a role, organizes roles into a hierarchy for that individual, and then predicts the person’s future behavior. There is an inherent assumption that an outside observer can determine which identity one is enacting. Seemingly, role-related behavior might not form the basis of many actions or much communication. In other words, if Christians determine that their individual religious identities are self-relevant and, thus, speak or act from the perspective of that identity in many different situations, then their Christian identity is highly salient while not necessarily fitting into an easily observable role identity.

Observations of researchers would probably not provide useful insights into the salience of religious identities, especially as they are enacted outside religious contexts. Interviewing religious individuals about how and when they enact their religious identities outside religious environments, however, could provide such insight. Indeed, religious members of secular organizations who are more concerned with what is
appropriate within their organizational roles may tend to enact their internalized religious identities in less objectively observable ways. Those with less salient religious identities may only enact them outside religious environments on occasion and might be unable to offer many cross context descriptions of emerging religious identity. The individual is also the only one able to provide a relevant spiritual perspective on his or her communication or behavior in general, such that the importance of his or her religious identity among their many identities could be better understood. Thus, the present project, following Hecht (1993), defined identity as “self-cognitions, feelings about self, and/or spiritual sense of self-being” (p. 79).

From this perspective, only the individual can describe his or her identities and define how his or her religious identity, in particular, makes up the self. Also, a focus on understanding of a specific religious identity is necessary because individuals from various religions within their identity communities would have very different understandings of what it means be a person of that faith or sect. This gave rise to the first Research Question: What does it mean to be a Christian in the eyes of evangelical Christian faculty members?

Research Question Two

Saliency of an identity, as described, can inform an understanding of identity whether it is a role identity or an individually oriented personal identity being
investigated. In the case of the present study, the salience of the religious identity across situations was assumed, such that the sensitizing construct of identity salience served to guide brainstorming of workplace contexts for designing the interview guide.

In addition, although identity commitment derives from the role identity perspective of Identity Theory, this type of commitment, nevertheless, has the same ramifications. Identity commitment as a sensitizing construct is especially interesting to consider from the perspective of the Christian identity.

Identity commitment refers to the “degree to which the individual’s relationships to particular others are dependent on being a given kind of person” (Stryker & Stratham, 1985, p. 345). In other words, commitment to an identity is high when important relationships depend on having the role to which the identity corresponds. If one important relationship is with a coworker, the identity connecting the individual with that person through a role will be an object of enhanced commitment. In terms of Christians, believing that their Christian identity, as opposed to a role, is that which gives them a personal relationship with God, then commitment would be expectedly high. This could help explain why some people identify themselves as Christians without engaging in communicative activities that maintain and develop their personal relationship with God. From many religious perspectives, however, God represents an important particular other, with whom having a relationship depends on being a given kind of person. As a
sensitizing construct, identity commitment may be reflected in Christians’ descriptions of
what it means to them to be Christian and the importance of that religious identity.

According to Identity Theory, the identities with high commitment are closely
connected to the individual’s self-concept and level of self-esteem. As with all identities,
the state of being and the progress the individual has made in becoming what he or she
envisions also affect self-concept and self-esteem. Thus, one can see how an individual
may identify as Christian, which reflects a state of being, while at the same time, the
person is not necessarily showing progress in the becoming aspect of his or her religious
identity. Identity Theory can, thus, inform our understanding of religious identity even
though it focuses on role relationships. The sensitizing constructs of identity salience and
identity commitment can relate to interactions outside observable roles. Social Identity
Theory, on the other hand, considers identities as understandings of self that derive
mainly from group membership, which connects these group understandings of self to the
fourth frame of the Communication Theory of Identity.

Tajfel and Turner (1974) posit that individuals develop understandings of self
from the social categories or group memberships to which one perceives him/herself
belonging. Saliency can be defined in two ways, according to SIT. First, each social
category varies in its overall importance to self-concept/self-esteem. If a religious
identity is highly salient, then the self-concept ties more closely to behaving according to
the religious group’s accepted norms.

Self-Categorization Theory grew out of Social Identity Theory and contributes to
understanding it by positing that social groups have prototypes represented by one’s
embodying often abstract ideal group features. From this perspective, a Christian who is
striving to be like Christ, the prototypical or ideal member of the group, will have a self-
concept that closely relates to his/her perceptions of the degree to which he/she behaves,
thinks, and feels as Christ and the in-group (i.e., a body of believers) deems appropriate.
Thus, when an identity is salient, it not only describes the person and prescribes aspects
of him or her, but the identity also provides a measure for evaluation. Investigation of
Christian identities may validate this perspective on saliency and provide insight into the
self-descriptive, prescriptive, and evaluative processes of religious individuals in
organizations.

Saliency in Social Identity Theory, like Identity Theory, also refers to times when
the identity is the basis for behavior in a particular context, such that individuals perceive
themselves as behaving according to in-group norms while also perceiving relevant out-
group members as behaving according to those out-group norms. If a Christian faculty
member perceives the relevant out-group as non-Christian faculty members, for example,
s/he may attribute her/his own refraining from cursing as the norm for the in-group while
attributing cursing on the part of non-Christian faculty to the norms of the out-group. Christian faculty members may, however, perceive the relevant out-group to be non-religious organizational members. Religions also tend to be subdivided into groups referred to as sects, or more often, denominations. The context in which the religious identity is enacted or invoked may determine whether the relevant out-group for a Christian is non-religious people, non-Christians, or other denominations of Christianity (e.g., Mennonite, Catholic, and Lutheran). Examining the religious identity of Christians in organizations could yield insights into whom they perceive as their relevant religious out groups within their organizational/professional setting although that was not the concern of this particular study.

The sensitizing constructs gleaned from layering Identity Theory, Social Identity Theory, and the Communication Theory of Identity include individual and group identity salience, identity commitment, and the four frames: personal, enactment, relationship, and communal. Subsumed by a Symbolic Interactionist perspective, these foundations provide a conceptual framework that embraces communication as the process used to construct, develop, and maintain one’s religious identity.

**Domain of Behavior**

The present study had as its principal aim describing how Christian faculty members articulate their meanings of being a Christian, but also how they see themselves
communicating their religious identity in their workplace. As mentioned, an identity can form the basis of communication without being an implicit or explicit communication of that identity. When faculty members see themselves as communicating their Christian identity more explicitly, they are engaging in self-disclosure.

Organizations are increasingly finding the need to understand employees’ religious perspectives, in part, because of the current issue of accommodation of religious expression. Religious expression on the part of proselytizing religions like Christianity is of special concern (Koral, 1986). “Go ye therefore into all the world preaching and baptizing. . .” is a direct command from Christ to His followers; thus, evangelical Christians see themselves as needing to share their faith wherever they go. For Christians in the workplace, self-disclosure of their religious identity, on some level, is a calling.

Organizational communication studies of self-disclosure from a religious perspective may offer organizations a better understanding of what is occurring in the workplace in specific regard to Christians, sharing their faith and in regard to self-disclosure more generally.

Self-disclosure is a domain of behavior social scientists frequently study, although the focus of most such research is on intimate relationships outside the workplace. According to Derlega, Metts, Petronio, and Margulis (1998), “Messages are always received into a matrix of expectations, perceptions, and understandings of relational
rules” (p. 10). Coworker expectations go beyond the typical relationship rules to include perceptions of appropriate work relationships, appropriate topics of discussion, appropriate times for sharing personal information, and the like while in the organizational context. Organizational influences on self-disclosure are not something to date that communication scholars understand well. The present study, accordingly, had as a goal providing insight on the role workplace organizational contexts may play in self-disclosure.

Self-disclosure, like most social phenomena, is usually something that scholars study from purely cognitive and behavioral perspectives. However, as Hecht (1993) notes, individuals make sense of their life experiences cognitively, behaviorally, emotionally, and spiritually. In addition, as other ways of knowing are explored, for example, emotional, those doing the studies employ rational cognitive perspectives to understand these phenomena themselves even though the phenomena are often far from rational. Attention to spiritual perspectives is almost nonexistent in scholarly literature. The current study explored individuals’ spiritual perspectives in respect to self-disclosure, and, thereby, served to illuminate their spiritual perspectives on work. Thus, the study helped to fill a void in scholarly understanding of self-disclosure and of workplace interaction in general.

Definition of Self-Disclosure
A much-studied behavior, such as self-disclosure, is one that scholars often view in a number of different ways, depending, in part, on how they operationalize the concept. According to Derlega, Metts, Petronio, and Margulis (1993), self-disclosure can be “loosely defined as what individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others” (p. 1). This definition does not stipulate the level of intimacy—only that the information shared be personal in nature. In this respect, the definition can apply even to relationships of acquaintance, which often typify the workplace. Although this definition requires verbal disclosure, many do not. Researchers narrow the definition of self-disclosure in various ways, but with few exceptions (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Montgomery, 1984; Patterson, 1990), they have treated self-disclosure as synonymous with verbal revelations about oneself (Derlega et al. 1993). Allen’s (1974) definition includes “uncoerced exchanging of personal information in a positive relationship” (p. 198) and, thus, stipulates that the relationship be a positive one. Worthy, Gary, and Kahn (1969) limit self-disclosure to transfer of information that the other person would not “otherwise” possess (p. 59). These variations in definitions may seem to be slight, but are nonetheless significant.

Inconsistent definitions of self-disclosure inhibit understanding of the behavior in at least two important ways. First, these conceptualizations lead to only certain behaviors’ being studied, as well as different methods and analyses’ being used, such that
many seemingly contradictory findings in the body of literature may be a result of these problems (Chelune, 1979). Second, definitions are problematic because they perpetuate “the phenomenological gap between self-disclosure as defined by the scientific method and the self-disclosure experienced by people in day-to-day life” (p. 2). The qualitative approach taken in this investigation permitted exploration of what individuals view as self-disclosure in their everyday work lives. To leave room for experiential understanding, this study required a broad definition of self-disclosure.

Jourard (1971) writes that, “Self-disclosure is the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so others can perceive you” (p. 19). In literal terms, to “disclose” means to make known, to reveal, or to show. This definition encompasses verbal and nonverbal acts we direct to others to reveal something about ourselves. According to this definition, then, self-disclosure is purposeful and can include any behavior whereby disclosers monitor how they present themselves so as to reveal or show something positive about themselves to others. All behavior may be used by others to formulate ideas about who we are, but self-disclosure is distinguished by being purposeful, in that one’s behavioral decisions entail the consideration of specific criteria, such as motives and perceived risks. So, for example, the remaining silent could be considered self-disclosure in many, but not all, circumstances. The motive of projecting the appearance
of being neutral, thoughtful, or considerate of others, if operative, would be one instance in which one might legitimately be disclosing personal information.

An important aspect of self-disclosure to understand is that individuals do not make disclosure decisions alone; instead, disclosure is a product of the negotiation between the people interacting. For instance, if a Christian worker has a passing relationship with a coworker, the only appropriate disclosure of religious identity may be mentioning a good church event in response to a question about how the weekend was. Inherent in negotiated disclosure is the idea that how the person receiving disclosed information responds helps the discloser decide what to talk about with that receiver. In the example above, a “That’s nice” response would cue the Christian differently from a response, such as, “Do you go to event like that a lot?” Thus, the two communicators together implicitly negotiate what will be disclosed. However, some Christians may look for and create opportunities to disclose more on the basis of their feeling or thinking that they need to share their faith. By doing so, they may violate the expectations of others.

Some close relationships appear to have taboo matters for discussion (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985). The relational and environmental context of the communication plays an important role in negotiated disclosure. The organizational context for persons’ sharing with one another would, thus, influence how one reacts to others’ self-disclosures and how he or she, in turn, chooses to disclose. How individuals define their relationships
can also influence expectations. Hence, a workplace relationship defined in a person’s mind as “coworker,” as opposed to “friend at work,” produces a different set of expectations for appropriate communication (Derlega et al., 1993). It is important to remember that these relational definitions are not etched in stone; rather, they evolve and are recreated by the interactants. In addition, coworkers may not be the only persons in an organization with whom one might communicate. In an institution of higher education, for example, faculty members form relationships with students, as well as colleagues who are in their disciplines, but may work for other organizations.

Many coworkers may believe that strictly private information is something one should not discuss at work. One reason for this belief is that one becomes more vulnerable to those who know private information about him or her (Kelvin, 1977). Hence, if a faculty member were to reveal a personal problem, for example, the information might work against the person’s being chosen for a project. There is also a basic need to control and protect private information, according to self-disclosure literature (Petronio, 2002). Beliefs and opinions fall into the category of private information because people do not usually know these things unless others make a decision to share them. That decision can reflect one or a combination of several considerations. A few suggested reasons include whether or not we think a person needs to know or whether we want to solve a problem, build a more intimate relationship, or
discuss relational problems. An implied mandate (e.g., a Biblical command) to disclose presents an unusual motivation for making oneself known that he or she may see as a decision based on his or her belief that people need to know the information.

That the self-disclosure literature should include studies, like this one, that are topic-specific is evident from the findings of Jourard and Lasakow (1958). They noted consistent differences in self-disclosure among topic categories. These differences seemed to be based on the degree of intimacy or ego relevance of the topic. It could be problematic that when topics are rated for intimacy, some mean of a group is typically used rather than individuals’ perceptions of ego relevance. Evangelical Christians, for example, may not rate disclosure of church activities as intimate a form of disclosure as beliefs on which they see their purpose in life resting. Thus, when evangelical Christians mention they are going to a church activity, the degree of disclosure is not as great as when they reveal that they believe in the authority of the Bible. This example shows how the degree of disclosure used to rate the intimacy of such topics as religion may inaccurately represent that topic’s importance for the individuals.

Along the same lines, there are numerous instruments that enable one to assess religiosity, but they tend to focus on overt, explicit measures (e.g., level of giving and frequency of church attendance) rather than tapping the individuals’ perceptions of the importance and implicit influence (e.g., saliency) that their religious identification holds
for them. The present study had fewer such limitations and, hence, provided a more illuminating view of how the participants communicatively dealt with identity issues.

“Under what circumstances is perhaps the most overlooked question in self-reports of self-disclosure” (Chelune, 1979, p. 19). Most self-disclosure assessment measures, according to Chelune, do not consider the context, but rely instead on participants’ ratings on their memories of disclosure, which could vary widely in terms of their contexts. In addition, as Altman and Taylor (1973) note, some disclosures are very intimate to people because they perceive a conflict between their opinions and/or beliefs and the values of the culture around them. Thus, the more evangelical Christian faculty members might think the values on campus and in their departments are at odds with their own religious convictions, the more intimate and private these convictions would then become for them. For example, a Christian faculty member may believe in creationism and not evolution but would be unlikely to disclose that belief because it conflicts with the generally accepted belief in evolution and ostensibly might put the faculty member’s reputation at risk. Thus, the context of revealing one’s religious identity (e.g., in higher education), the individual’s perception of the intimacy of the topic (e.g., “my Christianity”), and the risk of disclosure would likely influence the decisions Christian faculty members make about explicitly communicating their religious identity in the workplace. Consequently, the present study posed the following research question:
Under what circumstances do evangelical Christian faculty perceive that they are more likely to communicate their Christian identities?

Research Question Three

Recent scholarship on self-disclosure characterizes this behavior as one with inherent tensions for individuals (e.g., Dindia, 2000; Petronio, 2002). This means that as people make decision about whether or not and to what extent to self-disclose, they experience pulls toward disclosing (e.g., being motivated by the Great Commission) and pulls against disclosing (e.g., feeling they risk being discredited as academics). Hence, literature indicating how self-disclosure decisions are made was relevant to the present study.

One specific finding of a self-disclosure study aimed at the workplace is indirectly supportive of the general expectations of this study. Archer (1979) noted that people reported the greatest willingness to self-disclose at work when the person receiving the disclosure was at the same level of the organization. The next greatest level of willingness reported was to self-disclose to immediate supervisors. This suggests that faculty members would be most likely to disclose to other faculty at their level (e.g., associate professor). If faculty members do tend to be more willing to disclose to colleagues at their level, this may indicate that they have developed a working guideline
for choosing to whom they will disclose most freely. Ideas the faculty have about the appropriateness of private disclosures at work are related to a rule based system of understanding self-disclosure.

Communication Privacy Management Theory

The assumption that people develop systems of rules for disclosing private information undergirds Petronio’s (2002) Theory of Communication Privacy Management or CPM. CPM may best address the question of under what circumstances individuals choose to disclose private information, as the theory outlines a process by which individuals learn and develop rules to manage such decisions within particular contexts. Communication Privacy Management Theory rests on five suppositions. First, the assumption is that private information is what one discloses. As previously mentioned, some Christians may not consider private the fact that they attend church services, whereas many conservative Christians may indeed consider the extent of their orthodoxy to be private information. Note that the present study did not limit its definition of self-disclosure to private information in the same way CPM would.

Second, there exist “metaphorical” boundaries, within which individuals or collectives (e.g., families and organizations) manage private information and share with others. So, when a Christian, for instance, shares a private belief with a coworker, he or she has brought that person inside the boundary of who knows and controls that personal
information. The coworker now inside the boundary has responsibility for how that
information is handled. Part of the second assumption is that people may be drawn into
others’ boundaries willingly or unwillingly depending on whether or not the disclosure
was wanted.

Third, people or groups own private information and have the right to control to
what extent that information is protected or disseminated. For instance, the Christian
faculty group coordinator who maintains an email list for Christians on campus has been
brought into the boundaries of each individual with regard to their religious identity, and
together they have created a collective that owns and controls the identities of those in the
group and the mutual importance they all place on their religious identity as reflected by
their desire to subscribe to a list of like-minded scholars in the academic workplace.

CPM posits that ownership of private information implies a sort of “contract of
responsibility,” whereby co-owners reach understandings concerning how that
information is to be used, shared, and protected (Petronio, 2002, p. 10). When Christian
faculty groups do not maintain public rosters of membership, put only the president’s
name on their website, blind-copy emails to all members, and only allow members to
post information to the list, they are showing, in part, the extent to which they expect
their private religious identity to be protected by everyone within the disclosure
boundary. According to Petronio (2002), our perceived “vulnerability” and “the
possibility of risk heighten the significance of control issues for privacy management” (p. 10). Some individuals may have thin boundaries that is, they more readily share the information and have a low control need, whereas others may want moderate control. High control reflects the placing of thick boundaries around information one may regard as secret (e.g., classified intelligence reports).

Fourth, CPM assumes that people develop “rule-based management systems” to enable them to coordinate and specify how information owners and co-owners are “expected” to handle private information in their care (Petronio, 2002, p. 11). This theory suggests that we all make disclosure decisions through processes associated with 1) rule development, 2) rule enactment or negotiation within boundaries, and 3) “boundary turbulence,” which occurs when “coordination goes astray and rules become asynchronized” (p. 12). Disclosure decisions do not always follow the rules within, for example, an organization, but the organizational members take the implicit rules into consideration along with any number of other CPM suggested “criteria,” such as “culture, gender, motivations, context, and the risk-benefit ratio” (p. 21).

Fifth, Communication Privacy Management Theory suggests that there is an inherent tension that makes people feel that they must continually balance between their need for privacy and the need for disclosure. It is this dialectical tension, Petronio (2002) contends, that is “critical to understanding how people manage their public and private
lives” (p. 13). For instance, although evangelicals may feel the need to disclose for a fairly unique reason (e.g., a Biblical mandate), the pull between privacy needs and disclosure is still recognizable. This understanding of the tensions experienced by those choosing to self-disclose gave rise to the third guiding research question of the present study: What tensions do evangelical Christian faculty members perceive affecting communication of the Christian identity in the secular institutions of higher education in which they work?

The next part of this review focuses on issues related to religious individuals and religion in organizations. There is a little literature concerned with organizational communication and religion.

Religion and Communication in Organizations

Inquiries involving religious individuals, especially Christians, and religious issues in organizations were pertinent to this study. Studies in organizations or that connect religious individuals and their behavior related to this research, as did reports of religiously based discrimination in organizations or other factors that influence disclosure.

Spirituality in organizations has received some attention. Some of the studies equate emotional perspectives with spiritual perspectives using the two terms interchangeably (e.g., Bento, 1994; Dehler & Welsh, 1994). These really do not address
genuinely spiritual or religious organizational issues. Others focus on organizations that are foundationally religious, wherein the values inherent in the religious identities of the individual employees aligned with those of the organization in a complementary relationship (e.g., Louis, 1994; Sass, 2000). Although usually seen as having positive outcomes for organizations, research findings show that spirituality is both encouraged and sometimes discouraged by organizations based on how the organizations address such matters (Sass, 2000). In addition, there is evidence of “communicative manifestations” of employees’ personal religious identities within their workplaces, including an emphasis on “relationship-based organizing” (Sass, 2000, p. 200 & 211). The study herein was different in its focus on secular organizations.

Some findings outside organizational contexts further connect the religiosity of individuals with their behavior and by extension to their communication. Burris and Jackson (2000) reported that religious identity is an important aspect of many people that is not unlike gender or ethnic identities and affects how they interact with others. Another source more specifically suggested that evangelicals view their religion as “play(ing) intimately and intricately in everyday life” (Hunter, 1983, p. 68). Some research indicates that such religious individuals tend to perceive that their behavior and their faith are connected (Pedersen, Williams, & Kristensen, 2000).
Another area of pertinent literature is that of religious discrimination in organizations. In one field, over half the Christians in an international survey indicated that they had experienced religious discrimination personally, and the most often referenced location for these reports of discrimination was in the higher education organizations where these workers received their training (Ressler & Hodge, 2000). Another study, which dealt specifically with faculty members’ perceptions of ethnic discrimination in the academy, included religious discrimination in that category and then revealed that the faculty “overwhelmingly traced this prejudice to what they considered the antireligious atmosphere of the intellectual world” (Murray, 1971, p. 262). The present study reflected an interest in illuminating the perceived source of such an atmosphere in the academy.

The Case of Evangelical Christian Faculty Members

Although the present study utilized the broad theoretical perspective of Communication Identity Theory as the primary conceptualization of identity and selected self-disclosure as the domain of behavior, it focused specifically on faculty members in secular institutions of higher education who were evangelical Christians. It is necessary to further explain the rationale for looking at the perceptions of these particular types of individuals.
The focus on faculty members, as opposed to other types of organizational members, hinged on the critical role they play in pursuing two of the primary goals of higher education, namely the acquisition of knowledge and its dissemination. Faculty members influence the attainment of institutional goals each time they make choices balancing research, service, and teaching. They decide what sorts of knowledge are important enough to pursue. They choose the content and perspectives of what is taught. It is primarily the members of the faculty who interact with students and other consumers of higher education organizational products. Consequently, the study focused on faculty, in part, because of their centrality to the enterprise of higher education.

There were several bases for the emphasis on the specific religious identity of evangelical Christians. The first was my experience and, thus, qualifications as an evangelical Christian to explore this identity and how such individuals communicate it in higher education. The second basis for the choice of evangelical Christians was the minority status of their perspective. Although there are a great many Christians in the United States, evangelical Christians are a small, but unrecognized minority in terms of their religious identity. According to one study, religious practice in the professoriate is “less than half that of the general population,” so within higher education, one would expect evangelical Christians to make up an even smaller minority (Anderson & Murray, 1971). The third reason, as mentioned earlier, relates to the second in that evangelical
Christians are likely to view their religious identity as central to who they are and, thus, to perceive ways in which they regularly communicate that identity in the organizational context. The importance that evangelical Christians place on proselytizing makes the integration of their private religious identity into their public work lives through identifiable communication behaviors very likely. This integration can facilitate the study of religious identity and the communication of it in organizations.

Another area of literature related to the demographic factors included in this research project. The present study presumed that there might be variations among the evangelical Christian faculty members’ reports concerning how they communicated their religious identity on the basis of two criteria, one of which came from findings regarding religious individuals. The first criterion was whether or not the faculty member was tenured or non-tenured. Obviously, the security afforded by tenure could affect communicative behavior and the perceived tensions associated with disclosing religious identity.

The second criterion concerned variation among discipline types, specifically hard sciences versus the social sciences, humanities, and the arts. One study revealed that “religiosity is weakest (among) humanities and social science faculty . . . who constitute one of the most, if not the most, politically liberal occupational groups in the nation” (Anderson & Murray, 1971, p. 20 & 22). A more recent study sponsored by the Carnegie
Foundation indicated that conservatives make up only 3-4 percent of the faculty members in large secular higher education organizations (Anderson, 1996). Although concerned more with political conservatives, Anderson (1996) went on to note that in some departments, “one rarely hears” any other points of view, which makes them a “desert of conformity” (Anderson, 1996, p.145). This is an indication that being in a small minority can affect how open such minority members are concerning their perspective. It also suggests that there are probably ways in which religious conservatives monitor and restrain their communication.

There is also an indication in the literature that an implicit social rule exists that discourages the use of religious discourse by religious individuals in the public sphere. An analysis of the discourse of several political figures who erred by breaking this unwritten rule highlighted the backlash they experienced, both verbally and in terms of their political careers (Hostetler, 1992). The author also pointed out repeated evidence that these political figures were aware of the implicit tenet and knowingly chose to violate it. The study herein, in part, addressed the matter of whether such a rule exists in other public settings.

**Expected Contribution**

The self-disclosure literature informed the proposed project in useful ways, but primarily by defining a domain of behavior related to sharing one’s religious identity and
emphasizing the negotiated nature of disclosure. In addition, the present study assumed that Communication Privacy Management Theory provided a means for understanding how disclosure decisions may be informed by rules, but the study did not impose categories and criteria from CPM Theory on the framework. Rather, the present project focused on ascertaining the circumstances in which participants would disclose and did not limit the possibilities to prescribed categories as laid out by CPM Theory. Qualitative understandings of self-disclosure are not common, and taking this approach to studying identity revelations and going beyond to reveal how that, in turn, influences communication serves to provide a more heuristic understanding of disclosure and personal identities as they emerge in the workplace.

Conclusion

To summarize, the review of pertinent literature on identity and self-disclosure gave rise to three research questions that guided this research project. First, what does it mean to be a Christian in the eyes of evangelical Christian faculty members? Second, under what circumstances do evangelical Christian faculty perceive that they are more likely to communicate their Christian identities? Third, what tensions do evangelical Christian faculty perceive affecting communication of the Christian identity in the secular institutions of higher education in which they work? The methods used to gather data, analyze them, and answer these questions are detailed in the next chapter.
Chapter 3

METHODS

Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviewing, are well suited to studies that explore subjective meanings and the perceptions of individuals. This study was directly concerned with the subjective perceptions and experiences of evangelical Christian faculty members, specifically focusing on ways they reconcile and communicate their Christian identity in the secular workplace. This examination provided a descriptive framework for understanding identity and identity management in this particular context.

Communication scholarship of this type can illuminate how we “make sense of our communicative lives” and how we “attach meaning to our actions and the actions of others” (Bochner, 1994, p. 23) from a spiritual perspective.

In this chapter, I briefly describe who the participants were, how they were recruited, the data collection process, and the analyses I undertook. Then, I discuss the appropriateness and defensibility of the approach to the study while also noting limitations.

Participants

The study entailed a purposive sample of Christian faculty members. The sample was purposive, in that I used specific criteria to identify participants for inclusion rather than drawing them at random from a defined population. To be included, one had to
satisfy the following criteria: 1) be employed as a professor at any rank; 2) work in a secular institution of higher education; 3) have professed the religious identity of Christian as primary in his/her life; and 4) be an evangelical Christian. Each of these criteria applied to an aspect of the guiding research questions.

Participants had to be professors because of their central role in institutions of higher education and a presumed commitment to openness to ideas. Professors perform the primary functions of higher education in terms of developing and transmitting knowledge. It is in their classrooms that students are exposed to new ways of thinking and viewing the world. In their writings, systems of understanding our world are often proposed.

In addition, I sought professors from various disciplines. The purpose behind such variation was to add breadth to identity issues and the contexts in which the faculty members would likely report their religious identities emerging. In a pilot project conducted with Christian graduate students, there were differences in the participants’ perspectives related to their professional areas. For instance, those in applied sciences (e.g., engineering) revealed ethical conflicts, whereas others in social sciences indicated that paradigmatic assumptions sometimes conflicted with their own. In light of these findings, I presumed that there might also be qualitative differences between the
experiences of professors in the harder sciences versus those in social sciences, the arts, or humanities.

The criterion of working at a secular institution, as opposed to one having a religious affiliation, provided a basis for cross-case comparisons. The environment and culture of religiously affiliated schools seemingly would bear differently on the experience of communicating religious identity and its emergence at work. I assumed that Christian professors are “elites,” in the sense that they are experts, “well informed,” and knowledgeable about the organizations in which they work and about who they are as Christians (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 134). The criterion of professing the religious identity of Christian as central to who they are was also important for providing spiritual understandings of identity, work, and self-disclosure.

The criterion of being an evangelical Christian was important for a several reasons. First, evangelicals all consider the “Great Commission” as a personal mandate from God that they should obey. This personal mandate is primary to their description as “evangelical.” Because evangelicals consider sharing their faith a religious mandate wherever they go, it is likely that they strive not to compartmentalize their personal religious life and separate it from their public work life. The earnestness with which evangelicals take their responsibility undoubtedly directly affects how much they communicate their Christian identity at work.
Of the various types of Christians in the United States (i.e., evangelical, born-again, and nominal), evangelicals are among the most conservative, both in terms of what they believe doctrinally (e.g., acceptance of Jesus as one’s personal savior is the only way to heaven) and the extent to which they differ from the mainstream of America on moral issues (The Barna Update, 2004). Hence, evangelicals not only represent a minority of the nation’s population, but their views of what constitutes moral behavior differ in the extreme from what some others consider acceptable in American culture today. In addition, they are mostly conservative in terms of their perspectives on social and political issues. I assumed that these characteristics of evangelicals would contribute to their perceptions of tensions related to the expression of their Christian identity on secular campuses.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited from two large research universities located in differing parts of the country. These universities provided similar organizational contexts, in that they were both public institutions that received both state and federal funding. Neither began as a seminary or had past religious affiliations, as many higher education organizations do. Public institutions that are largely funded by the public and the government develop organizational cultures in which people may be more sensitive to issues regarding the separation of church and state. Since the study was concerned with
perceptions the participants had of being a Christian in this type of workplace, it was important to assure that the higher education organizations from which the participants came were similar. For the most part, they were. The universities chosen, however, were dissimilar in one notable regard. One was located in the “Bible belt,” and the other was not. This also was a purposeful decision resulting from the suspicion that the larger cultural context of the area of the country might influence perceptions of organizational constraints on participant communication.

Initially I gained access to participants at these two universities through each of their Christian faculty fellowships or associations. University A’s organization was one in which I knew a missionary who served as a liaison between Christian faculty and ministries designed to support and encourage them. The missionary introduced me at a meeting of the faculty fellowship. I then solicited volunteers from that group. From that opportunity I secured only one interview.

The second faculty cohort was an internet group. University B’s faculty fellowship is only loosely organized via the internet. Both universities, however, maintained a blind-copied listserv of Christian faculty members, but neither was willing to provide me with its list, as the identities of those included were confidential. I introduced myself and the project to members of this group via the internet using a scripted message (see Appendix A). Since the faculty email lists were blind copied, no
accurate response rate can be reported. I sent the faculty fellowship emails three times over the course of two years, which resulted in my securing only four interviews from University B and five interviews from University A.

Finding enough participants to have the needed reference groups for analysis proved to be very difficult. The design called for 32 participants, with a minimum of four representing each of the eight combinations of variables, which included gender, tenure status, and field type. See Table 3.1 for the final delineation of participants.

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I soon discovered that the invitational email was too long for most prospective participants to read, especially coming from a student unknown to them. As a result, the body of the email was edited for length (see Appendix B), with the bulk of the project information being sent in an attachment (see Appendix C). Most faculty members who agreed to participate were unwilling to recommend others until after they themselves had been interviewed or unless they personally knew the informant who had recommended
them. Initially, I interviewed all willing participants without administering the survey of evangelical beliefs, so as to produce the largest number of possible participant contacts. Emails to prospective participants were usually only answered if an individual the recipient knew personally was mentioned in the subject line and said to have recommended that I talk with the recipient. Upon completion of interviews with the original nine participants, I used their recommendations to recruit ten additional participants.

Emails to numerous Christian organizations, both on and off the two campuses, emails to faculty informants, contacts with current and former campus missionaries, repeated solicitation of recommendations from participants, and phone calls to highly recommended individuals over the course of two years resulted in my securing 26 additional participants; however, these efforts did not result in my securing the last two tenured women in the hard sciences I needed. A department by department online search for women in the hard sciences then ensued. Between the two universities, I compiled a list of 56 women and sent each of them a short plea to consider participating if they were a Christian. Again, the more detailed project information description was attached (see Appendix C).

Ultimately, a total of 158 possible Christian participants were identified from the two universities. An unknown number of faculty members received the request to
participate by having it forwarded to them by individuals they knew or via blind copied email lists on which they had their addresses. These contacts ultimately yielded a pool of 62 professors who indicated their willingness to participate. Of those willing, 54 completed the survey necessary to determine if they were evangelicals (see Appendix E) and, thus, qualified according to the study criteria. Seventeen additional participants were eliminated either because the subgroup to which they belonged had the requisite number of cases or because interview time could not be arranged. Thus, the number of usable interviews resulting from the selection procedure was 37.

Data Collection

I administered 54 surveys via email to those willing participants who could represent a needed variation set. I also sent an email thanking those respondents who were not evangelical for their participation in my project. The participants who were evangelical and, thus, could contribute usable interviews all answered “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to the following statements in the survey:

1. I believe the wages of sin is death.
2. I believe all humans except Christ have sinned.
3. I believe Christ died for our sins.
4. If I place my faith in Christ having paid the penalty for my sin, I will have eternal life.
5. If I place my faith in Christ having paid the penalty for my sin, I can have a personal relationship with God.
6. I believe I have a responsibility to share my faith in some way whereever I go (i.e. the great commission applies to me personally even in the workplace).
7. The Bible is the authoritative word of God.
8. I try to base my moral decisions on the Bible.
9. Access to a personal relationship with God and eternal life with Him [sic] is only available through Jesus Christ.

Participant ages ranged from 29 to 71 years of age. Five were either members of minorities or foreign nationals at birth, and seven claimed another heritage rather than describing themselves as Caucasian or white (e.g., Scottish).

Interview Guide Development

To determine the respondents’ perceptions of what it meant to them to be a Christian and to gather first-hand accounts of how they communicated their religious identity in the workplace, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each one (see Appendix G). The interview questions served to guide the discussion on issues relevant to the study without restricting consideration of other matters that the participants perceived as important. Semi-structured interviewing allowed me the flexibility to reorder or add new questions as necessary or desirable and return to items in the guide when the participants appeared to find it difficult to articulate some aspect of their experience. Often, returning to general questions after they had discussed specific situations helped the participants to think about their perceptions and then to provide more well developed responses. Less structured interviews are highly appropriate when in-depth answers about meanings, processes, cultures, and problems are desired (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).
In the pilot study, participants responded to the question, “How does being a Christian influence how you define yourself?” This question elicited answers of varying depth, most of which were not descriptive and failed to capture the meaning the respondents’ religious identities held. Therefore, for the main study, I adopted a narrative approach to interviewing. A narrative approach requires the researcher to solicit stories and detailed accounts of place, person, scene and background for events and experiences (Cortazzi, 2001). Thus, one of the guiding questions for the interviews was, “What is the story of your Christian identity?,” followed by probes, such as, “How important is being a Christian to you?,” “How has your Christianity developed?,” and “What is your testimony today?”

A strength of semi-structured, guided interviews is that their “outline increases the comprehensiveness of data and makes data somewhat systematic for each respondent”; in addition, “logical gaps in data can be anticipated and closed” while allowing for a more natural flow of conversation (Patton, 1990, p. 116). Some drawbacks of semi-structured, guided interviews, however, are that significant issues may be overlooked in an interview, and the ability to make comparisons across responses may be adversely affected.

When the first weakness is evident, one addresses it, in part, by analyzing data as gathered, such that he or she can developed a probe for future interviews, as issues of
significance emerge from the data. For example, in this study, the results of early interviews suggested a need for a follow-up question to acquire additional information concerning what was constraining participants from communicating their Christian identity in the workplace. Often, respondents said that they did not explicitly communicate it very often in any conspicuous way, but they did not explain why. The probe asking them to describe the circumstances when they refrained from volunteering was clearly inadequate in those instances in which they could not remember specific incidents. The choice to refrain seemed to be so frequent for many of the respondents that they could not single out a specific incident to describe; several of them merely indicated the need to use good judgment to determine when such communication was appropriate or inappropriate. Thus, a probe served to urged them to describe how they determined what was appropriate or inappropriate.

An important goal in a qualitative study is to have enough data to reach a point of saturation. Saturation exists when successive interviews do not reveal additional insights or understandings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In essence, the data have become exhaustive in respect to what is possible to illuminate; under these conditions, continuing to collect data would only yield more of the same or insignificant added contributions. However, I also wanted to be able to compare data for demographic variations, which, in my scheme,
required a minimum of four interviews per category (e.g., non-tenured men outside the hard sciences).

Interview Procedures

Rubin and Rubin (1995) propose stages for interviews that I incorporated as I prepared for them. The first, being in a natural environment, entailed going to participants’ offices, where I assumed they would be relatively comfortable. Only one individual requested a meeting outside his departmental office, as he was concerned about others’ knowing he had participated in a Christian study.

The second stage deals with encouraging sometimes nervous interviewees. The relationship I had with all the participants was professional rather than personal, in that I did not know the participants beforehand. I attempted to be professional, but also tried to be positive and sociable, to put the respondents at ease (Babbie, 1995). As experts on the topic, the professors were generally not ill at ease. Their primary concern was to establish that I was indeed a Christian and, thus, a sympathetic audience rather than someone with an alternative or hidden agenda. Bailey (1994) points out that interviewees disclose more if they have positive impressions of the researcher and perceive that they have things in common with the researcher (e.g., being an academic and a Christian).

Thus, I made clear from my initial contact with participants my identity as a Christian. I began each interview with informal small talk to relax and create the tone. The opening
time mostly entailed answering questions about who I am and my personal background. I asked participants for informed consent before the interviews began (see Appendix F).

The first questions involved background/demographic information as a way to open the interview with easy-to-answer, non-threatening matters.

The third stage that Rubin and Rubin (1995) discuss is expressing interviewer understanding through probes and both vocal and nonverbal cues. Conversational cues (e.g., “Uh-huh,” “Oh sure,” and head nods), in my case, were integral to showing understanding, encouraging openness, and empathizing. Showing too much understanding, however, seemed to lead interviewees to shorten their responses and descriptions; consequently, I used additional probes in asking them to define their understandings of common Christian terminology. The best conversational cues tended to be those that encouraged further description (e.g., “Really?” and interested “Oh”s).

The commonality I shared with these fellow Christians fostered disclosure; however, the participants sometimes assumed that I knew what they were saying (e.g., “You know how that can be”). Therefore, I took great care in following up such responses by asking for more detailed, explicit examples.

The fourth stage that Rubin and Rubin (1995) identify is working from general questions to specifics. For instance, I asked how actively the interviewees communicated
their Christian identity in their places of work in general before following that up with probes directed at specific situations, contexts, and interactants.

The fifth stage encourages the interviewer to display sensitivity, meaning that if particular issues seem to be very emotional or difficult for the participant, the interviewer only pursues those directly related to the research questions and proceeds with care. A couple of the participants were emotional, and I offered reassurance and waited for their cues that they were ready to proceed.

The sixth stage involves indicating the end by opening the floor to their questions to the interviewer and for their suggestions concerning related topics. Examples include: “Is there anything else you think is important to know about your Christianity and the workplace?” or “Do you have any other topics you would like to talk about with regard to Christianity and higher education?” “Is there anything you would like to ask me about this project?”

The final stage is to bring the interview to a close while also keeping the door open for future interaction. I did this by indicating that the interview was complete, thanking the participant for his/her insights and for agreeing to the interview, and seeking permission to contact him/her again, if necessary, after examining the content of the interview.
For at least two reasons, I audio taped the interviews. The first was to provide data in a form amenable to textual analysis. Taping insured that I accurately captured the individuals’ wording and also provided the opportunity for me to note the emphasis placed on various themes and ideas. Taping further enabled me to be more attentive to the participant during the interview. Despite the taping, note-taking was necessary, especially in regard to creating additional questions and probes (Yoder, 1988). For instance, participants sometimes touched on a topic of interest in passing while describing an event, which required that I record a note to ask them about the topic(s) when they finished their ongoing account.

Although recording can inhibit conversation, I conducted the interviews in a comfortable environment for the participants, which helped off-set this effect. Most of the participants seemed not to notice the recording device much if at all, except when it was necessary for me to turn a tape over to the other side. Additionally, I was able to use an MP3 recording device for a couple of the interviews. In the future, the MP3 might be best, as I did not need to mention the recording device again until the interview was over. It was less obtrusive in this respect. The quality and clarity of the digital recording was much better, and the ability to transfer the audio recording as an email attachment to a transcriber regardless of location proved to be beneficial. Since the Office of Regulatory
Compliance requires a date by which all such recording must be erased, the digital recordings are also easier in that respect.

I had to conduct the final five interviews via the telephone, as the logistics of interviewing the respondents personally in their offices could not be worked out. I followed the same interview procedures, except that nonverbal conversational cues, other than silence, were not an option. As a result, I used conversational cues carefully, and I tended to remain silent more often when participants may have been thinking over their responses. Even though the medium for these interviews was different, this change did not produce any notable differences in either the length of interviews or the themes that emerged from them during analysis. Only one of the five interviews entered into several new areas previously not discussed by other participants; consequently, the telephone interviews for the most part indicated that saturation existed. The new issues from that one interview related to the fact that a number of the participant’s classes were taught using web-based, distance learning vehicles. Even so, the themes that emerged from this interview were consistent with previous data.

The piloted interview guide proved to be inadequate in several ways. As a result, I worked to improve and refocus it for the main study. The pilot version addressed both religious and professional identities in the workplace. As a result, there was not enough time within the context of the interviews to probe for an in-depth understanding of either
the respondents’ professional and religious identity or how they emerged across contexts and are communicated. My personal interest and the existing void of spiritual understandings of communication directed my focus to religious identity exclusively for the rest of the project.

As mentioned previously, I reframed the questions to elicit more in-depth descriptions relating to the matters of interest. “Under what circumstances have you felt it necessary to hide or suppress your Christian identity?” became “Are there times when you refrain from explicitly communicating your Christian identity? Can you tell me about those times?” I dropped awkward phrases, such as “sense of self as a Christian,” in favor of simpler, familiar phraseology, such as “your Christian identity” or “your Christianity.” I developed specific questions about the implicit and explicit communication of religious identity in order to address in greater detail the range of identity emergence pilot interviews described more generally.

Data Analysis

Three transcriptionists and I transcribed the interviews to produce a narrative text of each interview for analysis. Although I would have gained valuable familiarity by transcribing all the interviews myself, a physical impairment made this option non-feasible. The tapes did not have any identifying marks on them so as to maintain the confidentiality of the participants from the transcriptionists. They will be destroyed per
the direction of the Office of Regulatory Compliance. Transcriptions are kept indefinitely. Some of the participants expressed mild concern or indicated that the examples they gave from their fields could/would reveal their identities to others; therefore, we eliminated references to exact disciplines, schools, or individuals from the final copy even though some clarity was lost, especially with regard to how they implied their Christian identity through examples in classes.

I color-coded the transcripts according to the combination of defining variables. For example, all the transcriptions of interviews by participants who were tenured men in the hard sciences were on green paper. Table 3.2 below shows the color designations given to each variation set. The analysis describes how I used these color codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hard Sciences</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenured</td>
<td>Non-tenure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pink</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft Sciences, Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>Gray</td>
<td>Gold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identification of Meaning Units

I analyzed the interview transcriptions textually; in short, I looked for themes and meanings within and across narratives by noting repetition, restatement, and intensity.
The first step was unitizing the text into segments for analysis. Units can consist of speaking turns, answers to interview questions, sentences, themes, etc. A unit is “a segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode or piece of information” (Tesch, 1990, p. 116). Throughout this text, the term “units” refers to such segments, each of which I cut from interview transcriptions and individually coded into emergent collective themes or categories. Consider the following excerpt from a pilot interview:

My Christianity is central to my identity and other things are defined through it. So as an academic, I’m not simply there to research and teach but to minister to students and to use my work as a ministry, to defend the faith, to see where God’s working that I can share the gospel with others and minister to them. So I view myself first and foremost as a Christian, and everything else gets defined through that. [Frances, 6:2].

The following procedures and decision rules were ones I utilized to unitize the data into themes along lines suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

1). Read the complete transcript.

2). Read and tentatively select the first theme unit based on the definition of a unit given above.

3). Read 10 lines beyond the end (and forward from the beginning, if applicable) of the first tentative unit. Ask the following question. Does the following (and preceding) text elaborate, extend, or clarify the previous theme unit?
4). If the answer is yes, reidentify the first meaning unit to include this information, and repeat Step 3. If the answer is no, mark the segment, and choose the next tentative theme unit while returning to Step 2.

5). Repeat this process for all remaining interviews.

I printed the individual units identified from this process and attached them to index cards. I then openly coded each unit. In short, I had no prescribed categories of themes. In other words, I used no prescribed categories to which I could then assign various units. For example, I did not use previously described self-disclosure decision criteria to create categories and then assign units to one of those various criteria. Rather, I attempted to identify only those patterns or themes that emerged from the data themselves in my reading of a transcript and to index them according to what was described by the participants.

Several participants mentioned that their communication decision was sometimes based on direction from God. For instance, Watson said “You just have to be open to the opportunity to communicate when the Lord makes it. I think that’s the whole key. If you’re sensitive to the Lord like you should be, you’ll know when you should speak up and when you shouldn’t . . . . You’ve got to be close the Lord, be sensitive to those things” [Watson 26:7, HS, T]. I initially coded units like this one as, “I try to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and communicate as God directs.” The example shows effort to label
units with an in vivo code, one that uses the language of the participants so that the conceptual designations accurately reflect the participants’ expressions. It also highlights a unique self-disclosure decision criterion that emerged from this data set.

I used Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) Constant-Comparison Method in conducting the analysis. This involved comparing each unit of data to the other units to determine 1) if it was similar to any other unit of data or 2) if it differed from previous units. As mentioned, I color coded units, printed them separately, and affixed them to index cards. I categorized units that were similar and compared them with and against other units, with the aim of slowly developing consistent, self-contained categories or themes that revealed the subjective understandings of the participants. The index card system facilitated this process for me as I compared and sorted individual units. In addition, the color codes allowed me to see at a glance if one theme was dominated by some demographic, for instance, gender.

The scope of the research questions also provided guidance at this point in keeping the analysis focused on answering the specific questions I posed rather than simply noting various themes. The following are four examples of units and how I took them through the analysis process.

One student came in a few times over the course of the semester and was really strung out and tired and discouraged. He just started talking
about this, bringing up family things, all sorts of stuff and how he was handling this, and how he was going to cope and did he have any coping mechanisms. And through there I talked about some of the ways I coped, and what role God played in my life and that kind of thing
[Edward 18:4, HS, T]

One faculty member came to me when he was going through a difficult time with his wife, and then when a faculty member died. Occasionally, I’ll find out that. It’s not clear that they seek me out, but it’s almost like they know that I might be a person they could get some comfort from or something. And those are opportunities to share. [Blake 3:5, HS, NT]

I have had it come up in ways I just haven’t sought out. I’ve had different colleagues come in, and it always starts out as an intellectual discussion. Then without me having to put the thumbscrews on anybody, it seems like we get around to personal stuff. If you can just sort of talk about things without making a big deal about it, without being threatening, they want to know what makes this Christianity tick. They’re curious themselves, struggling and searching. [Lloyd 34:5, SS, T]

I have posters on my wall, a calendar with scripture, pictures here and there. I don’t say anything a lot of times, I just let people look at them and read them. Okay, they’re looking, if they want to ask . . . [Katie 16:6, SS, NT]

I separated the units onto individual note cards. I coded the first one as,

“I communicate when students come to me with a personal struggle.” By using the participant’s language, which indicated that the student comes to him, this

*in vivo* code better described an important aspect of how this communication took place. I coded the second, “I communicate when colleagues come to me with personal problems,” but upon comparison, it became evident that these
units were similar to each other. Hence, I combined the two categories as “I communicate my Christianity when people come to me with personal struggles or concerns.”

I had a long table sectioned off by research question, where I put all the index cards assigned to this code in the section pertaining to the question, “Under what circumstances do Christian faculty members perceive that they are more likely to communicate their religious identity?” Keeping the questions before me on the table as I coded the individual units helped to focus the analysis on those identifiable themes relating to my research questions.

Lloyd’s unit also indicates that people came to him, but there is a qualitative difference between the personal conversations he describes with people who eventually asked questions on the personal level and conversations in which the faculty member was immediately drawn into a deeply personal struggle by the other individual. Lloyd’s unit and those like it I coded as, “I communicate my Christianity when people express open interest, ask questions or seem to be searching.”

Katie’s segment is different. She pointed out items in her office that could communicate her Christian identity and noted her hope that people would ask about what they observed. Units such as this one I stacked together and
coded as, “I have things in my personal space at work that might communicate my faith.”

Analysis was ongoing and began prior to the completion of all interviews. Themes of implied communication and overt communication occurring more as interactions turned personal were evident to me after I had conducted the first 12 interviews. I began systematic analysis after completing the first thirty interviews. This ongoing approach to analysis permitted the development of additional probes. For example, it became evident from the first several interviews that Christian faculty members often kept a Bible in their offices, but how visible it was among other markers of their personal space varied a great deal. I developed a probe to ask specifically about their having a Bible in the office and whether or not the respondent used it at work. I assumed that if the participant used the Bible at work, others might see it even if the person generally stored it out of sight.

The ongoing approach to analysis was most useful, in that it allowed time for the necessary follow-up with the participants. For example, several interviews touched on the idea of Christian maturity in some manner, so I added a follow-up question to subsequent interviews involving their understandings of this idea.

As the analysis continued, I made comparisons across categories to determine whether categories were related or could be further refined. For instance, the previous
four exemplar units related to one another, in that they all dealt with what participants’
considered “personal” on some level whether it was personal space or personal 
conversations. This process continued until I had analyzed all the interviews.

Credibility and Transferability

Finally, I checked my ongoing findings with participants via email to determine if they thought the findings accurately represented their viewpoints and to elicit their other reactions. All the members responded in the positive and indicated that the codes captured their experiences. For instance, one participant commented on the thematic codes sent to him by saying that although he had not described each of them himself, they were all things he could have said himself. The participants’ reactions, in general, indicated that the analysis produced credible thematic units that accurately reflected the participants’ perceptions. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the member check is pivotal “for establishing credibility” in qualitative research (p. 314).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) carefully delineate ways in which the trustworthiness is recognized in qualitative research which, in part, include credibility and transferability of the findings. For this study, I established credibility mainly by means of member checks. And although interviews were the source of all data in this study, triangulation of sources was used. Themes were not retained without multiple interviewees’ input substantiating the themes. The trust established between researcher and respondents in talking with one
another as one Christian to another was also important. There was, moreover, no reason to suspect the honesty or authenticity of the respondents.

Transferability is not the same as generalizability. Since the qualitative work focused on the meanings and experiences of these respondents with reference to their particular identities, context, and experiences communicating, the issue is more whether or not “someone interested in making a transfer” has enough information in the form of “thick description,” such that he or she could contemplate doing so (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). To this end, Chapter 4 presents several well described units from respondents in respect to gender, tenure status, and field type which characterize each theme that emerged.

I also trained an additional coder in respect to what the codes were to determine whether he agreed with my unit assignments. The purpose of involving the second coder was to establish the reliability of my coding decisions. I wrote definitions of the codes on individual note cards and laid them out on a large table as I trained the other coder in recognizing what each represented. We then scrambled the six hundred plus units that had all been marked on the reverse side with my code assignments. The other coder then began the process of assigning each unit to what he viewed as the proper thematic category. There were a number of units originally identified that ended up not pertaining to the research questions. Some of these note cards were included in the set given to the
second coder so that he also had the option of determining that units did not belong in any defined category. The initial level of agreement between coders was 80%.

Discussion ensued to resolve disagreements for the remaining 20%. Disagreements or questions were often easily resolved by referring back to the original interviews to give the second coder additional context. For example, I typically knew what question I had asked the respondent to elicit the response I then coded, so the note card did not include this information. Providing the second coder with context without additional comment often enabled him to make assignments to the same thematic categories I had. Other units seemed to reflect more than one theme. In such cases, the coders decided that the units needed to be divided and assigned to separate thematic categories. A small percentage of unit about which the coders disagreed remained. The final rate of agreement between coders was 93%. The second coder, an adult convert to Christianity, pointed out that being a Christian and having familiarity with Christian language use and beliefs was necessary to making coding decisions throughout this process.

Limitations

The study reported herein had a number of limitations. Although there were at least four respondents in each demographic set, there was an over representation of tenured men from the hard sciences, which, one should take into account as one reads the findings. Another limitation was that noteworthy examples of Christians who readily
shared their faith on campus did not participate. The self-selection process for the study, then, limited the variety of experiences described, subsequently analyzed, and presented herein. As an exploratory study, the findings only begin to illuminate the matters of interest. The findings were not bolstered by observations and, thus, represent only the perceptions of this group of respondents.

Conclusion

The methods I have described using yielded a great number of thematic codes that address the research questions posed for this project. Chapter 4 reviews what the themes were, how they answer the questions, and describes some of the ways they illuminate the larger conceptual structure of the study.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

*Being a Christian is, I believe, seeing the world differently, seeing the world from God or Jesus’ perspective [Emma 6:1 SS, T].*

The findings reported in this chapter are divided according to the research questions to which they apply. Variation attributable to gender and tenure status or hard science versus association with other disciplines was not generally in evidence. Exceptions are noted in the discussion of reported themes. I include participant comments throughout the report to provide a thicker description of the themes. The participants often alluded to scripture by quoting a Biblical phrase in their responses, so whenever possible, I have included a citation for the scripture being referenced with the descriptions.

**Research Question One**

Research Question One was: How do evangelical Christian faculty define their Christian identity? From the Christian perspective these faculty members have, it would be inappropriate to use scholarly theoretical perspectives to explain how they define what a Christian is. Rather, for these individuals, the lens through which they see themselves, others, God, their communication, and their purpose in being is their Christian identity.
They seek to embody a Christian worldview that they live out in their every action every day.

Emma, in the head note above, observed that being a Christian is to see the world as God sees it. The participants in this study seemed to be aware of that and reported attempting to do so on a regular basis. The scripture they have learned that affects their living of the Christian life runs throughout their interviews in the form of quotations and paraphrases. They all indicated responses to the questionnaire that they view the Bible as authoritative and try to base moral decisions on it, but the extent to which they use it to describe their views of life and how they deal with them in the workplace indicates the reality behind those responses. The regular references to scripture are a sub-theme embedded in the interviews and key to the participants’ understandings of what it means to be a Christian.

Defining a Christian

What is a Christian to these individuals? A few of the general definitions participants offered went into theological detail (e.g., “Jesus Christ is the Son of God”), but an overall definition for the participants appeared to be: “A Christian is someone who believes in Christ, has accepted God’s gift of salvation through Jesus, chooses to follow Christ, and has a relationship with God.” The following participant definitions reflect these core themes of the Christian identity as described in their own words: “A Christian
is simply a follower of Christ” [Jaime 15:1, HS, T], “Someone who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior and believes in Him” [Rhoda 37:1, SS, T], “Someone who has made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins” [Edward 18:1, HS, T], and “Somebody who is a follower of Christ, who believes that Jesus is God, and has developed a personal relationship with Christ in-dwelling in them” [Mina 17:1, HS, NT].

These definitions reflect the primary themes that emerged in the participants’ definitions of what being a Christian means to them. First, there is the theme that a Christian is “someone who is a follower of Christ.” From the Christian perspective, a follower is not merely someone who studies the life of Jesus Christ and tries to live by His principles and example. To the respondents, Jesus Christ is part of the triune God, one God with three persons, including God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. From the responses, participants appear to believe, then, that following Christ is also to accept His current leadership in their day-to-day lives. Illustrative is the following comment: “I’m becoming more Christ-like, walking more closely with God, walking in the Spirit” [Keith 14:3, HS, T, M].

Second, there is a theme of a Christian as “someone who accepts salvation in Jesus.” Important to these Christians is the idea that salvation is a gift from God that can only be accepted; it cannot be earned by good works or being a good person. As Chester said:
They’ve realized that there’s not anything they can do through good deeds that makes them acceptable to God; it’s only through Jesus Christ . . . . I have a life verse that puts it together, Ephesians 2:8-9, where it says “it’s by grace through faith we’re saved and it’s not of ourselves. It’s the gift of God, not works lest any man should boast.” It’s an absolute gift; nothing you can do. After you do that, the world changes. [Chester 22:2, HS, T]

A third theme that emerged from the definitions of a Christian was “someone who believes in Jesus.” There are a number of theological ideas that could go along with this belief, such as Mina’s example of believing that Jesus is God, but the essential element of this third theme is belief. Belief from the Christian perspective is not simply a mental decision to believe that something is true (e.g., “I believe in angels”); rather, belief is an active ongoing placing of one’s trust or faith in Jesus. The participants saw this belief as trust in who Jesus is, what He has done for the believer, and what He his doing in the believer’s life.

Being a Christian means I have placed my faith and trust in Jesus Christ and have, to use the Christian word, salvation. Personally, I see two aspects. First there’s the initial commitment accepting the sacrificial and redeeming work of Christ in what he did on the cross that brings you into relationship with himself and God. Then there’s walking as a Christian, I guess the word is sanctification. That’s more a process of becoming more and more like the person Christ desires you to be. [Devlin 7:1, HS, T]

Fourth, the definitions embodied a theme of a Christian as “someone who has a relationship with God.” Devlin touched on this relationship in the previous description.
From the participants’ perspective, interpersonal communication and relationship with the God of the Bible are part of being a Christian.

The participant examples above show how the different themes reflected in the definitions of a Christian and conjoined through analysis highlight how these aspects of being a Christian were imbedded in the participants’ individual understandings of who they were. There were no differences in participant definitions one could attribute to gender, tenure status, or discipline. For instance, seven men and five women included “someone who has a relationship with God” as part of their definition of a Christian. Of the 66 total number of definitions of what a Christian is, the theme of “someone who is a follower of Christ” was evident in fifteen participants’ definitions, and “someone who accepts salvation in Jesus” was a theme in eighteen. “Someone who believes in Jesus” was a theme in sixteen definitions. Since these numbers represent such high proportions of the total, it is clear that there was little variance that one could attribute to differences in demographic characteristics.

Identity Definition by Theoretical Perspectives

The Communication Theory of Identity

From the perspective of the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993), the basic definitions of a Christian focus sharply on the idea that the Christian identity is identity in action, or the second frame of the theory, enactment. The attributes
comprising the first or personal frame of identity according to the theory are those of being a “follower,” an “acceptor,” a “believer” (i.e., trusting and placing one’s faith in), or a “professor of belief” and having a relationship. Almost every definition pointed to identity in action or the enactment of identity through communication with God or fellow believers. For these Christians, there was a sense in which who you are is inseparable from what you have done and are doing. As the enactment frame suggests, “identities are enacted in social behavior and symbols” (Hecht, 1993, p. 79). The personal frame of understanding who they were from their definitions of Christian identity was bound to actions that they perceived as emerging from their Christian identity.

One reason the first and second frames were so intertwined relates to one of the assumptions of the personal frame; that is, “Identities are a source of expectations and motivations” (Hecht, 2002, p. 79). Some of the expectations for a follower of Christ the participants described include: looking at the world from God’s or Jesus’ perspective, taking your needs to God in prayer, walking closely with Christ everyday, and doing God’s will. There was a process the participants touched on and indicated was from the Bible (i.e., sanctification) for achieving Christian maturity. Christian maturity, according to one participant is “[to] have a faith that has reached the point that Christ has become evident in every aspect of a believer’s life” [Andrew 9:3, HS, NT]. Only a few participants actually indicated the motivations they derive from their Christian identity
for fulfilling the expectations. One’s motivation was to love God, and another was “to please God” [Chester 22:2, HS, T]. So what is expected of Christians and their motives comes from their Christian identity, specifically, the personal frame.

These definitions also reflect the third and fourth frames addressed in the Communication Theory of Identity. Those participants who focused on having a relationship with God appeared to view it within the third or relational frame of identity. However, all these definitions could also be viewed in terms of the fourth frame, or communal understandings of what it means to be a Christian. The Christian identity, as described by the participants, encompasses much more than simply their view of themselves as individuals or their view of Christians more generally; they described their religious identity as having broad impact on their lives.

Identity Salience

Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory both consider identity salience as an important aspect of understanding identity. Saliency is the likelihood that the identity will be enacted across various contexts. The participants’ statements concerning Christianity’s perceived salience in their lives indicated that, at the very least, the goal of their entire lives was to enact this identity in every situation. The Christian identity for the participants, in a sense, indicated that being a Christian is the role of their lives and that they, hence, make a focused effort to enact it in every situation by behaving as they
deem a follower of Christ would, even though they do not always achieve their goal.

How does one’s identity have such broad influence, regardless of context? Two themes that emerged from the analysis help explain this and reflect the personal and enactment frames from the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993).

**Primary Themes of the Personal Meaning of Being a Christian**

The first major theme that dominated the participants’ descriptions of their Christian identity was: “Christianity is my all-encompassing outlook on life.” Those in academia refer to this as worldview, but it seems to go beyond that to a simpler description that Christianity is “how I see things.” It is worldview-like when Nate says, “I look at the world in a different way. It gives me a framework where I can understand the world a little better” [1:2, SS, T]. “It’s my life” [Diane 3:3, HS, NT], “the most important aspect of my life” [Rhoda 37:3, SS, T], “It provides me with the whole point” [Lloyd 34:2, SS, T]. Repeated throughout the interviews, this theme suggests that for participants, being a Christian is the purpose of their lives. They have been created for this relationship with God. It is the ultimate focus, the guiding structure. A few of them qualified their descriptions with words like “probably” [Betty 40:2, SS, T] or described them in such understated terms as “important and central” [Keith 14:3, HS, T], but they went on to say, respectively, that it was more important than being a parent or important enough to hope to be able to bear persecution, prison, and death for their Christianity.
If the Christian identity is “how I see things,” “Christianity is how I live” follows and was the second primary theme. This theme, of course, relates directly to the identity as enactment frame of the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993, p. 79). “It has bearing on everything I do and say” [Watson 23:1, HS, T], “how I relate to people” [Lloyd 34:2, SS, T]. According to Blake, “My life has been bought with a price, and, therefore, everything I do I intend to try to do it in a manner that would be honoring to God” [3:2, HS, NT]. Blake’s comment indicates the personal frame’s expectation, the motivation, and the action of enacting. The suggestion is that their religious identity is highly salient because it reportedly plays out day to day in their lives across many different contexts. As Jaime observed, “I don’t believe in putting your life into compartments. So it actually has to impact my work here, my behavior in the shopping center, the parking lot, whatever else I do” [15:1, HS, T].

As further analysis bore out, these are not platitudes or goal statements having no bearing on the participants’ lives in the organizations in which they worked. This is probably part of the reason why many Christians perceive the secular university environment as hostile. If how they see things (e.g., people, work, and purpose) as Christians has become a central aspect of who they really are, then any perceptions of constraints on how they live out their Christian identity in the workplace may have greater importance to these faculty members as Christians. Melissa noted that “this issue
that’s sometimes raised about separation of Church and State, or separation of your private life from what you’re doing in terms of your vocation or your job is ludicrous to me, because I can’t separate that out” [21:2, SS, T]. These two themes of Christianity as “how I see things” and “how I live,” then, are reflected in the ways the participants perceived themselves as communicating their Christian identity.

Research Question Two

Research Question Two asked: Under what circumstances do evangelical Christian faculty perceive that they are more likely to communicate the Christian identity? The first section of findings for this question deals with perceived implicit communication of their Christianity. Implicit communication occurred most often when respondents were reportedly interacting with others in a way that gave them the opportunity to treat those people in a Christian manner. Other circumstances under which they perceived that they communicate their Christianity implicitly include: when they reveal their weaknesses, how they handle gossip at work, and when they experience bad situations, but react to them in a Christian manner.

The second set of findings relating to Research Question Two pertain to circumstances in which evangelical Christian faculty reported communicating their Christian identity in explicit ways at work. The primary circumstance making their
disclosure more likely was that the communication was somehow related to what they described as “personal.”

Perceived Implicit Communication of One’s Christian Identity

The Christian outlook on life the participants described appeared to define how they see all the people with whom they interact everyday and, thus, has ramifications for how they enact that identity in terms of their communicative behavior at their places of work. One major communication theme that surfaced in what 30 of the 37 faculty members said was: “I communicate my Christianity implicitly by how I treat people.” Some of their examples of communicating their Christianity in this way exemplified how their Christian worldview ties to the way they attempt to manifest that identity.

In our culture we have gone towards isolation and devaluation of people and the devaluation of life. But, on the very simple basis of just accepting people as all possessing dignity from being created in the image of God (Gen.1:26-27) and treating people with equal dignity, you immediately address an issue that our culture is failing to address . . . . So it’s in how you treat people, how you deal with them, how you listen, that you respect them, that you honor them on the basis of being created in the image of God. [Andrew 9:11, HS, NT]

For me it is the way hopefully I engage with the students. I have a very open policy. If I am in the middle of something and a student has a question, I will drop what I am doing. I think that comes with valuing the student, and recognizing that student is a creation of God. [Todd 51:7, SS, NT]

I try to behave as if they are special and cherished beings; I try to make them feel that . . . . to be fair, to really show kindness and caring, thinking of them as unique and wonderful creatures. And trying to impart that . . . sometimes I’ll even say “you are a really special person.” [Jill 53:8, HS, T]
In my interactions with students . . . it’s a communication and seeing them as having infinite value as children of God. I don’t say that to them, but that is how I see them. That attitude translates into action, in being patient with people, going beyond the minimum, spending so many hours with students not just my advisees, because they need me. That love you neighbor thing (Matt. 22:39) and your neighbor is the person who happens to be next to you at any given time. [Shanna 46:8, SS, T]

The professors making these statements reported seeing people as having inherent value and worth and seeing students as special creations. From that view of people, they purportedly try to treat all people with respect and do such things as giving students their time. Several of the professors mentioned that non-Christians can value and engage in similar behavior, but these individuals saw themselves as communicating their Christian identity by means of such behavior. This seemed to play out further in regard to the social stratification of higher education as described from several of their Christian perspectives.

One of the kind [sic] of hidden agendas of faculty is that they’re big on being egalitarian and that sort of thing, and then they treat the staff people like they’re not real people . . . . If we take seriously that before Christ there’s neither Jew nor Greek [Gal. 3:28], my relationship with the staffers is the same as with the President of the school. Now that takes work, because there’s a lot in our culture, and a lot in my job and other things wants me to become a colleague with him and oh-well with them. But we know that one of the things about being a Christian is to recognize the power suit or the blue jeans as irrelevant. [Lloyd 34:11, SS, T]

Treating all people well no matter what their job description is very important. Someone is a janitor or chair or whatever; God loves everybody here. And not to think less or more of yourself in this group than you really should [Rom.12:3]. [Mina 17:6, HS, NT]
I believe as Christians we are called upon to demonstrate the equality of people, that the only distinction that has any bearing are those who are in Christ and those who aren’t. All of the other sort of class distinctions of society are irrelevant to God and on a faulty foundation. So I consciously with people seek to demonstrate that I am perceiving them as peers, maybe not in knowledge of some topic, but in the human sense. We’re equals. [Scott 50:6, SS, NT]

Treating other people at work with this vision of value in God’s sight is the primary way most of these evangelicals reportedly perceived that they implicitly communicate their Christianity in their places of work. While they perceived their Christian identity as implied in this behavior, many noted that others may merely view them as being nice. As an example of a domain of behavior in communication, “treating people a certain way,” is not an aspect of self-disclosure discussed in self-disclosure literature. The definition of self-disclosure in the review of literature for this study, however, allowed for self-disclosure that includes people’s perceptions that they had engaged in sharing something about themselves. Consequently, the participants’ perceptions of implying the Christian identity via their behavior and attitudes qualifies as self-disclosure.

I did not report each and every way participants indicated implicitly communicating their Christian identity. I chose instead to focus on themes that for some participants led to more explicit communication of their Christian identity. For instance, some of the behavior described by only a handful of people included not swearing, not
drinking alcohol heavily, and being careful with issues of honesty. However, these types of behavior were often simply listed by participants as implicit forms of communication, without any real description of the circumstances in which such communication occurred. Such lists did not provide an adequate context for answering the research questions. Hence, the findings focus on those implicit communications of the Christian identity that more aptly apply to Research Question Two by describing the conditions under which participants disclosed the Christian identity.

Four themes relating to perceived implicit communication were relevant to the question of the circumstances under which evangelical faculty members disclose their Christian identity. The four themes that surfaced were: 1) “how I react to hard times and bad situations,” 2) “when I reveal my weaknesses and apologize for mistakes,” 3) “how I handle gossip in the workplace,” and 4) the aforementioned “how I treat others.”

The first implicit communication theme, “how I react to hard times and bad situations,” was apparent in the descriptions of seven women and four men. The participants mentioning this theme reported reacting in a Christian manner to difficult times, which they perceived as implicitly communicating the Christian identity. No men in the hard sciences, however, reported communicating this way. Reports reflecting this theme mentioned behavior that led to further disclosure and other behavior that did not.
How two individuals handled their difficulties reportedly led to more explicit communication of the Christian identity.

The greatest opportunity I’ve had to communicate openly was, it was having cancer. People would ask, “How are you dealing with it?” and I told them, “I’m a Christian. I deal with it that way.” It provided a basis for opening a conversation. So you talk about how you make it through on the basis of faith and that’s the support mechanism. [Ryan 29:13, SS, T]

It goes back to what kind of evangelist you are. You know, I’ve had people say to me, “all these problems you’ve had and you’re still up.” “Yeah, well, because I know what’s going to happen. So I’ll get through this because the end is real good.” And maybe they’ll shrug and say, “whatever,” but you’ve planted a seed. [Jaime 15:10, HS, T]

These participants, like many others, hoped that people would notice something different about them and ask about it. This was a sub-theme that spread across the reported nonverbal and implicit communication. Whether other people at work asked or not, however, the participants saw their attempts to react in a Christ-like manner to bad times or situations as implicit communication of their Christian identity. Sometimes, such action was tied to opportunities for more explicit self-disclosure, and sometimes it was not. An instance in which the communication of Christian identity remained implicit was clear in the following statement: “There was this one occasion with people at work when I could have carried a little baggage with me rather than forgive, but you realize that, and I talked with myself and said it wasn’t an option for me as part of who I was and how I was living” [Betty 40:4, SS, T].
The second implicit communication theme, “revealing weaknesses and apologizing for mistakes,” tended to remain on an implied level of communication for the participants who described it.

I try to be reconciled to others at work. This might mean [when I am] being dismissive of someone or not giving them the time they need so that they feel valuable in my life . . . I go and apologize for my treatment of the person. Sometimes they’ll say, “oh, I didn’t realize,” but it’s very important to me . . . And I think people see that willingness to not have to be right . . . This disarms some people. [Shanna 46:7, SS, NT]

The connection of revealing weaknesses to possible subsequent disclosure is basically the idea of building a foundation for future communication. The “disarming people” could be seen as taking away a possible stereotype others might have of Christians’ thinking themselves better than others. Four men and two women reported revealing weaknesses or apologizing; all but one of them were tenured. Tenured faculty may feel more secure and able to reveal weaknesses, since those weaknesses are ostensibly unlikely to have negative consequences for their work position. Melissa said of one of her apologies to a colleague that there was “just kind of like disbelief that you were that honest . . . Things like that can have a big impact where people then know that they can trust you, because you’ve been vulnerable with them” [21:8-9, SS, T]. Apologies and other revelations of vulnerability could lay a foundation for future disclosure, or the communication of the Christian identity might only stay in revealing the weakness. As one participant said:
I can’t be seen here putting on a show always being mister goodie-too-shoes. I have to be authentic. That means I’m going to make mistakes once and awhile. It’s how I deal with my failings in front of those who are watching that will tell them more about true Christianity, my true relationship with God, than it will be if I’m always putting on a white satin suit. For one thing, I can’t be that all the time, but more realistically I think when they see, “yes he makes mistakes, but here’s how he deals with those mistakes”; it communicates my faith. [Lloyd 34:10, SS, T]

The third theme, “how I handle gossip at work,” also tended to remain on the level of implicit communication of one’s Christian identity. Communicating by “how I handle gossip at work” includes trying to remove oneself from conversations that turn to gossip, offering positive statements about those being talked about, avoiding socializing with those who are known gossips, and making it known that one does not participate in gossiping. The following comments are illustrative:

I’m realizing more and more that I really need to watch what I say. I’m just amazed that people in this totally anti-social field get together and gossip about each other . . . . [N]ow I am like, “how do I get out of this?” [Diane 33:7, HS, NT]

At a university, things go on, and people like to talk. Several years ago I made a definite commitment not to, to take myself out of situations where there’s talk about rumors and problems. [Betty 40:4, SS, T]

I try to stay away from all that, but then when if somehow I’m caught in it, I don’t say, “I don’t think this is right.” I might try to subtly put a positive spin on it, but I don’t think that’s enough. [Nate 1:7, SS, T]
Six women and two men evenly divided by tenure status and discipline type, as was typical in this study, reported “how they handle gossip” as one way they implicitly communicate their Christianity. In discussing how he deals with gossip, one professor said, “It is known that if you ask me to keep something quiet that I will keep it quiet. I have been tested on that” [John 49:5, SS, NT].

Dealing with gossip in such ways may be directly tied to opportunities for explicit self-disclosure of their Christian identity. Jen reportedly does not simply refrain from gossip, but makes her position on gossip clear by saying things like:

“[T]hat’s the first I’ve heard of it, but, you know, I’m not part of the gossip chain” or if I do know something about it, I say, “I’ve heard something, but I’m not going to discuss that” or “that’s inappropriate for me to be sharing.” . . . I think that has spoken volumes to folks . . . . People in the gossip chain, in a weird way, it’s those same people who are more comfortable talking to me, because they know they’re not going to hear it back around the department. It wasn’t my aim, but now it’s those people who now want to talk with me confidentially about this or that, because they know I don’t do that [Jen 42:8, SS, NT].

Again, there is the idea behind this implicit communication of Christian identity that the behavior may lay a foundation for other opportunities to self-disclose more explicitly.

The four circumstances surrounding implicit communication of their Christian identity included reacting to bad situations in a Christian manner, handling weaknesses in an honest manner, handling gossip in a Christian manner, viewing others as valuable and, thus, treating them in a Christ-like way. The nature of such communication itself
probably increases the likelihood of Christian faculty engaging in such self-disclosure, since it is only positive disclosure behavior and not directly revealing anything that would make these faculty members vulnerable as Christians in the workplace.

This section began with what I described as the theme, “how I treat others communicates my Christianity.” Many of the participants hoped their implicit communication would lead to opportunities for more explicit communication, and some of the participants indicated that it had. So I emphasize the connection implicit communications may have to more explicit self-disclosure. I conclude this section with a thick description from one of the participants of how this has developed for him. I then describe the more explicit ways these evangelicals indicated communicating their Christian identities and under what circumstances they reported doing so.

One of the students that I had was going through a situation where a parent had been seriously ill and then died. This wasn’t a teenage student. Most of our graduate students are older. But by communicating more with that student and by cutting them some slack . . . being flexible with assignments that lead to interaction and more discussion and more transparency on their part and allowed me the opportunity to step outside my role as faculty member and into a role of just being a caring friend. That in turn lead to an opportunity to talk about the basis for hope about the future and that this life isn’t all there is. And that created an opportunity to share the Gospel. I don’t know if it’s a conscious strategy, but by having a relationship and creating openness, going the extra mile (Matthew 5:41), seeking to treat people in a caring manner and building into their lives opportunities emerge to begin to share the concrete tangible parts of what it means to know Christ. [Scott 50:3 SS, NT]

Circumstances Perceived as Likely for Explicit Self-Disclosure
Thirteen themes from the interview transcriptions applied to circumstances involving explicit disclosure of one’s Christian identity. Nine of the 13 themes suggest that Christian faculty members are more likely to communicate their Christian identity when the circumstance is in some way personal. The other four themes for communicating the Christian perspective included: “when I can couch it in a joke or a joking manner,” “when it relates to class in some way so it’s natural to mention it,” “when it seems appropriate to invite people to religious events,” and “when the Holy Spirit guides me to communicate.”

I should note that the assignation of perceived communication of Christian identity as implicit or explicit is mine. The participants varied widely in their perceptions of what was implicit or explicit communication. For example, Diane was in the closet with her Christianity for the most part until she, using her own word, “explicitly” communicated her Christianity by sending an email inviting the people she knew in her department to an Easter cantata followed by brunch in her home. Jen, on the other hand, reported being explicitly Christian in much of her communication. So, when she sends announcements to people about religious events, she sees that as an implicit communication of her Christianity. For the purposes of this study, both invitations appeared to be explicit disclosures of Christian identity, and I treated them as such.

Nine Circumstance Themes Characterized as Personal
The nine circumstances characterized as personal for which participants described themselves as more likely to communicate their Christian identity fell into two groups. The smaller group includes the following themes: 1) “In my personal space, I have indicators of my Christianity,” 2) “My personal priorities communicate the importance of my Christian identity,” and 3) “When personal information is a part of introducing myself, I share that I am a Christian.” These three themes are related to one another by the sole ownership participants have of their space, priorities, and information. The larger group of themes characterized as personal all relate in some way to disclosing the Christian identity within the context of personal communication, which was most often personal conversations. In the context of personal conversations, the interaction is co-created and co-owned by those engaging in the communication.

Three Sole Owned Personal Circumstance Themes

First, 31 of the 37 participants reported that they have indicators of their Christianity in their personal spaces. Hence, one way in which Christian faculty communicate their Christian identity at work is by having materials and objects, such as scripture, religious music, pictures, quotes, and Christian symbols, on their persons or in their designated personal areas (e.g., labs and email signatures). The condition here is that the areas where they have the indicators of their Christianity belong to them in some way even though they were in a public work environment. With this theme, I could
sometimes discern such pointers as being intentional markers or unintentional indicators ranging from the explicitly Christian to those that only imply a Christian identity. The following two quotations offer examples of intentionally explicit indicators of a religious identity:

I had an ad from the university newspaper on my filing cabinet that said “Do you know the teacher who’s going to give you your real final exam?” and it had a picture of Christ on it . . . . So that’s a way to actively witness to people. I’ve always tried to have something in my office. [Rhoda 37:4, SS, T]

I try to have little things around . . . . I’ve got that sign “This is God. I’m here for all your problems today.” . . . I try to keep scripture references on my screen saver. The one there now is one of my favorites, “Don’t be anxious about anything, but in everything by petition and thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God,” [Philippians 4:6] and I think the next verse is, “may the peace of God which transcends all understanding guard your hearts in the name of Christ Jesus.” [Luke 25:3-4, SS, T]

An example of a less explicit but still intentional marker in the personal area is: “I have things on my door, profound words of wisdom, that are consistent with my faith. They’re not quotes from the Bible or religious people, but they are things that are consistent with a religious perspective” [Jen 42:10, SS, NT]. And an unintentional indicator would be one like Jill’s: “I have a daily devotional book that sits out on my desk. Of course, half my office sits on my desk” [53:8, HS, T]. So she has something Christian in her office just for personal use that may unintentionally communicate her Christian identity.
Two of the Christian faculty members made it clear that they chose not to have any sort of displays in their personal space. One said, “I’ve never done that. . . . I wonder is this really an effective type of witness if it draws attention to you?” [George 27:7, HS, T]. The other indicated that he did not consider his office space personal in saying, “I don’t have anything on the walls or anything. This is not an office that I’ve paid for” [Alec 2:5, HS, NT]. Even so, he kept a Bible in his office for personal use, which could be an unintentional indicator of his Christian identity.

The next theme reported by some participants revealed perceptions that their personal priorities communicated the importance of their Christian identity to others. Personal priorities were, according to the participants, making Bible studies, church activities, and Christian commitments, and the like a priority that they communicated to others in various ways including informing others of scheduling conflicts. “Someone might say, ‘let’s get together on Wednesday’ and I’ll say, ‘oh, I really don’t want to miss Bible study’ or something. I guess I could say, ‘I’m busy,’ but I choose to say what it is I’m busy with” [Jill 53:9 HS, T].

The people who are close, the graduate students and faculty, will find out, because there’s a Bible study in the department on Wednesdays during lunch, so they’ll see you headed there with a lunch and your Bible. The secretaries all know that I get in late on Mondays because I go to a men’s Bible study that morning. So there are certain things that communicate. [Nate 1:3, SS, T]
Seven men and three women indicated that their personal priorities communicated their Christian identity. The split between tenured and non-tenured faculty mentioning the theme had more tenured men indicating this form of communication, but there were twice as many tenured men in the hard sciences who participated in the study. So that difference may be attributable to this imbalance.

The final circumstance characterized as personal, but not necessarily related to personal conversations is: “I share that I am a Christian when personal information is part of introducing myself.” This usually occurred on the first day of classes when professors introduced themselves to their classes in some way.

When I’m introducing myself first day of classes, I go through and talk about my educational background. I usually mention a little bit about my family, personal details, and it’s very natural then just to say that the more important thing in my life is my relationship to Jesus Christ . . . . And I sort of leave it at that, but I find that students pick up on it, and sometimes they’ll come around and talk to me about it or about other things. [Blake 3:3, HS, NT]

I’m not consistent with this, but some semesters, I would. Most of the time, I just tell what I’m going to cover in the course, “Here’s the material, here’s the grades.” Sometimes I have a paragraph or two in there about my personal interests, what I do for research, and then I would indicate that I’d done prison ministries or mention various countries I’d been to visiting missionaries. [Chester 22:5, HS, T]

Alec’s take on telling the students upfront is that it’s a warning about his bias. “I tell them I’m a Christian as much as anything for their own protection, because I’m going to say things throughout the semester that just naturally come out of a Christian viewpoint”
Six men and three women indicated that they include their Christianity when they share personal information as part of introducing themselves.

The campus ministries at both universities encourage Christian faculty to be open with their Christianity in this way. The president of one of the Christian faculty groups sent an email to those on the listserv explaining how he does this in his own classes.

Becky responded with shock in her own reply email:

I went, “what?! You can do that?,” and he said “yes, it’s perfectly legal.” And I thought you’re kidding me. I was always told, “oh you can’t even speak the word ‘God’ here.” . . . So I did it that first day of class this year and it’s been very interesting for me. So this is my first year really opening up and identifying myself. And this year I’ve had more students identify themselves as Christian to me than ever before. [Becky 30:4, SS, T]

Part of the motivation for disclosing their Christianity seemed to relate to letting Christian students know that they are not alone. “I think telling them—it’s encouraging to students who are (Christian) and intriguing to those who aren’t” [Alec 2:5, HS,NT].

I’m going to bring in some things to put on the outside of my door, because this Christian student I meet with said one of the hardest parts of coming here is all these doors in this department . . . [covered] with radical issues. She said, “why can’t we take that up, cover the door with Jesus and this and that,” and I thought, yes, I can do that, you know, because I’m finding out that I have every right do that too. [Becky 30:7, SS, NT]

Becky’s statement begins to touch on some of the tensions Christians reported experiencing on campus, which I discussed in reference to Research Question Three.
Suffice it to say that concern for Christian students is part of the motivation for Christian professors to communicate their Christian identity in such ways as explicitly disclosing it the first day of class.

Key to this theme is that personal information is considered an appropriate part of introducing oneself. One man indicated that he used to share that he was a Christian on the first day of class, but he no longer does:

The last few years I haven’t been as open when I begin class. I don’t say, “Here’s who I am.” . . . I just haven’t felt that it’s authentic for me to begin my class by presenting to my students that part of me that openly. Because, I’m less open about a lot of things with my students, so why should I be open about that? On the other hand, I don’t hide it either. [Lloyd 34:6, SS, T]

His non-example of sharing personal information emphasizes the aspect of including the Christian identity within the context of communicating other personal information the professors already share is part of what makes this disclosure within the formal role appropriate. To that end, several Christian professors reported being more likely to communicate their Christian identity when it is part of sharing other personal information such as when introducing themselves formally to their students for the first time.

Six Co-owned Personal Circumstance Themes of Communication

The next six circumstances relating to when evangelical Christian faculty members are more likely to communicate all entail types of personal communication and especially personal conversations. What warranted characterizing communication as
personal is that it moves away from formal role-related discussions most relevant to the work to issues outside the formal role that are communicated person-to-person.

The first theme includes general statements of the participants to the effect that: “When communication is more on a personal level, I’m more likely to talk about Christian things.” The second personal conversation theme was: “When students or colleagues come to me with personal struggles, it allows me to communicate my Christianity more.” Related to talking about personal struggles was the following theme: “I offer help and support to those who seem to need it but haven’t asked.” The fourth theme was: “When other people express interest, seem to be searching, or just ask questions I see as related to my Christianity, I disclose my Christianity more.” The fifth theme capturing the circumstance under which evangelical Christians reported disclosing their Christianity more was: “When I have a common basis for talking like when people have another faith or especially if they are Christians.” The sixth theme was: “When you’ve built a relationship with people at work, then you can really share your Christianity."

All six of the themes relate to the general circumstance of disclosing to people in personal communication of some sort. Personal communication includes face-to-face, telephone, chat room, and email conversations, as well as more one-directional communication, such as greeting cards. The personal conversations referenced were
most often one-on-one and took place in private or semi-private settings, such as an office. Again, disclosure in these personal communications ranged from the explicit to the implied.

For the first two themes (i.e., personal level and personal struggles), I divided the units according to whether the disclosure seemed to be a superficial mention of Christianity (e.g., mentioning church attendance) or whether it revealed a little more depth about the faculty member’s beliefs (e.g., mentioning going on mission trips). Although mention of church attendance might convey a Christian identity, many people go to church for reasons other than being a Christian. Mentioning going on a mission trip, for instance, may appear to be just another church activity, but such an activity usually implies more of the evangelical nature of a Christian’s beliefs. Hence, the latter is a more explicit disclosure than the former even though both could be mentioned in similar conversations.

The first personal communication theme, “When communication is more on a personal level, I’m more likely to talk about Christian things,” encompassed 35 explicit instances and 20 implied ones. There was no variation in who used explicit and implicit communication attributable to gender, tenure status, or discipline. The participants gave several descriptions that point to the negotiated nature of self-disclosure. “If something comes up that relates, I’ll share my side of it, the Christian side of it. But I never try to
use the four spiritual laws to share with people if they’re not open to it” [Stan 26:2, HS, T].

These Christians indicated across various circumstances that they were careful not to push their Christianity on others. They continually make decisions about whether people seem open to talking about Christianity in more depth. The next two examples refer to personal conversations in which one party went on to talk explicitly, but the other did not.

I had a meeting in California where we went out to dinner, another fellow and myself, and we started talking about some situation in his life. And I said, “Well, you know, in those kinds of cases I do this because the Bible says this.” Then we talked for the next hour about Christianity and what I thought of it and how it could apply to his life. So those situations come up frequently. [Alec 2:7, HS, NT]

One I can remember is a fellow researcher who was coming to give a talk, and so I was with her and we went out to tea. And we were talking about how difficult it is to be women in this field, and it was, felt good because you don’t really get to talk about it that much. She was asking me what I do for fun. And so I said I don’t have lots of free time, but you know, I exercise somewhat regularly, and I play my guitar, and I have good friends from church and a Bible study that meets at my house. And then I figure if she’s interested, then she’ll pursue it, and if she’s not, she won’t. [Diane 33:5, HS, NT]

Diane’s communication on a personal level really became explicit only because she mentioned hosting a Bible study in her home. In both cases, it was the turning of the conversation toward personal life issues that allowed the evangelical faculty member to disclose more of his or her Christian identity. Diane specifically pointed out that she
would go further only if the other person expressed interest. For most of the participants whose revelations of their Christianity were explicit, there was a sense that they waited for some kind of cue to which others were open or in which they were interested before they disclosed more of the depth of their Christian identity.

Alec is one of four exceptions among the participants who reported explicitly communicating their Christian identity frequently. Although these individuals also indicated the negotiated nature of self-disclosure, they apparently are much more open in their explicit references to their Christianity as being very important to them. Another extremely out Christian, Jen, indicated that she communicates more explicitly when conversations are personal, but like the other three exceptions, she reported talking about her Christian identity at some depth on a regular basis, which I have highlighted below with italics:

When I talk with people on a personal level about the activities in which I am involved, when you work with people or you have friends you share about your personal life and *that’s the part of my personal life I share about most often*, you know, my involvement in the church, the sorts of things I’m doing, *what God’s doing in my life.* [Jen 42:4, SS, NT]

Although all of the participants mentioned church activities in some way at work, very few reported talking about what God was doing in their lives.

Contrast that with some of the implied ways the participants reported communicating their Christian identity within the context of personal conversations.
If it comes up with colleagues, it’s usually in the context of conversation and maybe a political comment or something. It’s not precisely a Christian comment [I make], but just something relating to my ethics or my moral standard or something like that. It’s usually never gone beyond that. [Edward 18:4, HS, T]

Elsewhere, this participant and four others described themselves as introverts. This personality characteristic of low disclosiveness may have more to do with disclosing the Christian identity for these people than any of the variations tracked for this study. One of the other introverts indicated that he was “maybe slightly more likely to say something when it’s a Christian thing than I would otherwise. But it’s against my nature . . . . So when you get down to it, it’s the Christian perspective that’s bringing that out” [Nate 1:9, SS, T]. The self-identified introverts did provide both implicit and explicit cases.

Regardless, this first theme, “When communication is more on a personal level, I’m more likely to talk about Christian things,” appeared to be integral to the participants’ perceptions of when they are more likely to communicate their Christian identity in an explicit way.

The second personal communication theme, “When students or colleagues come to me with personal struggles, it allows me to communicate my Christianity more” concerns a circumstance in which someone else has immediately shifted the context from formal work roles to that of a more personal interaction by virtue of seeking a Christian professor to discuss personal struggles and problems. Again, such occurrences seemed to
be most frequent in the Christian professor’s office. Fourteen of these were clearly explicit, whereas eleven were more subtle or less sharply focused on Christian identity. One man said that when students come to him with personal struggles, “I don’t try usually under such circumstances to talk a great deal about Christianity, but what I usually try to show them is that I’m a caring person, willing to work with them through these difficulties the may have” [Chester 22:9, HS, T]. This example highlights the fact that the implicit communication theme, “how I treat others,” is sometimes communicated in conjunction with, or as part of, other communication circumstances. Another professor said she “always diverted them [i.e. those who came to her with personal problems] to the fact that sometimes we can’t rely on our own strength. There is a bigger power out there. So I use it as an opportunity to plant a seed” [Emma 6:5, SS, T], which is another example of indirect communication of the Christian identity in response to someone’s approach with a personal problem.

Again, many of the professors seemed to need “a fairly obvious opening” even with the circumstance of personal struggles being shared [Keith 14:5, HS, T], whereas others perceived that same context as an opening in and of itself. “I guess anytime I’m explicit, it’s because other people have opened the door for it. If someone comes to me with a concern about something I’ll say, ‘let’s pray right now for that’” [Watson 23:3, HS, T]. About two-thirds of the instances of personal problems reported involved
students, as opposed to colleagues, and the tendency for Christian faculty to report being approached more by students with personal struggles was the only identifiable trend with regard to the theme, “When students or colleagues come to me with personal struggles, it allows me to communicate my Christianity more.”

Related to talking about personal struggles is the third theme, “I offer help and support to those who seem to need it but haven’t necessarily asked.” “I always tell the students if there’s something you need somebody to talk to . . . . So many of them are clinically depressed” [Luke 25:4, SS, T].

It’s a different time now in society than it was thirty years ago. Christian faculty have a different set of problems to deal with and I think a lot more of them are dealt with in a one-to-one setting because students have much deeper and more serious issues a lot of times. They’re going to be reached more one-on-one than ever, but that takes a lot more time and a lot of their problems are gut wrenching . . . . It’s easy to just teach every day and pretend you don’t notice when people are having problems . . . . [N]oticing and taking the time is where the cost is to you personally, but if you can make an impact, it’s worth it. [Jill 53:12, HS, T]

The eight faculty members who made comments reflecting this theme seemed to be reaching out to people offering to help and to listen, not because the person came to them, but because they saw that he or she appeared to need the support. As Scott said, “I can demonstrate compassion and a willingness to put forth my effort to do what I can in practical ways to make life somewhat easier for people. All of that . . . creates opportunities to be more explicit about what drives me” [50:5, SS, NT]. Such
participants saw their outreach as communication of their Christian identity. These offers might be turned down or lead to personal conversations in which they more explicitly shared their Christianity. Although those involved did not generally indicate how often others subsequently approached them with their personal struggles, personal communication circumstances may be one reason others bring problems to such individuals.

The final two themes involving personal communication/conversations were: 1) “When others express interest, they seem to be searching or ask questions I perceive as related to my Christianity,” and 2) “When I have a common basis for talking about Christianity like if they are a member of another faith or, more explicitly, if they are Christians.” Both themes offer a kind of cue that religious topics are acceptable.

First, the evangelical Christian faculty participants noted being more likely to self-disclose when others expressed interest in some way. “There’s [sic] actually a lot of people, I’ve found, that have an interest in God—that there’s something there that they know they would like, but they’re afraid to take steps. So I feel like I can be a contact person for them for future discussions” [Katie 16:5, SS, NT]. In some cases, there was a sense that others saw the participant as a sort of expert, or someone who would have answers to their questions. According to one informant, “I have had people come into my office who had questions about the Bible, and since I have one here they came to me”
From another, “Most of the faculty know that I am a preacher’s kid and I’ve spent an awful lot of time in church. The conversation with most is superficial. They will come in and ask a question . . . . They might say, ‘you’re a preacher’s kid, how do you respond to this question?’” [John 49:4, SS, NT]. All of these are in the context of personal conversations, but the circumstance that really opens the door for a Christian to self-disclose is the question or interest expressed by others.

I tend to keep books that I can give to somebody if they’re interested. I frequently would give a book like Mere Christianity from C. S. Lewis . . . . I like to have enough of those types of things around to give to somebody I’ve come to see as really interested and wanting to search out some issues and beginning to think about their faith. [Scott 50:6, SS, NT]

About two-thirds of those mentioning the theme of interest on the part of others were from outside the hard sciences, which may be noteworthy since there were more professors in hard sciences in the data set. More information would be necessary to determine the importance of this finding. Despite that, these participants described themselves as more likely to self-disclose their religious identity explicitly when other people were expressing interest, seemed to be searching, or asked questions the faculty member perceived as related to his or her Christianity.

The final theme related to circumstances for disclosure, characterized by its relationship to personal communication/conversations, and indicating an increased willingness on the part of a participant to self-disclose the religious identity was: “When I
have a common basis for talking about Christianity, like if they are members of another
faith or, more explicitly, if they are Christians.” Twenty-nine of the 35 comments
indicating disclosure with people of faith as the common basis mentioned interaction with
other known Christians. One of the avowed introverts said, “We service the public, and
sometimes it’s very clear to me that a customer has similar faith, and then I may open up
a bit” [Edward 7:3, HS, T]. According to another,

There is a real underground of Christian activity here with people sending out
prayer requests . . . . I have a couple colleagues who come in and talk to me about
things. Once the word is out there, I can’t always tell you how we found out
about each other, then they become your work support group. [Shanna 46:6, SS,
NT]

The reports embodying this theme were almost equally split for gender, tenure
status, and field of specialty, but at least four different women, like Shanna above,
highlighted the aspect of support related to talking with other Christians, whereas none of
the men indicated that this type of communication was a support mechanism for them or
others. Three of these four women were in the hard sciences, and their minority gender
status may have influenced their perceptions of the need for such support, as the
following comment suggests:

I have students walk in and they see my Bible and they’ll say, “Are you a
Christian?” and, you know, the university is a difficult place to work as a
Christian, and I’ll say “yes,” and then we talk. I’ve had quite a few students who
have come back in many times to talk about their faith or the challenges of being
a Christian student here. [Jaime 15:2, HS, T]
The key to this personal communication circumstance being one under which the participants were more likely to report disclosing was the common basis of a faith. Most often, the deepest sharing was among fellow Christians, but a common basis of faith, in general, created a circumstance for Christian identity disclosure. “At this professional conference, I was talking to this one guy, he’s a member of another faith. So that was interesting. He was talking about his faith and I could talk about my faith too” [Katie 16:4, SS, NT]. As another participant observed,

The former chair was Unitarian, so much more liberal in their theology. One time we went to check out a meeting facility together, so we had an hour or two drive and discussed some issues of religion and her perception of my religion versus her religion. She readily acknowledged that her religion was basically a carte blanche, anything goes, anything you feel. And we talked about how scriptural that truly was. [Watson 23:5, HS, T]

The last personal communication theme is not a circumstance within the context of personal conversations as the previous five themes were; rather, it is one that reportedly leads to more personal conversations and possible self-disclosure of the Christian identity. The last theme pertaining to Research Question Two, “Under what circumstances do evangelical Christian faculty perceive that they are more likely to communicate their Christian identity?” was: “when I have built relationships with people at work so I can really share.” The following comments illustrate the point. “Our policy
has always been to be a friend first . . . . [Then,] there’s always opportunities to witness. But they are free to choose or not choose; that doesn’t affect your friendship, and you continue on. That’s been very satisfying” [Mina 17:13, HS, NT]. “I’m pretty active in communicating my Christianity, not obnoxious in it, but pretty active through relationships with faculty and staff, graduate students, I have opportunities on a personal level to share what that faith is about and show it can be real for other people” [Scott 50:1, SS, NT].

Of the fifteen participants who described the circumstance of having built relationships as one at work when they are more likely to disclose, five were women in the hard sciences. One said, “I try to establish deeper relationships with students than what they may get with other faculty” [Jill 53:8, HS, T], and “I try to have more than superficial conversations . . . to connect in a way that is deeper” [Jill 53:9, HS, T].

Many of the personal communications described in the other circumstance were probably also with people with whom the Christian faculty were building, or had already built, relationships. In these personal conversations, the parties shared personal struggles and engaged in discussions about how faith could serve to develop relationships or merely be one-time occurrences. In any event, it seems that most of the faculty usually wanted some sort of cues before disclosing their Christian identity. A reliance on social cues before talking about something they described as so important to who they are
seems to indicate that they felt constrained in some way from communicating freely. The findings for the last research question illuminate this matter.

Four Circumstance Themes Not Characterized as Personal

The first circumstance under which participants were more likely to communicate their Christian identity in an explicit manner that participants described was: “when it seems appropriate to invite people to a religious event.” Four women and four men mentioned inviting people to Christian activities, such as Bible studies in their departments, holiday activities, and special religious events such as baptisms or performances. They also reported inviting people, both students and colleagues, who were new to the department or school to come to their church if they were interested.

The second circumstance when participants were more likely to communicate their Christian identity in an explicit manner was: “when some aspect of my Christian perspective relates to class so it’s natural to mention it.” Participants reported expressing a Christian perspective as it related to discussions of ethics, worldview, diversity, and religion. For example, “When the topic area intersects questions of worldview and life view and so forth, there’s opportunities to clearly identify what my worldview is and life view is and how that impinges on the topic at hand” [Scott 50:1 SS, NT]. “I try to cover a lot of diversity issues in my class, so I use examples that are sometimes Christian. I don’t just zero in on Christianity; I try to make sure I’m hitting different issues, but I
want the kids to be challenged to think beyond the normal dry examples” [Jaime 15:5-6, HS, T]. In some fields, professors gave personal examples from their lives related to their content, so as Lloyd said, “[I]t’s natural for me to relate to students my Christianity, my Christian behavior . . . . It’s all part of who I am” [34:6, SS, T].

There were qualitative differences between the hard-science professors and others with regard to this theme. Most of the professors in the hard sciences, whether men or women, tenured or non-tenured, mentioned using communication of their wonder of the created order to communicate their Christian identity, since they saw that as the primary way in their discipline that it related to the topic. One such professor described it this way:

I’ll often say, “we’re going to discuss something that I think is absolutely miraculous.” It’s usually spontaneous . . . . There are just some parts of this discipline that are too perfect to be by chance and occasionally I’ll throw that in. I’ll say, “this is too perfect to be by chance” . . . . [I]t is a great chance to interject little comments like that, but when you’re talking about the topics in this field, there is very little opportunity other than that. [Jill 53:9, HS, T]

Nine of the professors who reported communicating their Christian identity when some aspect of their Christian perspective related to class were in the hard sciences, and eleven were in other disciplines. The reports were fairly even for tenure status and gender. However, the qualitative difference in how they saw their Christian identity relating to their discipline was most evident for the hard sciences where almost the entire subset
focused on how the discipline revealed the complexity of God at work. The eleven professors outside the hard sciences who related Christianity to the topic in class did so in ways different from that subset of hard science professors.

The third circumstance that the participants noted when they were more likely to communicate their Christian identity in an explicit manner was: “when I can couch it in a joke or a joking manner.” “Joking is a good way to talk to people . . . . [S]o you can ask somebody how they’re doing and say, ‘I have to apologize for my fatherly’ or ‘my evangelical spirit, but how is’ such and such. Couch that situation in that way” [Ryan 29:10 SS, T]. Carver gave this example: “When it’s time to get to work with a class of 150, the kids never come to order. So a little thing I use is I say, ‘You’re worse than my Sunday school class; all they want to do is socialize too’” [5:2, HS, T].

The analysis revealed six instances of when being able to couch a Christian reference in a joking manner was central to the circumstance of communicating a Christian identity. This was the only theme for which gender differences were salient. No women reported using humor to disclose a Christian perspective. Five of the six reports came from men who were tenured. However, this finding does not imply that women never use humor to communicate their Christian identity; it merely suggests that men may do so more frequently.
The fourth circumstance the participants mentioned in discussing when they were more likely to communicate their Christian identity in an explicit manner was: “when the Holy Spirit guides me.” This guidance was characterized as either a conviction that the participant felt came from the Holy Spirit, who was directing the Christian to behave in some manner, or a perception that God created opportunities to communicate. “I’m always impressed that the Holy Spirit just leads—I’m not one to make a big deal out of my Christianity, because that’s okay, God will open the door . . . ” [Lloyd 34:5, SS, T]. “Sometimes I’ll say, ‘I’ll pray for you about that,’ but sometimes I feel like it’s to be done now. When the Holy Spirit’s here saying to do something now, then it’s time to do it now” [Melissa 21:5, SS, T].

Several of the Christian faculty members reported praying for such guidance from the Holy Spirit. I grouped these reports with this circumstance: “I pray that God gives me discernment when to speak and when to keep my mouth shut, you know, wait for a better opportunity” [Jen 42:10, SS, NT]. “I pray everyday that the Lord will use me as circumstances arise in which I can be a witness to the faith that I have, . . . and then that God will make me sensitive to those opportunities and that I will be bold to take those opportunities” [George 27: 5, HS, T]. Although only one person mentioned it, there is an inherent aspect of perceiving opportunities created by God in which the Christian sees
God involved in both themselves and the lives of the person with which they felt lead to communicate.

There’s a difference between just going on your own and saying “Do you know Jesus?” and the moment where the Holy Spirit has set things up so that there’s an openness. There’s a point in their lives when they are going to be open to receive. I pray for those types of moments where you will say the name of Jesus and the light gets through. It’s something that happens that’s deep and significant and God has to be there to do it. [Melissa 21:4, SS, T]

Eight men and five women, both tenured and non-tenured from the hard sciences and other fields described the circumstance of being more likely to communicate when the Holy Spirit lead them to do so. Interestingly, no woman in the hard sciences, tenured or otherwise, mentioned following the Holy Spirit’s direction for communicating her Christianity at work.

To summarize, the four circumstance themes for communicating the Christian perspective that did not fall under the rubric of the “personal” were: “when it seems appropriate to invite people to religious events,” “when it relates to class in some way so it’s natural to mention it,” “when I can couch it in a joke or in a joking manner,” and “when the Holy Spirit guides me to communicate.”

Research Question Three

Research Question Three asked: What tensions do evangelical Christian faculty perceive affecting communication of the Christian identity in the secular institutions of
higher education in which they work? Three primary themes relating to tensions emerged from the analysis, including ones relating to outright fears, concerns about pushing people away, and concerns about inappropriate communication in the formal role. Two primary themes involving perceived environmental conditions reflected the participants’ fears and concerns. Below I discuss these environmental themes first, because one needs to understand the participants’ perceptions of the context in which they reported making disclosure decisions in order to understand the tensions aroused by those choices.

Two Categories of Environmental Strains

The two primary perceived contextual conditions are: 1) “My Christian viewpoints are in the minority at work,” and 2) “The environment is hostile to Christianity.” Some of the participants indicated that their differing viewpoints were unwelcome and received in a hostile manner, others chose not to voice their viewpoints, and still others voiced their opinions but did not indicate that they elicited hostile responses. However, I chose to keep these cases together, as their unifying theme was the expression of Christian perspectives on issues being in the minority in the campus environments.

**Christian Perspectives Are in the Minority**
The following examples represent each of these kinds of experiences related to being in the minority. “It’s interesting to me that people feel so free to express liberal views of things, and very loudly express them. But then you start to—any conservative side of things—and they just shut you up. It’s like, “no, you’re stupid” [Katie 16:6, SS, NT].

Universities are standard leftists, so my stance on everything is pretty much contrary. I’m pro-life; I’m not pro-choice. Pick any topic of conversation, I will usually be on the other side. In those conversations, I can’t just sit there and say nothing. So I try to nicely point out the other point of view. You’re always walking through mine fields. [Ryan 29:14, SS, T]

There are times when what’s being said or implied isn’t true, and that’s when my feathers start getting ruffled. I know you cannot say some things, and that’s probably okay, but sometimes you hear things that you know, that’s not right, that is absolutely not right, and you just sit there. I think that’s the hardest thing to take. What do you do at that point? So you tend to just be quiet and go home and yell about it later. [Heather 10:3, HS, T]

Issues involved in the participants’ minority perspectives included worldview (e.g., belief in creation, truth exists), social matters (e.g., abortion), moral concerns (e.g., drinking on campus, premarital sex), and general statements about being conservative rather than liberal. Although twice as many men as women weighed in on this theme, the critical difference lay in how men, compared to women, handled being in the minority. Katie’s statement above indicates that she tried to represent her point of view and was shut down. One of the other women only addressed the issue of abortion because she had
made that decision and was a single mother. She and the other three women making comments that represented this theme reported consistently choosing not to speak up. In contrast, Alec’s observation is illustrative of the several men who pointed out that they felt the need to speak out and did so regularly.

In politics, they [Christian perspectives] often come up. For instance, the abortion debate; there’s a lot of arguments both ways . . . . But in a debate like this, it’s really a value question, and I’ll bring that up. A lot of times people will hear your views even if they don’t believe them. So there are a lot of entry points, I think. [Alec 2:7, HS, NT]

Several of the men reported using these conflicting viewpoints as ways to enter into conversation and communicate their Christian identities, whereas the women, in general, chose not to enter such discussions at all. Women in the hard sciences, like Heather, who were already in the minority by gender, placed the most emphasis on staying quiet. Their gender minority status appears to have constrained some of their communication choices with regard to expressing their Christian minority opinions.

Perceptions of Hostile Environment for Christians

The second primary contextual theme emerging from the analysis was: “The environment is hostile to Christianity.” There were instances of comments reflecting this theme that were somewhat general in their references to the environment, including ones about the culture at large, the respondents’ fields, their departments, and the people with whom they worked. Two comments make this clear. “With the media we have today . . .
and everything, we hear a lot about Christians that’s bad” [Rhoda 37:8, SS, T]. “There is a whole realm of scholarship in my area that is just kind of overtly hostile to anybody that has a religious basis or that is part of their ideological underpinnings” [Lloyd 34:9, SS, T]. Twenty-two units reflected this general theme.

Within the general theme of a perceived hostile environment, there were several distinctive sub-themes. Two related to more specific displays of hostility. A third concerned an implicit informal rule banning Christian communication, and the fourth involved social sanctions for violating the rule.

The first theme, deriving from more specific reports of the hostile environment was: “Christianity is treated differently, singled out in what are usually negative ways.” A common feeling among participants was one James expressed well: “Alternative religions are viewed differently than Christianity. If I were a Muslim, my faith could be splattered on the walls, and people wouldn’t care” [47:7, HS, NT]. Other responses embodying this theme more clearly mentioned differential treatment ranging from negative social responses to illegal discrimination.

I think there is a global view of tolerance right now that is any view but Christianity is okay . . . . We have a high percentage of Jewish faculty here and in academia in general. If you put a little sign up that says “Happy Hanukkah,” they don’t flinch, but if you say “Merry Christmas” they raise their eyebrows at you . . . . I’ve had negative student evaluations like, “How dare you put a scripture on a slide. That’s a violation of church and state.” If I was citing another literary work, you wouldn’t have complained. [Watson 23:11 & 4, HS, T]
If you made a statement in your proposal about wanting to work at a Christian college, you couldn’t get into our department. They wouldn’t even let you in. Or, for example, if you come in out of a Christian school, you won’t get in (this graduate program). It’s straight out discrimination. [Ryan 29:18, SS, T]

I think there’s a bias against Christians in our culture, particularly in the academic environment. For example, if a faculty member at another school writes a letter of recommendation for a student . . . as a potential candidate in our field; if that student is, say, a practicing Hindu, that may be viewed very positively that this person has great faith in the Hindu tradition, and isn’t this wonderful and look at how this student is standing by their ideals, etc., etc. Yet if the person is a practicing Christian, that would be viewed very negatively. Write the same thing, but it’s taken on a very negative—oh this must be one of those fundamentalists, off the wall, we don’t want anything to do with that type of person. So I think there is a bias against Christians and I think we recognize that and we’re sensitized to it. [Devlin 7:4, HS, T]

The overwhelming number of respondents citing Christianity as being treated differently were hard sciences professors. Contrast this with the respondents for the next theme. The second theme concerned more direct evidence of the hostile environment. It was: “I hear derogatory comments, stereotypes, and jokes about Christians or God.” The twenty-seven units reflecting this theme were fairly evenly divided by gender, tenure status, and discipline. One person stated, “You can never joke about women, ethnic groups, people with disabilities, but certainly Catholics are fair game now. In general Christians, especially conservative Christians, they’re driving the country into the ground as far as people here are concerned” [Shanna 46:10, SS, NT]. A repeatedly reported stereotype evident in the following observation was: “I’ve been asked, ‘How can you be a
Christian and be a scientist?’” [Stan 26:5, HS, T]. Another example was, “I’ve had one colleague tell me that you can’t be a Christian and be a good professional in this field” [Ryan 29:7 SS, T]. Finally,

Worst comments? “If you sit down and think this out, you’ll know this is garbage.” “I can’t understand why you and your husband are wasting your time.” . . . The thing is they’re just said off hand, because they’re so ingrained. These people meant it . . . . I was told one time by a supervisor that if I would get rid of this Christian stuff, think of how productive I could be. [Jaime 15:9 & 6 HS, T]

Two of the women mentioned the emotional toll that hearing these sorts of comments and being in this hostile environment was taking on them. Both of them were non-tenured and in the hard sciences, which again seemed to indicate that their minority status by gender may have magnified the perceived effect of the hostility toward their Christianity.

There are times when I’m discouraged about things. Sometimes it’s frustrating with some of the attitudes some of my colleagues have . . . . Like when we were in a faculty meeting and a colleague was talking with some disdain . . . . His point being that people are essentially stupid for believing that (i.e., in the devil). And I didn’t say anything . . . . That kind of atmosphere is frustrating, especially when I’m not sure what to do about it. [Mindy 52:7 HS, NT]

I can think of people that have made off handed remarks when I’m around them, derogatory, of course, about Christians, like they’re stupid or just dumb, like any intelligent person would believe that. And usually I’ll just be silent. . . . There’s the psychological, emotional, difficulty of dealing with people when they don’t know I’m a Christian and use jokes and bad remarks . . . . It’s an emotional drain . . . and I’m just tired of it. I don’t want to deal with it anymore. [Diane 33:8 HS, NT]
The next theme also reflects the sense of a hostile environment, but this one appeared to indicate an understood rule specific to Christianity. The theme is: “I was told in some way not to communicate my Christianity at work.” According to one informant, “It’s been interesting to hear, sometimes through the grapevine and sometimes through official emails, what you can and can’t do. I think it’s a very chilly environment” [Jaime 15:12 HS, T]. “It’s very much implicit and implied in the department that you will be careful what you say and nothing about God or religion,” said Becky, who actually was written up in a peer teaching evaluation for using an historical example that referenced “God” [Becky 30:10 SS, NT].

Some of the respondents gave examples that were more subtle than these two.

For instance,

Academic freedom is now the freedom to express the accepted point of view. The freedom to debate, offer alternative opinions, and explore intellectual questions openly and freely just doesn’t exist. I mean there is a very very peer pressure based stifle of free discussions and it’s subtle. So you can’t say, here are the ways. You just find out that there isn’t opportunity for open discussions of things. [Andrew 9:11 HS, NT]

Seventeen units reflected this theme, and two participants cited examples of actions by others relating to this “told not to” theme that probably qualify as constitutional violations. “At one point, we did have a Dean who insisted we not put up announcements
about the Christian professionals group (in our field), said that was inappropriate”

[Carver 5:2 HS, T]. “Our department head has told me, ‘you can believe anything you
want, but leave it at the door.’ Okay? So I don’t communicate actively so much” [Ryan
29:9 SS, T].

Ryan’s statement illustrates how he internalized this understood rule that
constrains his communication of the Christian identity. Essentially, this theme is
evidence of an organizational rule similar to the rules for self-disclosure that Petronio
(2002) discusses in Communication Privacy Management Theory. CPM theory posits
that when rules are violated, sanctions are imposed by others to enforce them. One type
of sanction is evident in Becky’s situation involving the use of an example in class that
referenced “God.”

The final theme surfaced in comments relating to imposed verbal or nonverbal
sanctions which others imposed in conversations. The theme was: “Christianity
sometimes kills conversation.” As one participant noted, “People ask, ‘What does your
husband do?,’ and you say, ‘He’s a minister,’ and then automatically people have turned
away. People have turned away” [Jaime 15:7 HS, T] (Emphasis hers). Further revealing
the theme, “I haven’t had any overtly negative responses, but sometimes if you bring it
up, students just sort of clam up” [Keith 14:6 HS, T]. As another illustration, “Finally
after them pressing [for why I could not come], I said, ‘I’ll be in church Sunday,’ and the
conversation came to a crashing halt” [Indya 11:5 HS, NT]. This kind of social sanction of Christian disclosure occurs according to a couple of the reports. “When you express something Christian, some people will cut you off. You just notice it’s a don’t even go there, and just the attitude of the person is something that I don’t want to, it’s enough of a barrier for me [Rhonda 54:8 HS, T]. Although there were only six of these types of sanctions reported, they overwhelmingly came from hard science professors, which again suggests the subtle means of pressure not to communicate Christianity as a function of discipline type.

The themes above relate to the perceptions the participants had of working in an environment they felt was hostile to their religious identity. These perceptions provide the context in which the participants reportedly make choices about disclosing their Christian identity and to what extent. Three other themes emerged in the analysis that reflect actual tensions with which the respondents reported struggling in making disclosure decisions.

Three Categories of Internalized Tensions

The first tension-related theme involved concern for or fear of the consequences of disclosure. Respondents mentioned three specific fears. The second theme involving perceived tensions in communicating one’s Christian identity in a secular institution of higher education reflected a concern that they would push people away. The third theme
was concern about what is appropriate behavior within their formal roles as university professors.

These evangelical Christian faculty members described three types of “fear” they profess experiencing as a primary tension as they choose whether or not and, if so, to what extent to communicate their Christian identity in their workplaces. A fear cited by only few of the participants was coded as: “I fear giving others a bad image of Christianity or a poor reflection of God or Jesus.” Said one respondent, “I’m a Christian; I don’t want to make a bad name for being a Christian” [Emma 6:8 SS, T]. The reflection on Christianity theme included awareness of general images one might create, as well as how he or she might reinforce negative stereotypes or, more likely, behave in ways that others could perceive as not being a Christian thing for a Christian to do (i.e., hypocritical behavior). Several statements are illustrative. “I often hope that people don’t think less of God because of me. Because sometimes you share your frustrations and your miseries and anxieties with people and you forget to share the joy and the inner peace that you have” [Jill 56:6 HS, T]. “If people see ‘this is what he says and this is the way he is’ they’re going to be very quick to draw conclusions about my faith, about Christianity. My sense is people are rarely neutral about Christianity” [Lloyd 34:10 SS, T]. “I have to at least tell others that I am a Christian, but I have a temper. So sometimes I lose my
temper, so I feel I’m not doing a good job of behaving as a Christian at work [Paul 12:5 HS, T].

Some of the participants were concerned both about not being hypocritical and also not even appearing to be hypocritical.

I tend to be cautious about that (i.e., telling a class I’m a Christian), especially in a large class where students sometimes don’t get to know you very well, and you give them a low grade or something, and they view that as ‘non-Christian’ I mean, you never know the ways in which people will take things. [Melissa 21:7 SS,T]

The whole thing about not judging people, you can perpetuate the image of self-righteous Christians if you are not careful, and that is something we need to be careful—first not being self-righteous, but also not tarnishing the image of Christianity by coming across as self-righteous. [Shanna 46:10 SS, NT]

As an analyst, I could usually separate this fear of reflecting poorly on Christianity from the other two fears. However, “fear of job consequences” and “fear of man,” the other two types, were often so intertwined in the descriptions, I could not assign comments to only one or the other category. Hence, I combined these fears into the one category: Fears about disclosing the Christian identity.

I would say that I have not done it [i.e., communicated Christianity] explicitly here at all. And again, maybe it’s the fear of man [Proverbs 29:25]. It’s not because I don’t believe it’s the right thing to do, it’s partially my personality and partially my fear, my natural fear, and partially it is fear of losing my job. [Mark 45:4 SS, NT].
Mark’s comment reveals how these fears can be intertwined. A Biblical reference, fear of man was defined by another participant when describing her own fear: “Basically, it’s the fear of man talked about in the Bible, fear of what that person will think, fear of being ridiculed for beliefs that really mean a great deal to me” [Melissa 21:10 SS, T].

When the fear of man is described in the Bible, decisions based on it are always contrasted with those made on the basis of a fear of God (Welch, 1997). So fearing job consequences is one kind of fear of man that I separated from the general fear of man because fearing for one’s job bears more directly on the organization’s responsibilities as they relate to a hostile environment for employees. The units I coded as general “fear of man” focused on what participant felt others would think and the negative reactions they might have personally to the disclosure of one’s Christian identity. For example,

What consequences? There’s my own personal problem with worrying about what people think of me, which is dumb but it’s there. And then there’s that fear of, if this person doesn’t like me they are in power over me and they could kill my career. They really could. Although, then I have to remember that really God is in charge . . . but I don’t remember that . . . there’s that fear of being labeled as a fundamentalist Christian, and then after that everyone will just kind of dismiss you. [Diane 33:10 HS, NT]

Two of the participants mentioned a group setting as increasing their fear of man.

“I’m not comfortable talking in a group at social hour types of things . . . .” [N]obody wants to be beat up physically or intellectually, and I think there’s a certain part of us that
The majority of the participants made comments embodying the fear of man theme, but more non-tenured faculty members emphasized fearing job consequences. Reported job consequences included possible reprimands, promotion problems, and the possibility of losing one’s job. Illustrative are the following comments:

My contract is open ended, it could be for years and years, but it would take virtually nothing for someone to make a complaint against me and my job could be terminated. Someone could simply say, “There’s no position for you next year,” and they wouldn’t have to give an explanation. [Mark 45:4 SS, NT]

Okay, I can talk now [i.e., I learned it is legal for me to talk], but there is that caution, certainly as to who I am, whose I am, and that fear as to, I’ve got three children and guess what, I do need the job . . . . There’s a lot of fear in not being tenured, just a lot of fear in your position, and I’m trying to get over that. [Becky 30:13 SS, NT]

Perceived hostility toward Christianity and perceived vulnerability as a woman seemed to relate to this fear, as the only tenured faculty members who reported a fear of job consequences were both in reportedly hostile departments and among the only women in their area. As one said, “People here are antianything to do with Christianity or God . . . [so] I’m a little concerned with getting in trouble. . . . I’m the only woman of all tenured men here” [Rhonda 54:4 HS, T]. According to another,

If a student hasn’t made an overture, I don’t make an overture. I really would fear it going beyond the two of us . . . . Honestly, in this environment, I think I’d be
before a disciplinarian committee, I really do. And that’s based on my past here, just with comments that have been made. Yeah, I have tenure, but you can get rid of tenured faculty. [Jaime 15:7 HS, T]

Perceptions of a hostile environment also form the background for the second primary tension described by participants: “I want to communicate my Christianity, but I don’t want to push people away or build barriers to relationships.” This theme included concerns about consideration for others’ sensitivities, not wanting to offend, and discerning how others might take disclosures of Christian identity so that there would be opportunities for the future personal conversations and relationships in which the participants indicated they would be more likely to communicate their Christianity. The following segments of interviews make this evident.

Clearly, you want to say things as a Christian and often don’t. I think the problem I wrestle with is if I make some comment about something I certainly feel fairly strong about being right or wrong, is that a good way to promote relationship to that person to get them to accept at some later date the Truth? I try to balance that out. [Chester 22:11 HS, T]

I am sensitive to this, is not to do something that would put up a barrier where you can’t go further. With some people, the “Hi, I’m Shanna. I’m a Christian” would make them never listen to you again. I feel the need to be cautious. How explicit I am depends on the clues I get from other people. [Shanna 46:4 SS, NT]

I think in many ways I have been successful in that I have good relationships with everybody in this department. I think that many people know that I am a Christian, but I don’t think anyone would say “oh, there’s that Bible-thumper coming after us again.” And I don’t want them to ever think that. I want to be here to be available to somebody who may be struggling. [Mark 45:8 SS, NT]
Several of the comments I coded as reflecting this theme also exemplified the processual nature of disclosure. Disclosure may sometimes be an event, but there are always depths of the identity that may be further disclosed, and the participants reportedly looked for clues and tried to feel out how much they might be able to reveal and still have others remain open to further conversations with them.

Most of the participants who mentioned not wanting to push people away observed that it was not merely that pushing people away from them or relationships with others that makes this an important matter to them. The importance usually lay in their not wanting to drive acquaintances away from Christianity and God and, thereby, erect barriers to other people’s future opportunities to accept the gospel. This priority is evident in the comments below.

I know most people here; I know what their feelings are. My belief is it’s much better to be sensitive than to be a bull-dozer, cause if you’re a bull-dozer, you’re going to turn them off immediately. . . . I have a colleague . . . . I told him, “The Lord’s gunning for you” . . . . [W]e’ve developed a sufficient relationship that I can tell him . . . . [I]f I had just gone in he wouldn’t have—but now he listens to me. [Carver 5:6 HS, T]

With my boss, I have been fairly forthcoming. When he will say something negative about Christians [I’ll say] “You know, Joe, that’s not right and personally I don’t like that and there might be more people than you think that would find that offensive.” But I have a relationship with him. Other people with whom I don’t have as close a relationship, you have to be careful. [Shanna 46:10 SS, NT]
In these examples, the participants were able to disclose because of the depth of the relationship they had, and because they knew the disclosure would not become a barrier between them.

I am open to and hope that I would take advantage of opportunities that God brings to express my faith, but I’m not going out of my way to create opportunities, and perhaps I’m rationalizing. I could be accused of that, but I think that, particularly in this situation and in this work environment, that may be more of a turn off for people if I were proselytizing when that’s not what I’m here to do. [Devlin 7:4 HS, T].

This statement exemplifies the concern about pushing people away, but the individual making it changed the emphasis toward the end and began focusing on the fact that violating others’ expectations of what is appropriate for the workplace can in and of itself be a barrier. This example provides a good transition to the last tension-related theme: “Communicating my faith explicitly is generally inappropriate when I am in my formal role of professor or when it is not relevant to the topic.”

The tension associated with disclosure of one’s Christian identity as being inappropriate for the formal role is a matter 16 of the participants addressed. This code included references about violating professional expectations, not making students uncomfortable when learning, and being careful not to misuse authority over students, as well as general observations about inappropriateness or the irrelevance of topics. For instance, “You have to use judgment and what not whether you express yourself in
certain places. If you’re there to give a talk about a theory, they don’t expect you to talk about your Christian relationship” [Stan 26:7 HS, T]. Also, “I don’t think it’s appropriate to bring it up in a group situation where the professor is perceived to be the authority” [Todd 51:9 SS, NT]. Although the boundaries were not always clear to the participants, they definitely did not want to abuse their power with students or significantly violate expectations for appropriate conduct. They seemed more easily able to describe what was appropriate for when they were in their formal roles, presenting research, engaging in academic advising, and when teaching topics not directly related to Christianity from their point of view, but they still reportedly experienced some tension in determining appropriateness. As one said, “Especially in the classroom, you do have boundaries . . . . I can get a wee bit in sometimes, but I have to be careful how I do it” [Becky 30:11 SS, NT].

Conclusion

In summary, the three primary tensions relating to disclosure of the Christian identity participants noted stemmed from fears of the consequences for disclosure, not wanting to push people away, and possible inappropriateness in formal role. These tensions arose for the respondents against a backdrop of seeing themselves as having generally unwelcome points of view that are in the minority and imbedded in a hostile environment, which they see primarily in derogatory comments about Christianity, the
way their faith is treated differently from other faiths, implied and explicit expressions of
social rules telling them not to communicate Christian perspectives, and the way mention
of Christianity sometimes kills conversation.

In spite of the perceived hostilities and felt tensions, these Christian professors
reportedly do communicate their Christian identity at work. Often the communication is
implicit in their treatment of others, the way they handle gossip, how they react to bad
situations, and in revealing their weaknesses or apologizing for mistakes. A few of the
circumstances in which the participants reported being more likely to disclose their
Christianity included when they could engage in communication in a joking manner,
when they could appropriately invite and inform people of religious events, and when
they believed the Holy Spirit led them to communicate. Also, despite the tension of
inappropriate overt Christian communication in their formal role, many of the professors
described ways they communicated their Christianity within the classroom, but only as it
related to the topics they teach.

When communication turned toward the personal, often one-on-one and in at
least semi-personal settings, the evangelicals in the study reported disclosing their
Christian identity in ways ranging from implicit to highly explicit. Under the umbrella of
personal level communication, the faculty members described themselves as more likely
to disclose their Christian identity when someone approached them with a personal
problem, expressed interest in Christianity some way, had a faith common basis for disclosing, or was someone with whom the faculty member had built a relationship.

The other circumstances under which evangelical Christian faculty most often reported communicating their Christian identity all related to matters in their professional lives that they could describe as personal in some way. For instance, they often kept items in their personal space at work which could communicate their Christianity. Several also saw their personal priorities as communicating their Christian identity, and some of them included information about their Christianity in introducing themselves when personal information is often expected.

The Communication Theory of Identity provided the conceptual framework for viewing the Christian identity in this study, and I drew on it in revealing aspects of how these Christians define and find meaning in their Christian identities. The two major themes that emerged with regard to the religious identity of these participants were that Christianity is an all-encompassing worldview and that, as such, the faculty members perceive it as affecting how they live out their daily lives.

The self-disclosure literature, including Petronio’s Communication Privacy Management Theory, provided bases for elucidating the findings for Research Questions Two and Three, which focused on communication. Chapter 5 discusses the larger conceptual issues of this study in light of literature pertinent to self-disclosure that
directly relates to the findings herein. In that chapter, I interpret the results and suggest ways this study could advance spiritual understandings of identity and identity hierarchy. I also discuss ways the study could extend scholarly views of self-disclosure behavior in organizations, as well as how it adds to scholarly understandings of stigmatized identities.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study combined two main foci in its exploration of human behavior in a very particular and contextually oriented fashion. As a type of behavior, self-disclosure is often studied as a single event or an event in time, although the findings of this study indicate that one may more properly conceive of it as a transactional process of defining our relationships with others (Dindia, 2000). Because the study focused on identity and how one’s associations with others affects communicating it, the processual nature of self-disclosure was an important aspect of the findings. The qualitative approach to the study revealed the complex nature of the interaction between individuals’ understandings of their life circumstances and the decisions they make day in and day out with regard to the communication of personal information. This discussion hopefully will illuminate this complex phenomenon in ways that contribute to our understandings of how people make sense of their lives, especially through the lens of a religious identity.

Demographic Differences

The findings indicated that demographic differences did not, in general, exist. However, there were notable exceptions. Most of the differences that did emerge related to gender and discipline. The main demographic difference attributable only to tenure status was that all but one of the participants who reported communicating their Christian
identity by revealing weaknesses were tenured faculty members. Tenured faculty may have reported revealing weaknesses due to their more secure organizational position and social status. On the flip side of tenure status variation, more non-tenured participants placed emphasis on their fear of job consequences as an inhibitor of self-disclosing their Christian identity at work. Interestingly, these were the only findings showing differences related to tenure status. Differences involving gender were a more important aspect of this study.

Gender did appear to play a vital role in the communication decisions of several of the participants. Specifically, women who represented a minority in their departments both by gender and by their Christian viewpoints seemed to experience a heightened concern with regard to giving their religious convictions a voice at work. Several of the findings support this claim. First, the only tenured faculty members to report a fear of job consequences were women in the hard sciences and/or in departments dominated by men. Women, mostly in the hard sciences, were the participants most concerned with the social support functions of communicating their Christianity to other Christians in the organization both to seek social support and offer it.

Especially revealing were the repeated differences in how men and women reported navigating conversations where their viewpoint would be dissenting. Most men saw such conversations as opportunities to represent their position to others and perhaps
encourage further discussions. Women, on the other hand, reported consistently making the decision to not speak up in such conversations. Again, women in the hard sciences emphasized staying quiet about their religious identity to a greater degree. Finally, one of the unique circumstances for communicating their Christian identity reported across all the subsets sets, except women in the hard sciences, was communicating when the Holy Spirit directed the participants to do so.

Although these data revealed gender differences, the fact that they were mostly related to being a minority in one’s field may be the more meaningful finding. Because the variation did not occur between women and men, in general, but instead between women in the hard sciences and the rest of the participants, one might surmise that it was the dual minority status (i.e., being among the only women and the only Christians) that was responsible for the differences in the communication and perceptions the participants noted.

This study did not investigate other minority demographic characteristics, but it may be that others in higher education organizations experience similar fears and concerns when they represent two other minority positions in their academic areas. Future researchers should attempt to confirm whether or not this is a more prevalent tendency in self-disclosure behavior in the workplace. Regardless, the demographic differences in this study between women in the hard sciences and others in academia
indicated that self-disclosure decisions at work may vary on the basis of identifiable
demographic characteristics that have not been investigated, but probably should be.

Primary Identity Actions for the Christian Identity

The general purpose of this study was to investigate the communication of
religious identity in the workplace. The specific purpose was to describe evangelical
Christian faculty members’ perceptions of what it means to be a Christian and how they
bring that identity into the secular university setting. Hence, the first Research Question
was: What does it mean to be a Christian in the eyes of evangelical Christian faculty
members?

A general definition of “Christian” arose from the analysis of the study’s data,
which reflected four primary themes. In the eyes of the participants, a Christian is
someone who is a follower of Christ, who accepts salvation in Jesus, who believes in
Jesus, and who has a relationship with God. Each of these four themes relating to what it
means to be a Christian reflects primary identity actions. From the perspective of the
participants, being a Christian entails doing these Christian things. Inherent in following
is accepting direction from Christ, not just as a model and teacher of principles, but as the
living leader in their day-to-day lives. Believing is an active ongoing placement of one’s
trust or faith in Jesus. Having a relationship involves engaging in communication that
develops the relationship.
The Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993) refers to identity in action as the enactment frame, whereby “[i]dentities are enacted in social behavior and symbols (p. 79). However, the findings of this study highlight how the personal frame of identity can also include actions that are primary to being or having a certain identity. From the participants’ perspectives, doing what the themes embody is an integral part of what makes them see themselves as Christian even though none of these actions is necessarily what people commonly think of as being religious (e.g., going to church). The findings suggest that following, accepting, believing, and having a relationship all describe actions or decisions that are fundamental to how the participants understand who they are. Thus, some actions and decisions are foundational parts of identity at the level of the personal frame and can be called “primary identity actions” because of the key role they play in an individual’s understanding of what it means to have that identity. Further research on identity should investigate whether or not such primary identity actions are common to other types of identity.

In this case, understandings of what it means to be a Christian reflect not simply a state of being, but also certain actions that one has taken and is taking that serve to maintain and develop the religious identity toward maturity. Many of the participants believe and continue to place their faith in what they believe about Christ in ways that have significant impact in their lives. The findings reveal how they see their religious
identity having broad impact in their lives even, in the workplace. Two themes make clear how this happens.

Religious Identity and Hierarchy

Two emergent themes relating to the participants’ Christian identities, how they see things and how they live, suggest the extent to which a religious identity can become paramount in the hierarchical order of identities and is a fundamental part of who we are (e.g., Hecht, 1993). Although such a hierarchical order is assumed, this study provided support for the theoretical supposition in establishing that the participants do indeed have a topmost identity. Through the qualitative findings, we can trace the progress from the participants’ Christian worldview to their understandings of self and others, from cognitive motivations to decisions about how to behave, and from behavior to perceptions of how that behavior conveys what ultimately ties back to worldview. The findings suggested that the participants’ Christian identities form a pervasive, in one of their words, “all encompassing” spiritual view of life, purpose, and meaning that are translated through their daily interactions even within the organizations in which they work. This study provided support for the value of looking at identities as hierarchical and further indicated that for some individuals, religious identity may be at the top level of the hierarchy.
Some scholars define what is a spiritual, religious, or a faith understanding of life by calling it “our ultimate concern” (Fowler, 1981, p. 4), “a conscious holding of ultimate goals and the conscious effort to achieve these goals” (Kirkwood, 1994, p. 16), or an “approach” to life “in which actions and meanings are central” (Sass, 2000, p. 200). The themes that emerged as the respondents defined what being a Christian meant to them vividly portray one example of such an approach to life, whereby meanings on every level for the individual derive from that in which they have placed their faith.

Ultimate concern was evident in the respondents’ definition of a Christian, their felt need to treat others in a Christ-like manner, and in their desire to disclose their Christianity with others in ways they hoped would encourage them to achieve what particular Christians perceived as the purpose of life. This study, thus, illustrates how ultimate concern and worldview might be useful starting points for investigators interested in developing a holistic picture of identity with regard to people’s understandings of who they are, how they understand their choices for living, and the effects of decisions to behave or not behave in accordance with what they believe to be central in life.

Scholarship suggests that identities describe, prescribe, and provide a measure for our self-evaluations. The findings of this study support these observations, but also indicate that other factors related to identity are operative when people evaluate
themselves. In this case, the definitions of a Christian the participants provided both described what a Christian is and prescribed being Christ-like. Although the participants admitted failure to live up to the standard or prototype, the presumed negative evaluations and the impact of that on their self-concept was generally not evident. Rather, it seemed that their spiritual worldview’s focus on how valuable each person is from God’s perspective mediated, even dissipated, the negative self-evaluation one might expect. In addition, they tended to see their growth toward Christian maturity as an ongoing journey toward being Christ-like rather than as a standard expected of them at all times in the present. This serves as an example of self-evaluation being mediated by specific aspects of the participants’ understanding of self and by their worldview and further emphasizes the importance a top hierarchical identity can have in an individual’s life.

Although the data in this study supported the assumption of an identity hierarchy, the Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993) was not particularly useful for illuminating the findings. Rather, the findings seemed to raise questions about CTI in at least two instances. First, analysis revealed primary identity actions as being central to the participants’ personal level of understanding of what it means to be a Christian, whereas CTI places such behavior at the enactment level. The theory may need expansion if further studies reveal similar findings. Second, the findings indicated that
the Christian worldview seemed to operate as a medium, which reduces the CTI assumed negative evaluations identity holders have when they do not live up to the ideals of a particular identity. The Communication Theory of Identity seems to be more useful when the focus is directly on identity development and the role communication plays in that process, as opposed to the self-disclosure process.

Self-Disclosure Process and Tensions

Research Question Two asked: Under what circumstances do evangelical Christian faculty perceive that they are more likely to communicate their Christian identities? From the perspective of the Christian participants, communicating their religious identity to others at work was one way they lived out their faith, but it was a goal-oriented process that involved struggle. The self-disclosure process involved behaving in ways that made clear their values, such as treating all people with respect and as important. Their primary implicit communication themes also served to show others who they were, as well as to lay a foundation for what others could expect from them in interactions and relationships. Revealing weaknesses indicated that some participants acknowledged not always being right and that they were willing to open themselves up to others in ways that made them vulnerable. Not participating in gossip suggested that they would be careful with confidences if others chose to disclose to them. The participants saw their behavior as disclosing positive aspects of who they were as Christians, and they
hoped it would lead to opportunities to reveal more of what it means to them to be a Christian.

This aspect of the findings is one that self-disclosure literature does not usually address. Since self-disclosure is defined in a rather restricted manner, the fact that non-verbal behavior can be the enactment of an identity or identities and convey information about a person is generally overlooked in scholarly investigations. However, the findings of this study seem to indicate that this kind of implicit disclosure may be an important foundational element of the self-disclosure process, especially as it relates to sharing personal information with others in a public work environment, in which people may observe one another over time and make conscious choices about whom to interact with in the future beyond the minimal sort of exchanges necessary to complete work. That some people consciously use their daily behavior to reveal who they are in ways very real and fundamental to them may be an important extension of the study of self-disclosure.

Many of the explicit verbal self-disclosure events described by the participating faculty members were quite superficial. Scholars have focused on the way self-disclosure functions to increase intimacy and develop close personal relationships, but the findings in this study underline the fact that self-disclosure is often still a part of interactions even when it does not serve these functions. “The disclosure of superficial, public, or non-intimate information about self is crucial in the beginning stages of relationship
development” (Dindia, 2000, p. 148). Inherent in many studies of self-disclosure is the assumption that it is only useful to investigate the forms that entail revealing private information (e.g., Petronio, 2002) and that lead to the development of more intimate relationships. This study showed that many of the religious faculty member participants regularly engage in self-disclosure of their Christian identity in ways that are essentially superficial.

It seems that within the work environment, superficial self-disclosure is often all that is appropriate to the organizational context and mission. I would argue, however, that such self-disclosure serves useful purposes and is worthy of investigation by communication scholars who focus on relationships in organizational contexts. Research shows that workplace relationships serve important functions for organizational members, including providing “instrumental support” and affecting “job satisfaction, commitment, and turnover” (Sias, Krone, & Jablin, 2002, p. 618). Even outside the workplace, studies indicate that most self-disclosure is non-intimate (Dindia, Fitzpatrick, & Kenny, 1997; Van Lear, 1987), but formulations such as Communication Privacy Management Theory do not address this aspect of self-disclosure. In this study, which asked specifically about the communication of an identity, participants repeatedly reported such self-disclosure and their perceptions that it was important to them. Although this, in part, is likely due to a desire to show how they comply with their
internalized mandate to share their faith, these reports may also support the idea that sharing who they are with others and connecting with them in even superficial ways is important in their lives. These less-intimate disclosures may be more important to individuals when there exist social rules banning more intimate expressions of one’s identity.

Support for Aspects of the Communication Privacy Management Theory

The findings of this study indicate that Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002) may be a particularly useful framework for investigating self-disclosure. For instance, the data reflected CPM’s social sanctions for perceived rule violations and revealed several specific criteria for self-disclosure that fall under CMP’s categories of motivational, contextual, and risk-to-benefit ratio criteria. Following is a discussion of the specific themes that emerged from the data that provide support for Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio, 2002).

It was fairly clear from the findings that the evangelical Christian faculty members taking part in the study felt they had been socialized not to communicate their Christianity within the context of the secular higher educational organizations in which they worked. The themes that emerged and specifically related to being told in some way not to communicate it and the social sanction of having the topic kill conversations were evidence of an often informal organizational rule sometimes expressed explicitly as an
issue of the separation of church and state. So, the findings, in part, support Petronio’s (2002) proposition that people use rules to regulate their self-disclosure, that they learn those rules through socialization, and that they incur sanctions for violations of the rule.

In addition, the findings of this study provide evidence supportive of some other facets of Communication Privacy Management Theory, including the use of motivational, contextual, and risk-to-benefit ratio criteria on the part of participants when making decisions concerning whether or not to self-disclose their religious identities more explicitly. Many participants touched on several motivational criteria for disclosing besides fulfilling the Great Commission, such as disclosing in order to help others (e.g., when people come to them with problems) and to represent their minority viewpoints in discussions of issues at work. Most of the motivational criteria described in the self-disclosure literature have a self-centered focus (e.g., Petronio, 2002). For instance, studies have identified the need to express oneself, develop knowledge of the self, and avoid being hurt as motivational criteria in self-disclosure (Davis & Franzoi, 1987; Rosenfeld, 1979). However, the participants in this study pointed to a number of outwardly focused motivations, such as the desire to offer social support to others and to help them through life’s struggles. This study indicates that the needs of others are sometimes an important part of the motivational decision criteria for self-disclosure that scholars tend to overlook but should consider.
Petronio (2002) describes contextual criteria as “a critical element in formulating rules that regulate revealing and concealing” (p. 25). The findings from this study support such a statement and highlight aspects of both the social setting and the physical setting as pivotal. In fact, the circumstances in which professors reported disclosing their Christian identity most explicitly was more often than not in private physical settings (e.g., their offices) and social settings repeatedly described as “personal.”

As an example of a situationalized use of contextual criteria, participants reported that in their formal role it was generally inappropriate for them to communicate their Christianity explicitly. The formal role is part of the social context in which they interact, but many of the participants experienced tension with regard to this, in part it seems, because it is not always clear to them when they are acting in their formal role capacity. For instance, it was clear when a student came to a professor about academic problems that the professor was being called on to act in his/her formal role and that explicit Christian disclosure was inappropriate. However, it was much less clear when students or coworkers came to them at work with a personal problem. One professor reported dealing with this tension by verbally saying he was “taking off his professor hat” to talk with such people on a personal basis. For the other participants, dealing with such issues in this social environment presented numerous ambiguities, which were heightened by their view that a Christian perspective might often be helpful.
Many of the themes that emerged in this study identified the social setting as the primary criterion the participants used to make decisions about self-disclosure of their Christian identity and how implicit or explicit to be when they chose to disclose. They reportedly had markers in their personal space, tended to communicate it in one-to-one personal conversations, watched for clues indicating others were interested in some way, and responded to interest and personal problems with some type of Christian communication in a personal setting. Further, they described personal relationships as the site where it was most appropriate for them to communicate their Christian identity. Hence, the contextual criteria of physical and social setting were reportedly pivotal to the participants.

The risk to benefit ratio criterion posited by Communication Privacy Management Theory was also evident in the findings of this study. The types of fear in the fear tension theme could all be viewed as descriptions of the risks perceived by evangelicals in disclosing their religious identity at work. Petronio (2002) suggests that one criterion for self-disclosure decisions is weighing the perceived risks against the probable benefits of disclosing. She then lists five common types of risk: “security risks,” “stigma risks,” “face risks,” “role risks,” and “relational risks” (Petronio, 2002, p. 69-71). Petronio also hypothesizes of these risks that, “[a]lthough they are presented as independent categories, it is likely that they are not mutually exclusive” (Petronio, 2002, p. 69).
The findings of the present study both illustrate some of the types of risk and support the hypothesis that the risks may overlap and be combined. The fear of negative job consequences that some of the faculty members mentioned illustrates a perceived security risk for their livelihood and a role risk to their position as professors. A few of the faculty members described a face fear when they expressed concern that they might give others a bad image of Christians, Christianity, or even God. The other tension theme of not wanting to push people away from themselves and/or Christ underscores the perceptions faculty members had of the relational risks involved in disclosing their Christian identity. Stigma risks were also vividly apparent in the findings of the study and need to be discussed in a little more depth.

**Evangelical Christian Identity as a Stigmatized Identity**

Petronio (2002) defines stigma risks as those that “are specific to the individual’s inner self or self-identity” (p. 70). Dindia (2000) defines a stigma as “a stable characteristic of an individual that is perceived as damaging to the individual’s image or reputation” (p. 156). Although identities may be stigmatized any time they deviate from normative expectations, research involving them has focused on groups of people who have been generally stigmatized by society as a whole in some way, such as those who are HIV positive, homosexual, or victims of sexual abuse (Dindia, 2000). The findings revealed the presence of an identity that is perfectly acceptable in many parts of society,
but that can be a stigma within a specific organizational context. In this respect, the study herein offered a unique extension of the research on stigmatized identities.

In respect to stigmatized identity, the findings concerning Christian identity support much of the research related to other stigmatized identities. Consider the following statements: “It might hurt my relationships with others . . . and lessen the degree of respect in which I’m held,” and, “I don’t want to be a one issue person” (Bragg, 1997, p. 29) “If someone asked, I wouldn’t deny it, but I don’t wear a sign,”” (Dindia & Tieu, 1996). All of these quotations parallel almost exactly statements the evangelicals made in the interviews for this study, but each was from participants in studies of gay identity self-disclosure. Investigations of the self-disclosure of stigmatized identities emphasize the view of self-disclosure as a process and highlight its dialectical nature.

Communication of stigmatized identities is an exemplar of the dialectics of self-disclosure. There is some disagreement concerning whether the dialectical tensions of self-disclosure are about finding the balance between need for disclosure and the need for privacy or between being open and being closed (Dindia, 2000). Communication Privacy Management Theory focuses on privacy issues and, thereby, severely limits what communication qualifies as self-disclosure. While CPM can be quite useful in understanding aspects of self-disclosure, as with the criteria used to formulate rules for
social interactions, its focus on private information raises a number of problematic
questions and seems to encourage a dichotomous view of the private versus the public.
How many others can be brought into a privacy boundary before it is no longer private?
If Christians disclose some aspects of their Christian identity very publicly while
carefully guarding more intimate matters, how does one formulate the degree to which
they are private? Must the identity be segmented into public and private parts, or does it
make more sense to discuss the degree to which one is being open or closed?

Findings relating to stigmatized identities, including those of the study herein,
seem to support the view of the dialectics of self-disclosure as being a tension between
how open and how closed to be. Research Question Three was: What tensions do
evangelical Christian faculty perceive affecting communication of the Christian identity
in the secular institutions of higher education in which they work? The findings showed
that participants never articulated a need for privacy in regard to their religious identity.
The tensions they actually reported experiencing relate more to how open or closed to be
about the extent of their faith and its prominence in their lives with a special concern for
what is appropriate or inappropriate given the various contexts in which they find
themselves at work. From this perspective, the qualitative differences between Christian
identity disclosures, which are implied communications of a less intimate nature, can be
placed on a continuum, along which it makes sense to discuss them in such terms as how
openly they disclose versus how openly they disclose more intimate aspects of the same identity. From this perspective of self-disclosure, rule management and negotiation are one strategy for dealing with the inherent tension between being open and being closed (Dindia, 2000).

The findings in this study, like those of one dealing with the disclosure of gay identity, indicate that a careful process of coming out of the closet as a conservative Christian occurs when evangelical faculty self-disclose their religious identity in the secular workplace. The extent to which one is out with his or her gay identity at work often depends on the transactional nature of self-disclosure whereby the person with the stigmatized identity “tests the reaction” of a possible disclosure target (Dindia, 2000, p. 157). This was evident for many of the participants in the present study in the theme of disclosing when others express interest or ask questions. The participants also indicated that they waited for cues from others or clues that others might be open to Christianity in some way or open to hearing that perspective before they self-disclosed more explicitly. When others reacted negatively to communication relating to religious identity by, for example, ending a conversation, the participants often took that as a cue not to pursue the topic because the person was not open to it.

Cupach and Metts (1994) observed that people sometimes know how others will respond to self-disclosure. That finding was supported by this study in the fact that they
frequently perceived that their work environment was hostile to their religious identity.

When an identity carries a stigma, people may operate on the assumption that responses to self-disclosure of that identity will necessarily be negative. Several participants indicated that they laid a foundation for future disclosure and hoped that opportunities to disclose would arise as they connected with others one-on-one and in relationships.

Although it was not a substantial theme, several participants expressed concern for reinforcing negative stereotypes or being categorically dismissed because of the stereotypes attributed to evangelical Christians in general. Other individuals with stigmatized identities also report gradual disclosure over time as they interact with others and find out what sorts of reactions they might have to such disclosures (Dindia, 2000).

Hence, this study supports the view that people sometimes feel they know how others will react to their self-disclosure because they are sensitive to the social environment in general and the communication cues of others specifically.

One of the primary reasons scholars report for gays remaining in the closet at work is “the internalized fear of rejection and ridicule” (Bragg, 1997, p. 36). In the present study, faculty members internalized what they called “fear of man,” or other people’s possible negative reactions to their professed identity. Additionally, they were concerned with pushing people away, not merely from relationships with them, but ultimately from God. Four individuals, however, seemed not to struggle with fear of
man, fear of job consequences, or the fear of giving a bad image of Christ. They were very much out with how important and how much a part of their lives their Christian identity was. Although they were still careful about matters of relationship and formal role appropriateness, they enacted their identity in such a way that they could be called “flaming” Christians.

In general, the perceived risks of disclosing a stigmatized identity can cause both gays and Christians to stay in the closet at work. There is some evidence that being in the closet causes stress and may not be healthy (Dindia, 2000). A couple Christian faculty members alluded to the psychological toll of being in the closet in an environment hostile to their religious identity, but further research would be needed to support the validation of such a claim on a large scale. The organizational consequences were evident, however, in that both these individuals were actively engaged in job searches.

There is one final parallel between gay and Christian identities that gives rise to speculation about the root assumptions associated with the study of identity. Central to understanding the Christian identity is the idea that there is a core “self which is known only to God and which is uniquely constitutive of a person’s identity” (Sykes, 1984, p. 268). Such an identity comes from God rather than through social interaction. It would be as offensive to many Christians to talk of this core identity as a social construct as it
would be to many gays to discuss the core of being homosexual as having been socially constructed through their life experiences.

The foundational assumptions of identity development and the study of identity presume that identity is a quality people create and maintain through communication, but it seems likely that there are aspects of identity that exist outside communication but become apparent in our interactions with others rather than being the products of such interactions. Some of the lay language employed with regard to the self also seems to be indicative of such an aspect of identity. People go on voyages of self-discovery. It is considered good advice to remember who you are. We speak of finding ourselves. There may be significant facets of identity to be discovered by employing alternative perspectives to the study of identity that allow for revealed aspects of who we are.

Conclusions

This study touched on several aspects of identity and self-disclosure, which may open some useful avenues for future research. The most important revelation of the study for identity scholarship was the discovery of primary identity actions that the participants used to define what is meant to be a person having a particular religious identity. The importance of primary identity actions may increase if subsequent research indicates that these identity actions are common to other identities.
The study also supported the theoretical assumption that identities are hierarchical by providing a close look at an identity deemed most important by the participants and reportedly salient across contexts. As an exploratory study of religious identity with a focus on evangelical Christian faculty in secular institutions of higher education, the findings highlight how these minority religious group members report experiencing tensions and fears constraining their free expression of this very important aspect of who they are and of the differing perspectives they could bring to their disciplines and into the classroom. Further research on the organizational and educational consequences of faculty members’ engaging in a sort of self-censorship on campus might prove to be beneficial by helping unrecognized minority voices gain legitimacy on campuses and ultimately promoting free speech and greater diversity in educational discourses.

The findings extend what is known about stigmatized identities in particular by providing a case in which a usually accepted identity becomes stigmatized within a specific context. Identifying more stigmatized identities could broaden the scope of such research and, thereby, broaden our understanding. For example, research comparing the coping strategies of different stigmatized identities might yield generally applicable information concerning what works for people, especially as they negotiate workplace challenges.
The most important revelations of the study with regard to self-disclosure were twofold. The first was that the findings highlighted the sometimes glaring differences between self-disclosure as conceptualized by scholars and self-disclosure as experienced in people’s day-to-day lives. This phenomenological gap needs to be addressed in future research. In light of this discovery, for example, there are grounds for speculating that superficial self-disclosure may play an important role in social behavior in the workplace and elsewhere. A better understanding of what those roles or functions are and how individuals perform them could extend significantly the knowledge scholars have about self-disclosure in communication. The second was that the tendency to disclose versus not to disclose is more complicated than presumed previously. For example, current theory characterizes the bases of disclosure decisions as almost entirely self-focused motivations, but the findings of this study indicated communicators often use criteria for disclosing that are based on mutual concerns (e.g., the co-owned relationship) and even other-focused (i.e. altruistic) motivations. Again, the extent to which these findings should be considered important to the field of human communication will be reinforced if subsequent research uncovers similar findings.
References


Duffy, B. K., & Duffy, S. (1984). Fundamentalism, liberal education and freedom of


Louis, M. R. (1994). In the manner of friends: Learning from the Quaker practice for


APPENDICES
Appendix A
Script for Introducing Research Project to Possible Participants

Greetings. My name is Kristin King, and I am a Ph. D. Candidate in the Communication Arts and Sciences Department of The Pennsylvania State University. My area of study is Organizational Communication, and I am conducting research in an area that may be of interest to you. I am currently seeking participants to volunteer for a study that would describe what Christian faculty members’ “religious identity” means to them, the important of this identity to organizational members, and how religious identity affects the communication of organizational members.

I am contacting you this fellowship to solicit volunteers for the study. I need participants who are professors of all ranks, are in various professional fields, and have varying denominational backgrounds who are working for secular higher education institutions, and who profess Christianity as being primary to who they are as persons. Participation would involve completing a short survey and taking part in an informal semi-structured interview with me about your Christian identity and how you bring that identity into your workplace and profession. I will ask participants to allow me to interview them in their offices at a mutually convenient time. Interview would last approximately 1 hour.

Please consider participating in this research. The findings from this study will shed light on the ways Christians perceive their identity functioning in their personal and professional lives. Moreover, these findings may provide insight on how Christianity may be recognized within secular workplace environments and inform organizational managers and scholars of the importance of religious identity as a component of diversity in the workplace. All participants may receive a copy of the final report upon request.

Please reply to me via this email if you think you qualify and you might be willing to participate. I will send further information, answer questions, and send before beginning to coordinate an interview appointment.

Thank you so much,
Kristin F. Chaudoin King
The Department of Communication Arts & Sciences
The Pennsylvania State University
234 Sparks Building
University Park, PA 16802
1-270-625-1277
Appendix B

Edited Email script for Introducing the Research Project to Possible Participants

Dr. __________,

I am writing to see if you might be able to help me with my thesis. I am a Ph. D. Candidate at Penn State writing a thesis entitled “Self-disclosing Religious Identity at Work: The Case of Christian Professors at Secular Universities.” I am hoping you might be able to help either by participating and/or recommending people who might be willing to participate.

I have attached an information sheet about my project for your use. Also, I am recruiting participants from two universities in order to help maintain confidentiality. I am very much in need of _________ (e.g., women in the hard sciences). I got your name from ______________________, so I was hoping you might be able to help. Please recommend anyone you think maybe able to help me and/or feel free to just forward this information on to them so they can decide whether or not to contact me themselves.

Thank you,

Kristin F. Chaudoin King
Ph. D. Candidate
Appendix C
Email Attachment

Project Information

My name is Kristin King, and I am a Ph. D. candidate in the Communication Arts and Sciences Department of The Pennsylvania State University. My area of study is Organizational Communication, and I am conducting a study called “Self-Disclosing Religious Identity at Work: Christian Faculty in the Secular Institution.

I need participants who are professors of all ranks are in various professional fields, and have varying denominational backgrounds who are working for secular higher education institutions, and who profess Christianity as being primary to who they are as persons. Participation would involve filling out a 5 minute survey and then possibly taking part in an informal semi-structured interview with me about your Christian identity and how you bring that identity into your workplace and profession. I will ask participants to allow me to interview them in their offices at a mutually convenient time. Interviews would last approximately an hour. I will be interviewing professors from two large universities located in different regions of the country. This will help insure individuals’ confidentiality.

The findings from this study will shed light on the ways Christians perceive their identity functioning in their personal and professional lives. Moreover, these findings may provide insight into how Christianity may be recognized within secular workplace environments and inform organizational managers and scholars of the importance of religious identity as a component of diversity in the workplace.

All participants may receive a copy of the final report upon request.

Kristin F. Chaudoin King
The Department of Communication Arts & Sciences
The Pennsylvania State University
234 Sparks Building
University Park, PA 16802
Residing in Jurbise, Belgium
Appendix D
Survey Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Self-Disclosing Religious Identity at Work: Evangelical Christian Faculty in the Secular Institution
Principal Investigator: Kristin F. Chaudoin King (kfc2@psu.edu)
Contact: 316 Sparks Bldg., University Park, PA 16802 Call: (270) 365-5783 or 011-32-65-36-02-49
Advisor: Dennis Gouran (g8v@psu.edu)
Advisor Office: 234 Sparks Bldg. (814) 865-3461

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to describe Christian faculty members’ perceptions of what it means to be a Christian and how that religious identity emerges in communication in secular higher education organizations.

2. Procedures to be followed: Participation in this research includes completion of an email survey. Access to emails will be restricted to the primary investigator. Survey respondents may be contacted for participation in a 1 hour interview. Participation in the survey in no way obligates participation in an interview.

3. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort or reveal the need for further discussion of issues raised with a qualified counselor. If you feel such a need, the interviewer encourages you to seek further information from the office of the campus Employee Assistance Program.

4. Benefits:
a. The benefits to participants include stating agreement with or disagreement with beliefs which may allow you to clarify your stance on these topics.
b. This research may provide insight into the importance of religious identity for adherents, and inform issues of religious identity in the workplace. The
information might assist managers and scholars in understanding religious identity as a diversity issue in organizations.

5. **Duration/Time:** The survey takes approximately 5 minutes.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Only the person in charge will know your identity. If this research is published, no information that would identify you or your organizational affiliation will be written. University’s’ email service is not a secured method of exchanging information, so complete confidentiality is not possible. You may also mail your signed consent and survey responses to: Kristin King, Unit 21407 Box 12, APO AE, 09705.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You can ask questions about the research. The person in charge will answer your questions. Contact Kristin King at 011-32-65-36-02-49 or reply to this email with questions. In addition, you may contact the Penn State Office for Research Protections, 212 Kern Graduate Building, University Park, PA 16802, (814) 865-1775 or ORProtections@psu.edu for information concerning your rights as a research participant.

8. **Compensation:** There is no direct compensation for participation in this study; however, participants may request research reports.

9. **Voluntary Participation:** Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the principal investigator. You can decline to answer specific questions as well.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please type your name and indicate the date below.
You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

______________________________________     _______________________
Participant Name                          Date
Appendix E
Survey of Evangelical Beliefs

Please respond to this survey by sending it in a reply email in which you type your responses beside each statement. Choose one answer for each statement from among the following responses:

Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree

1. I believe the wages of sin is death. ________________

2. I believe all humans except Christ have sinned. ________________

3. I believe Christ died for our sins. ________________

4. If I place my faith in Christ’s having paid the penalty for my sin, I will have eternal life. ________________

5. If I place my faith in Christ’s having paid the penalty for my sin, I can have a personal relationship with God. ________________

6. Access to a personal relationship with God and eternal life with Him is only available through Jesus Christ. ________________

7. The Bible is the authoritative word of God. ________________

8. I try to base my moral decisions on the Bible. ________________
9. I believe I have a responsibility to share my faith in some way wherever I go (i.e. the great commission applies to me personally even in the workplace).

__________________________
Appendix F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Self-Disclosing Religious Identity at Work: Evangelical Christian Faculty in the Secular Institution
Principal Investigator: Kristin F. Chaudoin King (kfc2@psu.edu)
Contact: 316 Sparks Bldg., University Park, PA 16802 Call: (270) 365-5783
Or 011-32-65-36-02-49
Advisor: Dennis Gouran (g8v@psu.edu)
Advisor Office: 234 Sparks Bldg. (814) 865-3461

10. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to describe Christian faculty members’ perceptions of what it means to be a Christian and how that religious identity emerges in communication in secular higher education organizations.

11. Procedures to be followed: Participation in this research will include completion of an interview. A reflection activity is included in order to help you prepare for the interview so that the best use can be made of the interview time. Use of the reflection activity is not required. Interviews will be recorded. Tapes will be stored in the investigator’s home office and will be destroyed by 2005. Access to tapes will be restricted to the investigator, transcribers, and trained coders. No personal identifying marks will be on the tapes. Access to identification of which tapes were of which interviewees will be restricted to the investigator.

12. Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Some of the questions are personal and might cause discomfort or reveal the need for further discussion of issues raised with a qualified counselor. If you feel such a need, the interviewer encourages you to seek further information from the office of the campus Employee Assistance Program.

13. Benefits:
   a. The benefits to participants include articulating important beliefs and reflecting on their relationship to behavior. You may have a better understanding of how your religious beliefs integrate into professional life after participating in this study. In addition, the practice articulating your beliefs may help you better express your Christianity to others in the future.
   b. This research may provide insight into the importance of religious identity for adherents, how religious identity is expressed in the workplace, and provide spiritual
understandings of work, self-disclosure, and identity. The information might assist managers and scholars in understanding religious identity as a diversity issue in organizations.

14. Duration/Time: Interviews will last 1 hour.

15. Statement of Confidentiality: Only the person in charge will know your identity. If this research is published, no information that would identify you or your organizational affiliation will be written.

16. Right to Ask Questions: You can ask questions about the research. The person in charge will answer your questions. Contact Kristin King at 011-32-65-36-02-49 with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Penn State’s Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775 or ORProtections@psu.edu.

17. Compensation: There is no direct compensation for participation in this study; however, participants may request research reports or copies of their transcribed interview for personal use.

18. Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time by notifying the principal investigator. You can decline to answer specific questions as well.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

______________________________________  ______________________________
Participant Signature  Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

______________________________________  ______________________________
Investigator Signature  Date
Appendix G
Interview Guide

1. Reflect on what being a Christian means to you. What is the story of your Christian identity?
   Probes:
   How did you become a Christian?
   How has your Christianity developed?
   What is your testimony today?
   How important is being a Christian to you?

2. Think about how you communicate your Christian identity. How actively do you communicate your Christian identity in the workplace?
   Probes:
   Use the following list of communication contexts to help you think of particular circumstances when you Christian identity emerged in your communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In your office</th>
<th>With peers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the classroom</td>
<td>With supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In meetings</td>
<td>With colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At conferences</td>
<td>With coworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Some communication is explicit while some is more implicit. Thinking of the contexts mentioned above, how does your Christian identity more implicitly emerge in your professional life?
   Probe:
   Are there some ways it emerges that are nonverbal? Verbal?

4. Think about any times you have refrained from explicitly communicating your Christian identity. Describe those times.
   Probes:
   Under what circumstances have you chosen not to communicate your Christianity? Tell me about what made you choose not to communicate. Contexts for probing:
In your office
In the classroom
In meetings
At conferences
With students
With peers
With supervisors
With colleagues
With coworkers

Are there other personal issues you choose not to reveal at work?
Can you describe any negative experiences you have had when you revealed your Christian identity?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share about your Christian identity and the workplace that we haven’t already talked about?

6. Has this interview given you any ideas of future topics of importance or interest research might look into?

Thank you so much. I really appreciate your time and your sharing with me. Would it be okay if I call you after I look over my notes if I have any questions or items to follow up on? Thanks.
VITA
Kristin F. Chaudoin King

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Princeton, KY 42445 7050 Jurbise
BELGIUM
Email knrking@gmail.com (011) 32.65.36.02.49

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Speech Communication
M. A. 1996 Murray State University
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Major: English
Minors: Communication & Religion
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TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE:
2002 Teacher of Public Speaking for Homeschool Course Curriculum at
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1996-1998 Graduate Teaching Assistant at The Pennsylvania State University for
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