

Talking about Self, God, and Relationships:
How First-year Students use Christianese to Construct Identity at a Faith-based University

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Abstract

Very little systematic research has been conducted to explore the features of Christianese, a shared way of talking among Evangelical Christians. This study explored the association between Christianese and identity construction, particularly the way in which first-year students at a faith-based university participated in the practices of Christianese to construct their identity as belonging to the community. Thirty-one first-year students participated in four interviews over one year of data collection. The data presented multiple possibilities for analysis, but I chose to examine participants' testimony narratives, agency ascribed to God or self, and metaphors used to describe relationships. Following Swales' (1990) rhetorical move analysis framework, I identified up to five moves in the testimony narratives and grouped the participants based on the number of moves they included in their testimonies according to the trajectories in Wenger's (1998) *communities of practice* model. I utilized van Leeuwen's (2008) social actors network to analyze agency attributed to God or oneself and found this to be dependent on the topic being discussed. Regarding metaphors, I noted ten semantic fields of metaphors in the data, all of which related to relationships, and examined how participants used these metaphors to construct their identity of belonging to the community. This systematic investigation revealed that students participated at varying levels within the university community of practice by drawing from the linguistic resources of Christianese. I argue that as participants used more Christianese features in their speech, they constructed their identity of belonging to the community; conversely, those students who participated less in the linguistic repertoire of Christianese constructed their identity of peripheral or marginal membership in the community. Ultimately, using characteristics of Christianese to construct one's identity involves multiple elements, and there was no singular means for determining one's identity based on the Christianese they speak.

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Dedication

To my grandma, Evelyn White, who encouraged me before I began;

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for supporting me through the finish.

I love you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

The Lord just impressed on my heart that this was the right season to explore the role of Christianese and identity construction in first-year students at a faith-based university.

This seems to be an odd way to open a thesis, but in a faith-based academic community, this opening sentence would be a fitting way to describe this project to others within the community. Certain elements of this opening statement mark the author as a member of the community: in particular, acknowledging the agency of God in one's decisions is both appropriate and necessary in a project of this magnitude, as is the inclusion of certain metaphors, such as *heart* and *season*. These characteristics, along with sharing one's testimony will be further explored in this thesis.

Faith-based universities are prevalent throughout the United States: of the 1,600 private degree-granting higher education institutions, roughly 900 maintain a level of religious affiliation and 120 claim membership in the Council of Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCCU), an Evangelical organization whose mission is "to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth" (CCCCU, 2014). Evangelical Christian colleges and universities are among the fastest growing institutions in the United States (Adrian, 2003). The term, Evangelical, covers a diverse number of Protestant Christian denominations (Eskridge, 2006), making it "transdenominational" (McGrath, 2002, p. 44). Though defining Evangelicalism is the object of ongoing debate and transition (Rainey, 2018), Bebbington's (1989) description, now seen as the classical definition, will serve the purpose for this thesis. He identified a "quadrilateral of priorities" that marked the Evangelical stream of Christianity: conversionism (lives must be changed), activism (followers live out the gospel), biblicism (believers maintain a high regard for the bible, and

crucicentrism (Christ's sacrifice on the cross is stressed) (pp. 2-3). (There is also disagreement about whether Evangelical should be capitalized or not; I have opted to follow Bebbington's choice for capitalizing the term throughout this thesis since many scholars defer to his work on Evangelicalism.) These four priorities align with the National Association of Evangelicals' statement of faith used by the CCCU to distinguish its members (Patterson, 2005), along with "an institutional mission or purpose statement that is Christ-centered and rooted in the historic Christian faith" (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2009, p. 87).

While the reasons for attending a faith-based institution vary, a primary motive for students who choose these schools is to learn within "a community of believers" (Faith-Based Schools, 2009). Evangelical Christian higher education institutions offer a learning environment grounded in and shaped by a strong Christian faith (Cumings, Haworth, & O'Neill, 2001). Moreover, these colleges and universities attract students with strong religious beliefs but also work to develop stronger faith in their students (Railsback, 2006). I completed my BA at a faith-based university and MA at a secular university and have taught at both faith-based and secular institutions. Throughout my experiences, I have noticed differences in the language habits of Christian communities, particularly in educational contexts. Some students use faith language typical of the community in all of their interactions, and some students use little of it. These experiences produced the topic of this thesis, specifically how first-year students use the faith language of the community in order to mark their membership within that community.

1.1. Context of the study

Indiana Wesleyan University (IWU) is a private, faith-based Evangelical institution that serves nearly 3,000 undergraduate students at its residential campus in the Midwest United States. Many faith-based universities maintain some level of affiliation with a particular denomination within protestant Christianity but operate in a more independent

manner. IWU is somewhat unusual in that the Wesleyan denomination owns the school, along with five other higher education institutions around the United States (“Wesleyan,” 2017). The Wesleyan denomination carries a great deal of weight concerning decisions about the university; for example, the denomination sets the ratio of Wesleyan faculty members to those faculty members who belong to a different protestant Christian denomination (Schenck, n.d.). Despite its Wesleyan ownership, it refers to itself as “an evangelical Christian comprehensive university that is committed to liberal arts and professional education” and draws students from eighty different Christian denominations (“About IWU,” 2018). Many students come from similar Evangelical faith communities, so their transition into the religious aspects of the IWU community is more familiar. Others come from faith communities outside the Evangelical sphere, such as Lutheran or Catholic churches or schools, with quite different practices and must learn to negotiate their former identity with any new ones as they transition to their new university community (Silver, 1996).

During the data collection process for this project, I observed a number of university functions with the aim of gathering a foundational understanding of the practices involved in this particular community. The academic year began in late August before the students arrived with the yearly University Convocation for all faculty, staff, and administrators. This took place in the Chapel Auditorium, which seats roughly 4,000 people and is the location for the thrice-weekly required chapel for the students during the school year. This convocation was opened and closed with prayer and included a mix of worship through song, sermon, and communion, as well as a business meeting and awards ceremony – all of which occurred within two hours.

This convocation served to set the tone for the academic year: the president of the university addressed the employees regarding the place of a great Christian university in our day. He described what he believed were four foundations of the IWU community: engaging

deeply in Scripture, practicing community by praying for and helping each other in times of need, continuing as a community of learning, and engaging in life. After his message, the program moved on to awards with an abrupt shift to a homily on communion from one of the chaplains in nonresidential education that turned out to be a combination of claiming Christian persecution in the United States and the need to be “peculiar” Christians, that is, not “embracing all sorts of social issues and saying it’s [sic] Christian.” After communion, the president returned to the stage to remind everyone “we’re called to serve” and ended with a benediction and a prayer to bless the food that was provided in the cafeteria for everyone following the convocation.

Key practices that can be gleaned from this opening ceremony of sorts include an emphasis on prayer and worship, both of which occurred in some fashion at most official gatherings, as well as a reminder of the collective identity of the community and its common purpose. Other practices that will be explored in this thesis include language functioning as a way for members to mark their community membership, not just in gatherings such as the University Convocation, but also in less formal venues.

I attended a number of official gatherings throughout the year of data collection (2015-2016), described more fully in Chapter 3 (section 3.2.4), but this convocation served as a kind of model for other gatherings with the employees of the university in terms of the prayer and songs opening any business planned for the meeting. My field notes served as a foundation for how the non-student members of the community typically used language, which helped guide my choice of interview questions and the way I intentionally included (or not) language of the community during the interviews, all of which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.2. Research questions

This study seeks to explore such issues as Christian discourse patterns and identity within the context of faith-based education using discourse analytic tools. The literature review will identify relevant research in the areas of sociology of language and religion, Christians in higher education, and the language of Evangelical Christians. Ultimately, however, there has been no systematic, comprehensive investigation of either Christianese discourse or how first-year undergraduate students use this particular discourse in order to construct their identity of belonging (or not) to the university community.

Thus, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. What are some of the characteristics of Christianese within a faith-based university?
2. How do 1st year students construct their identity using Christianese at a faith-based university?

1.3. Layout of the thesis

As mentioned above, I review the literature most related to this topic in chapter two, as well as offer a brief account of the theoretical framework that will inform my analysis: Wenger's (1998) model of *communities of practice*, particularly his conceptions of community, identity, and participation and non-participation. In chapter three, I discuss the methodology, data collection, and methods I used for this study, as well as the analytical frameworks I employed for the various analysis chapters. Chapter four begins the analysis of the data, wherein I conduct a genre analysis, following Swales' (1990) approach, on the testimony narratives from the participants. I use this analysis to group the participants in terms of their linguistic alignment to the IWU community of practice. In chapter five, I apply van Leeuwen's (2008) social actors network analysis to examine how the participants talk about God – when they give agency to God or keep agency for themselves while referencing God. I explore the use of metaphors to discuss relationships in chapter six. Metaphors

surfaced numerous times in the data, specifically in reference to relationships, so I analyze the way students used certain metaphors to construct their identity. In chapter seven, I explore the language of testimony, agency, and metaphors among four participants who represent varying levels of engagement in the IWU community; then I discuss the data and participants as a whole and draw some final conclusions. Chapter eight provides the closing summary to this thesis, in which I also determine limitations of the study and areas for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1. Literature review

This chapter will first review literature from areas that intersect in some way with this study: the sociology of language and religion, speech and discourse communities, Christians in higher education, and the language of Evangelicals. Then the chapter will outline and detail the elements of the communities of practice model that serves as the theoretical framework for the thesis.

2.1.1. Sociology of language and religion

The sociology of language and religion (SLR) as a field of inquiry is multi-faceted because it seeks to bring together the fields of sociology of language and sociology of religion, both of which have rich research histories. In the inaugural collection of SLR studies, Omoniyi and Fishman (2006) insisted that the sociology of language and religion should reconsider the themes of these two fields and determine their common interests in order to construct “new methodologies and theoretical paradigms appropriate for the interface and how the shared interests impact social practices in various communities around the world” (p. 3). They argued that the ultimate objectives of this field of inquiry would be “to demonstrate the closeness of the two fields, help us understand the relationship between them better and fashion tools for creating a body of new knowledge that supports the emergence of a better society” (p. 3).

This book examined the intersection of language and religion in specific contexts, with studies that used a variety of approaches and methodologies all with the intent of shedding light on this intersection. The work began with Fishman’s (2006) Decalogue of theoretical principles that, he proposed, could underpin future studies within the field of sociology of language and religion (SLR), but he recognized the need for them “to be fleshed

out, modified, selectively abandoned or added to” in order for this field to be “theoretically anchored and empirically supported” (p. 24). The principles mainly derive from theories informed by what Fishman called the “parents” of SLR, namely the sociology of language and the sociology of religion (p. 14).

While some of the Decalogue principles are relevant to this study, others are not because they imply institutionalized varieties of religious discourse, such as Latin with Catholicism or Sanskrit with Hinduism. However, my study examines the everyday conversational language of students at an Evangelical university; the religious language they incorporate in their speech aligns more with a few of Fishman’s (2006) principles, specifically, the first, second, and sixth. The first principle states, “The language (or variety) of religion always functions within a larger multilingual/multivarietal repertoire” (p. 14), which flows into the second, “The variation posited in Principle 1, above, exists both intra-societally and inter-societally and may vary over time” (p. 15). In my study, the religious language used by the students is situated within American English and Evangelical Christianity, but as will be evident in section 2.1.3., this religious variety is not static. Finally, the sixth principle states, “All sources of sociocultural change are also sources of change in the sociolinguistic repertoire vis-à-vis religion, including religious change per se” (p. 18). The Christianese variety investigated in this study demonstrates a kind of informality compared with the institutionalized religious varieties Fishman used as examples for the other seven principles in his Decalogue. But this informality in the language variety provides a solid illustration of the Evangelical preference for the casual over the ceremonious (Stanley, 2013, p. 196).

These principles have been noted and drawn from in more recent studies. Some examples include the role of language in non-English speaking ethnic churches in Melbourne, Australia (Woods, 2006), the choice of language scripts among adolescent

Muslims in the UK (Rosowsky, 2009), language use and cultural identity with regard to Lutherans in Alsace (Vajta, 2013), and multiple studies exploring how religious language and practices manifest in online spaces (Rosowsky, 2018).

The studies in Rosowsky's (2018) edited volume that explored language in Christian settings all fell in some way under Fishman's (2006) first principle that "a language (or variety) of religion always functions within a larger multilingual/multivarietal repertoire" (p. 14). Sawin (2018) examined online faith communities of three different self-ascribed Christian minority groups: Evangelical Koryo-saram who were originally from Centra Asia and lived in South Korea at the time of his data collection, Christian academics at a large American public university, and "Side B" celibate or heterosexually partnered LGBT Christians. Using Facebook as her research setting, Souza (2018) explored the dimensions of online religion and religion online at a Brazilian Pentecostal church. Omoniyi (2018) investigated the use of Nigerian English in digital evangelism from two sources, one based in London and the other based in Lagos. Notably absent was a focus on any discourse features specific to English-speaking Evangelicals, such as the Christianese discourse described in this thesis.

Despite an earlier interest in the connection between language and religion, the field of sociology of language and religion is still considered to be in its beginning stages (Spolsky, 2018). The current study fits squarely into this field of inquiry as I endeavor to identify certain characteristics of Christianese discourse used within the context of Christian Higher Education and how first-year students use it to position themselves within the university community.

2.1.2. Research on Christians in higher education

Because the context of this study is an Evangelical Christian university, it is essential to examine some literature about Christians in higher education. While there has been an

increase of interest in Evangelical students in higher education contexts, there is little research investigating how these students use language to construct their particular Christian identity. Thus, the majority of this section will examine studies from a sociological and ethnographic perspective that carry relevance to the Evangelical context of this thesis.

Within the tradition of sociology of religion, research about Evangelicals in higher education tends to be divided into two streams: Christian beliefs and practices on secular campuses, which constitutes the majority of the literature, and Christian beliefs and practices on faith-based campuses. Since Rose's (1988) claim regarding the limited amount of sociological research on Evangelical Christian education, there has been a developing interest in exploring the identity and role of Evangelical Christian students particularly within public universities (Allen-Collinson & Brown, 2012; Magolda & Ebben, 2006; Moran, 2007; Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007).

The majority of these studies focus on Evangelical students involved in student groups or para-church organizations on large, secular universities around North America: Bryant (2005, 2006, 2009, 2011a, 2011b) in California, Magolda and Ebben (2006) and Magolda and Gross (2009) in the Midwest, and Bramadat (2000) in Ontario, Canada. The sociological inquiry of these studies focused on students' beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices within and around the organization's culture. One of the common themes among this research is the "fortress mentality" (Hammond & Hunter, 1984): the Evangelical student group offers a retreat from the challenges of the secular university, a place where the students can be surrounded by "sameness" and be strengthened in their faith and beliefs (Bramadat, 2000; Perry & Armstrong, 2007; Magolda & Gross, 2012). Organizations, such as Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU) or InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), function in a similar way to a church in that they often have related beliefs and attract students with a similar religious affinity, in this case Evangelical Christianity, but are not necessarily attached to any

one denomination. Practices within these groups and para-church organizations remain largely similar. Each organization engaged students in a large group worship setting, fun activities, and small group Bible studies – often gender exclusive, so all-male and all-female study groups (Magolda & Gross, 2009; Bryant, 2009). Morality, too, plays a key role in the shared behaviors across the Evangelical student organizations (Bryant, 2005). Abstinence from drunkenness, immodest attire, and sexual activity comprised Bryant’s definition of moral conduct for these groups (p. 12). This same type of conduct occurs at Christian universities as well and plays a role in the formation of students’ character and spirituality (Birkholz, 1997; Cumings, Haworth, & O’Neill, 2001; Raymond, 2009; Barnard, 2012; Bruehler, 2015). It is this type of moral differentiation, along with the above practices, that significantly contributes to the collective identity of these organizations.

These norms, namely, following Christ, having fun, and engaging in fellowship with like-minded peers (Magolda & Ebben, 2006), along with the expected moral conduct, help to create a “haven” for Evangelical students where they find support, Christian leadership, and relationship-building opportunities that help them continue to grow in their faith while at college (Perry & Armstrong, 2007). Perry and Armstrong preferred the term *haven* above Hammond and Hunter’s (1984) *fortress mentality* because Evangelical student organizations like CRU or IVCF offer social support by providing a different campus community for like-minded students who share a set of valued behaviors, relationship norms, social activities, and rhetoric (Bryant, 2005; Perry & Armstrong, 2007; Sherkat, 2007). They identified rhetoric as part of those valued behaviors yet brought very little attention to defining that rhetoric. Evangelical universities offer this same kind of support, providing an academic community that works to integrate their faith with their learning in what is deemed a safe space for Evangelicals (Holmes, 1987; Joeckel & Chesnes, 2012). Both entities function in a way to preserve or create a particular religious identity. These studies focused mainly on

practices, beliefs, and attitudes in terms of identity, but they did not discuss the language used by these members that contributed to their Christian identity despite the fact that these norms (following Christ, having fun, and fellowshiping) require language.

This notion of social support appeared in Bryant's (2005) research as well. This article featured a case study of an Evangelical organization similar to CRU or IVCF on a large, secular university in California. In her study, students found social support by participating in a group with homogenous demographics – the members were largely traditional-aged university students from a middle to high socioeconomic status, who displayed high academic ability (p. 9), which is a common demographic in Christian universities (Nieves, 2012). Additionally, many of the students wanted to be intellectually challenged to deal with difficult issues in light of their faith, and they wanted to make their faith their own, not just what they had been taught by their parents or church leaders. Praying, reading books and Bible commentaries, and talking to trusted friends and group leaders all contributed to common practices for developing their faith (Bryant, 2005, p. 14), practices that also occur at Christian universities (Ma, 2003; Woodfin, 2012).

Even though Bryant (2005) shed light on beliefs and practices shared among the members, her research omitted any attention to the language used by the organization's members, with the exception of a theological concept. She stated that leaders and students involved in the para-church organization perceived it to be theologically conservative, "primarily because of the collective adherence to Biblical inerrancy" (p. 10). Bryant explained that a key issue in the theological doctrine of conservative Evangelicals is the inerrancy of scripture, an important belief to which the organization and its members ascribed. Interestingly, she included a quote from one of her non-specified interviewees (a leader or a student participant?) that explained the meaning of *inerrancy*, "doctrinally speaking...they believe in the inerrancy of scripture – the infallibility of the word of God –

and they affirm the orthodox Christian faith” (p. 10). This brief explanation misses the important fact that *inerrancy* and *infallibility* have two distinct, and often divisive, meanings for the Evangelical community: inerrancy is the doctrine that there were no errors in the original form of the Bible, but infallibility refers to the idea that the Bible holds God’s truths in its pages (Davis, 1977). This is an excellent example of why understanding the language, in this case theological language, used to construct the collective Evangelical identity in Bryant’s researched organization is essential to truly understanding how individual Evangelicals both construct and realize their religious identity.

A study closer to the context of this thesis investigated student culture at Wheaton College (Cumings, Haworth, & O-Neill, 2001), known among Christian higher education circles as the “Harvard of all Christian colleges” (p. 46) or the “Harvard of all Evangelical schools” (p. 57). Based primarily on interviews with students, as well as supporting documents, the researchers aimed to “identify and describe the assumptions, values, norms, and behaviors that inform and animate Wheaton’s student culture” (p.34). While the authors did not highlight language in the study, there were passing references to language and identity as they discussed specific interview segments. For example, as they described student social life, they argued that students socially constructed the notion of a “perfect standard” based on how they interpreted “Evangelical Christian and elite academic assumptions” which then informed various aspects of student life at the institution (p. 58). The researchers discussed how students used “cover up” tactics “to be more cautious and superficial in their friendships” (p. 48), and it is here that one interviewee referenced the kind of language students used at Wheaton to skirt issues of weakness or struggle: “If you can *sound religious* and *sound theological* [added emphasis]...If someone starts digging at you, you can pull out a *couple big fancy words* [added emphasis]” (p. 49). However, there was no

further exploration to identify examples of “big fancy words” or what it meant to “sound religious” or “sound theological”.

This idea of a “perfect standard” came to light in another, more recent study (Woodfin, 2012). Joeckel and Chesnes (2012) created two surveys—one for faculty and one for students—and distributed them to the appropriate recipients at CCCU institutions (p. 13). Faculty from 98 institutions and students from 19 institutions participated, creating an “unprecedented data set” (p. 13) that they shared with a number of scholars for analysis. Thus, Woodfin (2012) investigated the data with the purpose of illuminating how faculty and students understood the Christian atmosphere on campus. Like Cumings, Haworth, and O’Neill (2001), she found that students felt pressured to be a “cookie-cutter Christian” or the “‘right’ kind of Christian” (p. 97) and felt judged if they did not behave a certain way or “become involved in an overabundance of Christian activities” (p. 98). While the analysis did not include language per se, Woodfin discussed the “bubble,” which she did not define but mentioned that “bubble” occurred 134 times in the student responses to two particular questions of the survey (p. 96). This metaphor surfaced repeatedly in my data set and is discussed in Chapter 6 (section 6.3.10).

One final study bears brief discussion because it explored another aspect of student culture at Wheaton College: short-term mission trips (Howell & Dorr, 2007). In this study, the researchers analyzed the language in the essays of 96 applications for these trips and viewed the short-term mission trips “as ritualized pilgrim journeys for the development of evangelical faith” (p. 237). Thus, they understood the language of short-term missions, as produced by these Christian college students, as “actively constructing these trips as a catalyst for renewing spiritual devotion and as a pilgrimage to the heart of evangelicalism in its purist form” (p. 244). The language extracts they included in their article offered a potentially rich source for linguistic analysis, but their focus remained on their coding for

pilgrimage-related issues, such as leaving one's "comfort zone, the formation of Christian community, a sense of call, anticipated spiritual transformation, suffering and return" (p. 244). This thesis aims to bring greater understanding to the kind of language used in a community akin to Wheaton College.

2.1.3. The language of Evangelicals

Even though the sociology of language and religion and the nature of Christians in higher education are fairly well established arenas of research, very few studies have investigated the everyday language patterns and practices of faith-related language used by Evangelical Christians. Commonly derided by members of this religious community, people refer to the language variety as Christianese and talk about it as something they need to eradicate from their language practices, especially when interacting with people outside the Evangelical community (Cawley, 2018). This section will consider what Christianese is and briefly survey the limited number of studies that have attempted to research it.

The language of Evangelical practices and worship

There has been developing interest in the discourse used in Christian communities in the last several decades, beginning with the brief lists of lexis peculiar to Evangelical Christianity in general (McQuerry, 1979) and nondenominational Christians in New Brunswick, Canada (Williston & Kinloch, 1979). Coleman (1980) was the first to begin to describe certain elements of what she called "the language of 'born-again' Christianity" (p. 133). When she first shed light on the peculiarities of language used by Evangelicals in the late 1970s, she concluded that this was a means for them to both reflect and apply their particular worldview and ultimately described how the Evangelical worldview affected their language practice. She even coined the term *worldviewlect* to reflect her determination that "influences from the [Evangelical] worldview appear[ed] in nearly every area of language use" (p. 141). (This concept will be further explained below.)

She referred to this as Evangelical language and in-group jargon, despite the fact that her analysis focused only slightly on lexis and primarily on its variation from Standard American English (SAE) in terms of syntax, pragmatics, and semantics (Coleman, 1980, p. 139). Coleman briefly mentioned agency to note how it was “inappropriate to talk about what good actions one has performed oneself” but entirely acceptable to praise someone else (p. 134); the majority of her discussion on agency centered around the uses of active and passive voice and key examples of verbs commonly used in unusual ways in Evangelical language. For example, she noted how passive voice is used in place of active voice: “I feel/felt led to do X,” and “I have been exercised about X lately” (p. 135). Furthermore, the active voice can be used instead of the typical passive voice for certain verbs as in, “God has privileged us to partake of this remembrance feast” (p. 135). In these examples, Coleman pointed out that Evangelical language avoids referring to people “as primary agents and to introduce God as the moving force behind all good actions” (p. 136). In Chapter 5, I will demonstrate that the way Evangelicals attribute agency is much more nuanced and complex than Coleman’s early study leads readers to believe.

Much of the remaining literature deals not with the daily discourse among Christians but with specific aspects of a Christian gathering, namely the ways people used or referred to the Bible in these gatherings and the function of prayer. Quoting the Bible was a key practice explored in Seventh-Day Adventist Bible studies (Lehtinen, 2004), and it played an important role in forming one’s identity in Mormon and Methodist youth groups (Rackley, 2014). Referring to or making allusions to the Bible during a Brethren worship service created additional meaning for congregants (Borker, 1986). Shoaps (2002) investigated how participants at an Assemblies of God Pentecostal church integrated Biblical texts with spontaneous personal prayer to construct their identity, while Corwin (2014) explored the

effects of praying in front of others at a Catholic convent. These studies demonstrated the importance of these practices across denominational affiliation.

An early exploration of glossolalia pioneered by Samarin (1972) was the first of its kind to study why religious people speak in tongues. Samarin defined glossolalia as “a meaningless but phonologically structured human utterance believed by the speaker to be a real language but bearing no systematic resemblance to any natural language, living or dead” (p. 2). While those who speak in tongues largely participated in Pentecostal traditions, Samarin found that many of his survey respondents and interviewees came from other Christian traditions, such as Catholicism and Presbyterianism (p. 5). Glossolalia can occur in both public and private settings, and serves as “an in-group phenomenon” as well as “a means to demonstrate the presence of supernatural power to convince the unbeliever” (p. 221). Yet glossolalia is just one aspect of religious discourse that is often met with skepticism and criticism by other Christians (p. 43). There are a number of other linguistic practices to explore in addition to the specific phenomenon of glossolalia.

While Wuthnow (2011) did not study religious discourse himself, he advocated for the need to analyze discursive markers, metaphorical language, and categories within religious discourse in order to make sense of religious symbols, meaning, and behavior. Sawin’s (2013) study starts to answer Wuthnow’s call for the study of specific features of religious discourse. In the context of an Evangelical men’s Bible study, Sawin examined the role of masculinity by analyzing the discourse over several meetings. The competing models of masculinity – *Larger American*, *Evangelical*, and *Local Congregation* – were then compared by examining instances of servant-leading, military and athletic imagery, self-deprecating humor, humor rooted in sexuality and wordplay, vocabulary, and animation of masculine-indexicalized pop culture sources. This important study moved beyond simply

looking at the use of the Bible during a Bible study to a specific exploration of how the members used language within that context.

Youth, language, and religion

One important research area that relates to the setting of this study involves youth in religious contexts because this is often where they are exposed to religious language, both theological and conversational. In an effort to gain a broader perspective on the religiosity of teenagers in the United States, Smith and Denton (2005) led a nationwide research project that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods. This National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) conducted telephone surveys of 3,290 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17, as well as their parents, using the random-digit-dial (RDD) method (p. 292). The second phase of the study involved 267 in-depth personal interviews that further probed teenagers' religious, spiritual, family, and social lives (p. 302). This triangulation of data collection enabled a kind of generalizability that had not previously existed in the literature. They found the vast majority of the American teenagers they interviewed to be "*incredibly inarticulate* about their faith, their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives" (p. 131, emphasis in original). While a small number of older and more religiously devoted teenagers expressed themselves more clearly about God, faith, and spiritual life, "impressively articulate teens were few and far between" (p. 133). These comments about the lack of articulation are just that; Smith and Denton never stated their criteria for evaluating how articulate their participants were.

One can interpret they meant that the teenagers they referenced had trouble talking about their faith. In fact, Dean (2010), one of the interviewers involved in the NSYR project, explained that Smith and Denton's (2005) reference to "highly devoted [religious] teenagers" meant those "who *could* talk about what they believed, and who *did* share stories about religion's impact on their lives – stories in which God had agency and was not merely a

distant bystander” (p. 135, emphasis in original). In the same paragraph, Dean uses “religious vocabulary” and “theological vocabulary” interchangeably (p. 135), which leads to a possible assumption that these researchers equated the young people’s lack of theological language with inarticulacy about their faith.

Dean (2010) further argued this might be due to the lack of opportunities for teenagers to learn “the grammar, vocabularies, habits, virtues, or practices of mature Christian adults” (p. 152). Some churches have used certain means, like spiritual apprenticeships or faith immersions, to immerse young people into Christian “language communities” that offer them the necessary language to talk about their faith (p. 149). For decades, the prevailing model of youth ministry in Protestant churches in the United States has been to separate the children and adolescents from the adults, but this has taken away the opportunity for youth to learn how to talk about their faith from a community of mature Christians (Smith & Denton, 2005; Dean, 2010). Despite the detailed research in Smith and Denton’s study, the focus remained on American adolescents’ religiosity – not the language they used to demonstrate it.

Very few studies about the actual religious discourse of young people in these Evangelical faith communities exist. In one such study, Surdacki and Gonzalez (2014) examined a group of middle and high school students at a Bible camp on a faith-based university campus, one particular kind of faith immersion mentioned by Dean (2010). While the authors continued to refer to “the language of faith,” they never defined what that was. By using a survey, they aimed to understand what the participants actually believed, not the language they used to convey that belief. In their discussion they suggested that more explanation be given in the context of certain important rituals, such as baptism, in order for adolescents to learn the reasons, beliefs, and language that underscore faith practices. However, they failed to clarify examples of “the language of faith,” and with their example

of baptism, one could believe their “language of faith” simply means the theological language used to describe such practices – not the mundane language used to express one’s faith.

Christianese

In the search to define the nature of faith language used within Evangelical communities, many in-group speakers use specific terms to refer to the language patterns, such as Christian lingo (Hill, 2013), Christianese (Unice, 2012), jargon (Norris, 1998), a special register (Saunders, 2014), and overused clichés (Piatt, 2012). While this peculiarly religious language is widely acknowledged within Christian communities, it is often mocked or made the butt of insider jokes (Law, 2018). Yet, it remains in usage, offering a powerful marker of identity to others inside and outside of these communities. As Norris (1998) states, “Any language can become a code; in religious terms, this means a jargon that speaks only to the converted” (p. 8). Even within the faith community, some of the discourse can remain mysterious. Having been raised Catholic and then later attending a United Methodist church, Tim Stewart began collecting words and phrases he had never heard before to create the online Dictionary of Christianese, “the casual slang of the Christian church...authoritatively defined” (2017). This website seeks to define and describe the “slang words and expressions” used by Christians to explain their faith. Yet there is more to Christianese than simply lexis.

Only a few studies exist that focus primarily on the actual language variety used by Evangelicals: Coleman (1980), Leiter (2013), and Notman (2017). Coleman’s paper was the first attempt to describe certain elements of Christianese, though this nomenclature was nonexistent at that time. Leiter’s study described the features of Christianese in the most detail, and Notman simply used Leiter’s conclusions to assist his conversation analysis of the Christianese used by members of Bible studies, demonstrating no critical approach to her work but merely using it as the basis for his own study. It is important to note that both Leiter

and Notman conducted their research as undergraduates in fulfillment of their honors program requirements. Thus, the somewhat basic approach and flat conclusions are not unexpected, but these studies can still serve as starting points for further research.

As mentioned in section 2.1.3., Coleman (1980) coined the term *worldviewlect* to refer to the way Evangelical language reflected the beliefs of the faith. The term *worldviewlect* never caught on with other scholars; however, Hary (1992) initially developed the concept of *religiolect*, then further defined by Hary and Wein (2013) as a language variety “with its own history and development, which is used by a religious community. Since religions (or secularisms) are intrinsic parts of human society and communication, language varieties could be analyzed for their religious associations and described as religiolects” (p. 88). Originally created to describe Judeo-Arabic languages and varieties, Leiter (2013) applied this concept to Christianese by locating it within the context of a variety of Southern American English, a particular regional dialect, spoken by Evangelical Protestants (Leiter, 2013, p. 9). “The variety is distinct from Standard American English pragmatically, semantically, lexically, semiotically, syntactically, and possibly phonologically” (p. 9), she claimed. However, Christianese extends beyond the Southern region of the United States, as will be evidenced by the Midwestern US context of this current study, and is a shared feature of community membership among Evangelicals across the country.

Of key importance is that Leiter (2013) chose data without any clear rationale from websites written by non-academic insiders of the Evangelical community and then created a survey around those words and phrases. Based on this selectively chosen data (p. 38), Leiter detailed seven different elements unique to Christianese as a means for marking membership in the Evangelical community: functional shift, preservation of archaic forms, allusions to the Bible, “borrowing” of Biblical terms, the use of passive voice, personification of God, and

the use of metaphor. In the following paragraphs, I will provide a brief overview of each element, examples, and my own critique of her inclusion of each as characteristics of Christianese.

Functional shift refers to when an existing word takes on a new syntactic function. While this feature is not unique to Christianese, Leiter (2013) cited some examples that hold special meaning within this community of speakers. The verb phrase, *born again*, shifted in usage as an adjective and noun, refers to someone who has personally accepted Christ. The words, *disciple* and *fellowship*, typically seen as nouns in Standard American English, can be used as verbs or gerunds (p. 24), as in “He *discipled* me last year,” and “We had a great time of *fellowshipping* after the service”.

Leiter (2013) included the preservation of archaic forms as a feature of Christianese, citing several weak examples that included a statement made by someone who attended an Evangelical church in Atlanta, Georgia (*The Lord is faithful to provide*) (p. 26) and the term *sistren* that “fell into disuse in Standard English in the sixteenth century” (p. 27) identified by Tim Stewart (2017) as published in his online *Dictionary of Christianese*. With the first example, Leiter incorrectly identified *faithful* as an adverb, which was an archaic form; but in this instance, *faithful* functions as a predicate adjective, modifying *the Lord*. Furthermore, Stewart described *sistren* as having “a nice fancy ‘King James Bible’ sound to it” despite the King James Version never using that archaic plural form of sister (2017). Leiter used Stewart’s entry to claim that *sistren* “is used presently in the southern United States as the plural of sister” (p. 27), but Stewart’s source offers inconclusive evidence.

The explanations of allusion to the Bible and “borrowing” of Biblical terms in Leiter’s (2013) study converged rather unclearly. Under the section about allusions to the Bible, she described several words commonly used in Christianese that are taken from the Bible: *fellowship*, *hallelujah*, *amen*, and *hosanna* (p. 29). She distinguished allusions from

“borrowing” in that Christianese speakers have adapted the “borrowed” words from the Bible to have modern meanings; for example, Leiter claimed that *redemption* in the Bible was used to describe freedom from slavery, but the Christianese meaning today refers to salvation from sin (p. 31).

The use of passive voice, also noted by Coleman (1980), refers primarily to the way in which Christianese speakers attribute actions or events to God (Leiter, 2013, p. 25). Discussion about the personification of God also included the notion of God’s agency, in that God is actively involved in the lives of His followers, which contributes to them feeling “a personal connection with God” (Leiter, 2013, p. 32). Because God’s agency appeared to be such a central characteristic of Christianese, I devoted a chapter in this study to exploring how the participants talked about God. Describing this agency as simply the use of the passive voice or classifying it as personification of God reduces the complexity and nuance for how members of the Evangelical community talk about God. (See chapter 5 for a full discussion.)

Metaphor is the final feature of Christianese discussed by Leiter (2013), which she connected with allusions to the Bible and personification of God. She claimed this is an important aspect of Christianese because “it highlights the religiolect’s role in creating a particular lens through which speakers view the world, both philosophically and experientially” (p. 33). Though she did not explicitly reference conceptual metaphor theory, she touched on this with the example of *backslide*, which means “a Christian who has begun to retreat from or subscribe less passionately to the teachings of Christianity” (p. 34); as a metaphor, it “conjures up images of sliding backwards down a mountain...after exerting energy in order to climb in the opposite direction, upwards” (p. 35). In this way, she argued, “Christianese speakers equate Christianity with ‘up’ and non-Christianity with ‘down’” (p. 35), which hearkens to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) treatment of spatial concepts (pp. 56-

57). From the data I collected, I noted the high frequency of metaphors and devoted chapter 6 to a discussion of how the study participants used metaphors to discuss their relationships with others, God, and themselves.

Finally, Notman (2017) examined Christianese in the context of a conversation analysis (CA) of two Bible studies. As mentioned near the beginning of this section, he used Leiter's (2013) proposed characteristics of Christianese as the basis for his analysis, but he also grounded them within the CA framework. The characteristics he discussed included "allusions to the Bible, allusions to larger Christian culture, religious topic choice, framing extended statements as mini-sermons, Christian-specific jargon and phrasing, and backchanneling" (p. 25). He also provided excerpts from his recorded data (and other random data sources, such as *The Simpsons*) that illustrated his claims more fully than Leiter managed in her study. For example, he supported the Christianese feature of allusions to the Bible with several examples and noted how "speakers of Christianese pepper passages of the Bible into conversation not only for humorous effect but also to substantiate their connection with God" (p. 28), evoking Coleman's (1980) point about the language expressing Evangelical worldview.

Allusions to the larger Christian culture can include references to Christian hymns or contemporary worship songs, famous pastors, worship leaders, or churches (Notman, 2017, p. 33). Shifting the topic to religious issues assists Christianese speakers in verifying their "in-group membership and group identity" (p. 36). Notman illustrated this with a participant talking about his "time with God," a topic that the Bible study group clearly prioritized (p. 37). The fourth feature he discussed was framing longer statements as mini-sermons. He compared the structure of one particular extract to the typical structure of a sermon (p. 39).

The next feature Notman (2017) identified is Christian-specific jargon, which included theological terms, metaphors, and ambiguous words, such as *word* to signify a

meaningful message from God, the Bible, or another Christian (pp. 41-43). He also included “God as semantic agent” in this category, based on the use of passive voice in Christianese (p. 47). This category is the most relevant to my study because metaphors and agency became key areas of my analysis due to their prevalence in the data.

The final feature Notman (2017) described was backchanneling: speakers voiced affirmations of another Bible study member’s comments about his “time with God” (p. 51). Their backchannels of “wow” and “praise God” acted as “stamps of approval” for their friend and acts as validation for his in-group membership (p. 52). Thus, Notman argued that Christianese speakers use these features to “demonstrate their membership in a group of Christians and their connectedness to the larger Christian culture” (p.55). While Notman’s study offered the most detailed linguistic analysis of Christianese thus far, the data set was comprised of two Bible study sessions, totaling 90 minutes of recorded data. The extremely limited aspect of his data sample reduces any kind of generalizability and only serves as an entry into further study.

2.1.4. Summary

The above sections reviewed relevant studies from the research areas of sociology of language and religion (SLR), Christians in higher education, and Christian discourse, particularly language of Evangelicals. Studies in the SLR research domain have included Christian discourse, but there has been no comprehensive, systematic exploration of the language variety itself or how students at an Evangelical university use the language as a form of participation in the community. Likewise, the investigations regarding Christians in higher education primarily aimed to describe the cultures of these various groups, with no emphasis on the role of language. Thus, there is a lack of research exploring the everyday language used by Evangelicals, specifically within a faith-based university context. The next section of this chapter will outline the theoretical framework for this study, which is drawn

from Wenger's (1998) community of practice model, and detail the specific elements of this model used in this study.

2.2. Theoretical framework: communities of practice

This study seeks to explore the use of Christianese among first-year students within the context of a Christian higher education institution. Rather than attempt a more systematic approach than Stewart's (2017) to cataloguing and describing the lexis that comprises Christianese, I want to understand how newcomers to a Christianese-speaking community ultimately find belonging (or not) in that community by adopting (or not) their language practices.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Indiana Wesleyan University sits within the context of Christian higher education: the institution places high priority on integrating academic disciplines with personal faith. But few studies have explored the role of language within this kind of academic, faith-based community. Where does one's faith intersect with the language used by members of the community? What type of language community is this? Sociolinguists have used the terms *speech community* and *discourse community* to explore language in various settings.

A speech community consists of people who share similar language patterns or recognize their language use as different from another speech community (Hymes, 1972), for example, Southern American English and Midwestern American English; additionally, membership in this type of community is not necessarily by choice (Borg, 2003). Speech communities also tend to share certain values and social norms in addition to the shared linguistic norms (Gumperz, 1972; Milroy, 1980). Fishman's (2006) Decalogue, introduced above, assumed the use of speech community to refer to the sociocultural setting in which people are fully socialized and enculturated and proceeded to use the term in some of his principles (p. 14). In the same volume, Wolf (2006) questioned whether West African

English (WAE) could be described as a speech community; he ultimately affirmed this based on the definition of “a group of people that feels connected through the use of the same language or language variety” (p. 43). Yet these paradigms have been critiqued for their lack of attention to the way shared practices contribute to the maintenance of the community and its language (Holmes & Myerhoff, 1999).

A discourse community typically involves a set of shared (usually written) language patterns, often divided into genres, which are used to further a set of common goals (Swales, 1990, p. 9). The term discourse community can be used to describe academic disciplines as separate discourse communities, such as paleontology or political science (Borg, 2003), or the academy can be viewed as a discourse community itself (Bizzell, 1982; Spack, 1988). Religious communities can be viewed as kinds of discourse community using Swales’ definition: they share common texts, such as the Bible or the Qur’an, and they seek to further common goals, both for the community and the individual. Chruszczewski (2006) applied this term when he argued that religious texts play an important role in integrating the ethnic identity formation process in Jewish religious discourse communities, particularly in Israel, yet he only examined the function of prayers as religious text and no other aspect of Jewish religious discourse. While a religious community can certainly be described as a kind of discourse community, identifying it only as a discourse community omits the very central element of practice, both physical and linguistic, within that community.

Thus, as Indiana Wesleyan University forms a kind of religious community for learning, in terms of both academic and social learning, I turned to Wenger’s (1998) model of *communities of practice* (CoP) since it provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates community, language, and identity in terms of the shared practices of a particular community. In the subsequent sections, I will describe the relevant aspects of the CoP framework that I will use to answer my research questions in the analysis chapters.

Communities of practice as a theory for learning began with Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on situated learning and the role of legitimate peripheral participation. They determined that learning constitutes not just a provision for membership but an evolving form of membership within a particular setting, whether academic, vocational, or familial (p. 53). Their notion of situated learning reconceptualized learning not just by apprenticeship but also by participating in communities of practice. Learners in apprenticeships "must be legitimate peripheral participants in ongoing practice in order for learning identities to be engaged and develop into full participation" (p. 64). This participation was viewed as "a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the 'culture of practice'" (p. 95). Thus, they defined a community of practice as "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p. 98).

Wenger (1998) expanded this concept to view communities of practice as the central concept in his social theory of learning, with an explicit association between practice and community. In his theory, four components are integrally important for learning to occur: meaning (learning as experience), practice (learning as doing), community (learning as belonging), and identity (learning as becoming) (p. 5). The communities of practice (CoP) framework presents a model of how these components are integrated within a setting familiar to those involved.

The concept of practice is essential to his understanding of learning. Practice, as defined by Wenger (1998), "connotes doing, but not just doing in and of itself. It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do" (p. 47); thus, practice is social – something we do with others. To illustrate his theory in a real-life setting, he used the context of a medical claims processing center operated by an insurance company he called Alinsu, in which the claims processors he observed developed various practices in

order to do their jobs and create a gratifying experience at work. These practices, moreover, went beyond the individual tasks required by their work to include the meaningful engagement with fellow claims processors. This notion of social practice can include both the explicit, such as language, well-defined roles, or regulations, as well as the tacit, such as subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, or underlying assumptions (p. 47).

The CoP framework has been applied to a wide variety of fields, including education (Swales, 2003), management (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), and language and gender studies (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 1999), though Rock (2005) pointed out the inconsistent appropriation of this framework in various studies (p. 77, n. 1). Additionally, no work has yet drawn from this framework to explore the language practices of students at an Evangelical Christian university as this current study does. In the following sections, I will highlight specific elements of Wenger's (1998) CoP framework that I will incorporate in my study: community, identity, and participation and non-participation.

2.2.1. Community

The aim of this study is to explore particular characteristics of Christianese discourse within the context of a Christian university. As previously discussed in this chapter (section 1.2), neither speech community (Hymes, 1972) nor discourse community (Swales, 1990) fits the needs of this study because, rather than studying the characteristics of the language of a community per se, I am interested in how individuals draw on the language resources of a community to position themselves within that community. Specifically, I investigate how first-year students use certain characteristics of Christianese to construct their identity and thus mark their membership in the IWU community. As I examined the language practices of the participants in this study, such as the practice of sharing one's testimony with others, I sought a definition of community that moves beyond speech or discourse. For the purpose of this study, I adopted Wenger's (1998) definition of community, which is informed by his

CoP framework: community is a set of social relationships that coalesce around shared activities; these activities are viewed as worth pursuing and have varying degrees of participation (p. 5). A community of practice, then, involves “an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor” of shared interest or purpose; as a social construct, it “is different from the traditional community, primarily because it is defined simultaneously by its membership and by the *practice* [emphasis added] in which that membership engages” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464).

Members of a community of practice participate in three dimensions of community: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998, p. 73). Mutual engagement encompasses the relational aspect of community, i.e., “doing things together,” that helps maintain the community (p. 73). Joint enterprise refers to the idea that members continually renegotiate their response to the community, which then further shapes the practices of the community. Over time, this mutual work in a joint enterprise creates resources for negotiating meaning; these resources become a shared repertoire. Of these three dimensions, I will focus on the shared repertoire as a key part of the community of practice at Indiana Wesleyan University.

Shared repertoire

This notion of a shared repertoire includes the connotation of the “rehearsed character [of practice] and its availability for further engagement in practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). The testimony narratives I analyze in Chapter 4 demonstrate the rehearsed character of this particular practice within the community. Those participants of the study who were quite familiar with the IWU CoP drew from the testimony genre shared among Evangelicals, while those participants who were less familiar with the CoP demonstrated fewer characteristics of the genre.

The shared repertoire in a CoP includes numerous aspects, both reificative and participative, among them routines, words, discourse, or concepts created or adopted by the community – all means used to “express their forms of membership and their identities as members” (p. 83). Though language is not the only practice included in a CoP, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1995) argued, “The continual modification of common ways of speaking provides a touchstone for the process of construction of forms of group identity—of the meaning of belonging to a group (as a certain kind of member)” and acts as “a resource for the orientation of the community and its participants to other nearby communities and to the larger society” (pp. 468-469).

Members of faith-based universities conform to this concept, as there are distinct routines (and prohibitions) discussed in section 2.1.2 and discursive patterns that carry distinctive meaning within the community, and in turn reflect their identities as members of the community. In Chapter 5, I discuss a systematic analysis of how participants talked about God and when they attributed agency to God for events in their lives. In Chapter 6, I investigate metaphors used by the participants to discuss relationships. These analyses show patterns for accepted ways of talking about God at IWU and how certain metaphors carry shared meaning within the CoP, and thus demonstrate participants’ use of the shared repertoire of agency and metaphors.

2.2.2. Identity

As members of a community of practice draw from their shared repertoire, they engage in the practices of the community. How they view themselves in relation to others helps form their “meaning in the world” (Eckert, 2000, p. 41) and thus plays a role in their identity construction. One’s experience is then “constructed in collaboration with others as those others engage in the same construction for themselves” (p. 41). Identity, then, is a process of both engagement in and disengagement from a community, and individual identity

is co-constructed with group identities (p. 42). Gee (2011) asserted, “We build identities for others as a way to build ones for ourselves” (p. 18). While there are many approaches to theorizing identity and investigating identity construction, I will mainly draw from Wenger’s (1998) characterization of identity from the CoP framework. However, since the context for the present study is a religious academic university, a brief overview of relevant studies is in order.

Because of the religious aspect of Indiana Wesleyan University, wherein certain behaviors are expected while others are prohibited, the university projects a kind of collective identity based on the practices that members participate in and abstain from. IWU’s collective identity is consonant with the kinds of norms that can be associated with many Christian institutions as discussed in section 2.1.2, such as identifying as Christ-followers, engaging in relationships with others as a way to encourage one another’s spiritual beliefs, and living a certain way. This latter concept often deals with prohibitive behavior, such as abstinence from alcohol and sexual activity, refraining from wearing immodest clothing, and rejecting the use of foul language, particularly using God’s name in a flippant manner.

The study of collective identity is multi-faceted, reaching across the disciplines of social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and applied linguistics. It constitutes the notion that members of a group share certain characteristics with each other: individual elements that form a collective identity include self-categorization, social embeddedness, evaluation, and behavioral involvement (Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004, p. 83). Koller (2012) added that collective identity should be understood as “being constructed, negotiated, and changed through discursive interaction within and between groups” (p. 20). Yet studies using Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) and stance-analysis have demonstrated that not all members of religious communities adhere to the same identities projected by the leadership of those communities (Power, 2014; Power, 2016).

A growing area of research has begun to study identity within religious communities, particularly Evangelical Christians (Magolda & Ebben, 2006; Moran, 2007; Good & Willoughby, 2007). Moran (2007) examined public identity work, i.e., the construction, expression, and management of one's public identity (as defined by Johnston, Larana, and Gusfield, 1994; Goffman, 1959) of Evangelical Christian students at a public university. Moran did not focus on language as a key component of this public identity work, but her findings revealed several terms or phrases shared by the participants in her study that appeared to build and sustain a collective identity. While not focused specifically on collective identity, Good & Willoughby's (2007) study explored the religious identity of rural adolescents and discovered that participation in activities within their religious communities (e.g., church, youth group, service projects) played an important role in their identity construction: the strong sense of religious identity held by the religious teenagers arose in part from their engagement in corporate religious practices.

The CoP framework enables the intersection of a community's practices with the formation of one's identity; it also offers an explanation regarding the connection between individual identity and the collective identity of the community. Wenger (1998) stated, "Building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of experience of membership in social communities" (p. 145) and viewed "the very definition of individuality as something that is part of the practices of specific communities" (p. 146). Moreover, identity is a lived experience; it is a process of becoming within social contexts that involves learning across space and time (p. 163). Just as Wenger (1998) mentioned the role of language in the process of building identities, Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz (1982) also emphasized this when they wrote, "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (p. 7). This view allows room for a combination of linguistic descriptions and social dimensions to work together in identifying how members construct their identity both

individually and in terms of the community. This way of understanding identity is central to studying identity construction within the context of a faith-based university; as first-year students begin to find their place within the academic and religious community, they may or may not adopt the language practices of the community to varying degrees.

Furthermore, identity in a community of practice can be viewed as a form of competence (Wenger, 1998, p. 153). This competence can be subdivided into three domains that contribute to identity: mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise, and negotiability of a repertoire. Full members of a particular community of practice demonstrate competence by how they engage with others in the community, their investment in the shared enterprise of the community, and their ability to interpret and use the common repertoire of the community (p. 152). In Wenger's words, "we know who are are by what is familiar, understandable, usable, negotiable; we know who we are not by what is foreign, opaque, unwieldy, unproductive" (p. 153). As members increase their competence with the shared repertoire of the CoP, their "identities are both created and recognized by others" (Paltridge, 2015, p. 18). Yet members do not necessarily arrive at full competence in Wenger's framework, as is made evident by means of the concept of trajectories.

Trajectories

Identity is not a fixed state of being in Wenger's (1998) CoP framework; rather "our identity is something we constantly renegotiate during the course of our lives" (p. 154). He used the language of trajectories to illustrate how one's identity is in continuous motion rather than being a fixed destination. Wenger identified five different types of trajectories: peripheral, inbound, insider, boundary, and outbound. Peripheral trajectories never quite lead to full participation in a community, but they provide a type of access to the community that can influence one's identity. Inbound trajectories typically refer to newcomers joining the community with the intention of fully participating in the present and future. Insider

trajectories assume full participation with the understanding that “the evolution of the practice continues” (p. 154) with the possibility of continually renegotiating one’s identity. Boundary trajectories engage in the delicate work of crossing boundaries and connecting various communities of practice. Outbound trajectories lead out of a community of practice (pp. 154-155).

In Chapter 5, after analyzing the participants’ testimony narratives, I group the participants in terms of the trajectories I associate with their narratives. For this purpose, I chose to focus on the insider, inbound, and peripheral trajectories based on the results of the analysis.

2.2.3. Participation and non-participation

Similar to Eckert’s (2000) view of collaborative identity construction described above, Wenger’s (1998) model includes both participation and non-participation in a particular community as part of identity formation (p. 148). He declared, “We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in” (p. 164). Keeping in mind that the learning trajectories discussed in 2.2.1 do not imply a fixed course or destination, the CoP framework assumes that participation in the community’s practices enables members to move toward full(er) participation. However, non-participation carries some complexity since it involves a combination of both participation and non-participation.

Wenger (1998) described how peripherality and marginality could be a product of this non-participation. With peripherality, participation is “enabled by non-participation”, but with marginality, participation is “restricted by non-participation” (p. 167). However, this characterization fails to sufficiently distinguish between what qualifies as peripheral or marginal and how that would impact one’s categorization within the community. Wenger hints at a possible issue of agency with this example regarding marginality: “long-standing

members can be kept in a marginal position” (p. 166). His choice of the passive voice assumes some other agent, presumably someone in management, who is keeping long-standing members in that marginal position. Thus, it is possible to consider the marginal status as being less of one’s own choice to not participate in certain practices.

2.2.4. Summary

To summarize, the community of practice (CoP) framework offers a different perspective for investigating the role of language practices in an Evangelical Christian university context by combining the concepts of community, identity, and participation and non-participation. Within these concepts, the specific elements of the shared repertoire and trajectories of participation provide a means to understand how members use language to identify their belonging within the community. In the following analysis chapters, these concepts will be revisited in order to bring clarity to the research questions of this study.

2.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, existing research fails to emphasize both the characteristics of Christianese and how students use this discourse to find belonging in an academic community of practice. Moreover, the existing linguistic research on Christianese fails to draw from a large source of data in a systematic way. The research regarding religious communities, particularly Evangelical communities, typically overlooks the role of common Christian discourse in individual and collective identity formation. However, the communities of practice framework provides a theoretical underpinning for the exploration of the role language plays in the intersection of language, religion, and identity construction within the context of a faith-based university. The way Wenger (1998) brings together notions of community, identity, and participation and non-participation enables the investigation of how first-year students use Christianese to construct their identity at a Christian university.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3. Methodology and methods

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Qualitative investigation

The central aim of this study is to determine if and how first-year students use Christianese to construct their identity at a faith-based university. Defining certain elements of Christianese is a secondary issue that supports the principal focus on identity construction. As Christianese is a shared way of speaking among Evangelical Christians, the type of data I need in order to fully explain these issues will be actual speech samples: interactions with these students within the campus setting and observations of other campus community members, such as chaplains and professors, who act as religious models there. Thus, I chose to conduct mainly qualitative research in order to focus on the discourse patterns of the participants in my study, bolstered by some quantitative elements to support my findings. Collecting data at the site where the participants live their experience in the IWU community as well as collecting multiple forms of data draw on the wide variety of accepted practices within qualitative research. Furthermore, providing a holistic account of the complex issue and including the reflexivity of the researcher remain important aspects of qualitative research (Cresswell, 2013). Finally, counting various words or structures in the data aids in the identification of patterns during the analysis process and substantiates conclusions formed by using the qualitative approach (Morgan, 1993).

In the twentieth century, much of the sociological research on religion in the United States came out of the positivist research paradigm, seeking facts about behaviors and attitudes (Silverman, 2001). These researchers primarily used surveys (Wuthnow, 2011) with the purpose of determining participants' religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices (Gallup & Rae, 1940; Glock & Stark, 1965; Lenski, 1961; Surdacki & Gonzalez, 2014). A less common

approach was ethnographic, examining rituals such as marriage, funerals, and bedside confessions (see Wuthnow (2011) for a review of such studies.). Even less common was researching the “talk” of participants in studies; talk was viewed as trivial or superficial, difficult to replicate in other studies, and of peripheral importance to sociologists (Wuthnow, 2011, p. 5). However, while surveys offer big-picture descriptions of an issue, “directly observing and talking with people at length” enables researchers “to get to the important experiences, feelings, contradictions, processes, and complex layers of meaning in most people’s lives” (Smith and Denton, 2005, p. 118). Hence, a qualitative approach yields a better result than a more quantitative survey-based approach for exploring language patterns and practices within this setting. Interviewing the first-year students and observing their spiritually formative experiences on campus enables the researcher to provide a clear description of their lived experience within the IWU community and to capture the role of Christianese in their identity construction.

As evidenced from Chapter 2, more recent studies on religious language center primarily on theological language and how one understands it in relation to personal faith, harkening back to the positivist search for established facts about behaviors and attitudes. The purpose of this study is neither to determine the participants’ understanding of theological language nor to identify their level of personal commitment to Christianity. It is, however, to begin to identify and describe the language patterns and practices used by first-year students at a faith-based university. Surveys would not give the kind of contextualized detail necessary to determine these patterns and practices. I explore how first-year students utilize the faith language used at this university to construct a particular kind of “Christian college student” identity. I chose to explore these issues using a qualitative approach because this kind of inquiry is “a person-centered enterprise” (Richards, 2003, p. 9) and allows the researcher to access the natural language used to describe one’s experiences and feelings.

Wuthnow (2011) asserted, “[T]alk is cultural work that people do to make sense of their lives and to orient their behavior” (p. 9). In order to ascertain an accurate picture of my participants’ language use for identity construction, the logical choice is to situate my study within the realm of qualitative inquiry. It is important to add, however, that I chose to include the quantitative element of counting for two of the three major analyses I conducted on the data in order to substantiate my claims, as well as a Pearson correlation test to strengthen my claim of the connections between these analyses.

Thus, in addition to using a primarily qualitative approach for this study, I espouse the social constructionist research paradigm. I understand social reality to be co-constructed by participants as they live it, together developing a shared set of beliefs, practices, and artifacts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The social constructionist perspective will enhance my investigation of certain elements of that social reality. In this paradigm, researchers operate under the assumption that reality is socially constructed, and they want to understand the complexity of people’s lived experiences from their particular point of view (Richards, 2003; Schwandt, 1994).

3.1.2. Ethnography

With this in mind, I have chosen to primarily use interviews informed by some participant observation within a broadly ethnographic perspective. Ethnographic research involves taking a deeper look into a particular culture, small communities within a larger one (Harklau, 2005), or even organizations or programs (Dörnyei, 2007). The central purpose of this kind of research is to study a particular group long enough in order to describe how the people belonging to that culture function within it in daily life, work, or recreation (Heigham & Sakui, 2009, p. 92). Ethnography originated in anthropological and sociological research that focused on naturalistic, long-term observation and participation in a particular social setting: the early ethnographers like Malinowski, Mead, and Evans-Pritchard spent

considerable time among indigenous people groups as they sought to describe various social structures or events in cultures that differed significantly from Western culture (Geertz, 1989). In more recent years, ethnographic research has been used in a variety of educational settings (Harklau, 2005).

Ethnography has been treated as both a method (Mackey & Gass, 2005) and as a methodology (Richards, 2003; Heigham & Sakui, 2009) and, at times, discussed as both simultaneously (Dörnyei, 2007). Lillis (2008) carefully differentiated the terms *method* and *methodology*: a method being a technique or tool that is used alongside other tools, while a methodology is a collection of methods (or data sources) that operates within a specific ontology and epistemology (pp. 355; 374-375). She situated her understanding of these terms within her context of researching academic writing, considering the values and limitations of defining ethnography in these ways. Viewing ethnography as a kind of method, namely, tools and techniques largely taken from anthropological ethnography, creates the opportunity to consider the context of the text, but Lillis further argued that understanding ethnography as a methodology allows the researcher to take a more holistic approach “in order to move away from a container notion of context...and towards a notion of contextualization—that is, researching what is relevant from any specific aspect of context to specific acts and practices [of the issue]” (p. 381). Thus, ethnography as a methodology enables the researcher, as in her study, to blend together the emic and etic understandings due to the thick description and participation obtained through continued engagement with participants (p. 382).

From my viewpoint, ethnography as a methodology is supported by and operates on a few key assumptions. First, there is value in studying a small slice of a particular culture or extensively probing a circumscribed setting in order to gain a rich, detailed understanding of that situation. The “thick description” described by Geertz (1973) plays an important role here. Geertz discussed thick description, drawing on the work of the philosopher Gilbert

Ryle, as including both a description of observed events and an interpretation of the cultural meaning of these events in context, thus contributing to a fuller understanding of a particular situation. Second, how the researchers understand or interpret this small slice can inform the larger community or can speak to related issues within the larger community. Third, researchers, as much as possible, should be reflexively aware of the agendas that they bring to the research and their impact on the study itself (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 18), while allowing the data to speak for itself (Wolcott, 1994). While my study is not a full ethnography in the classic sense, where I followed first-year students around campus and experienced their first year of university as they did, the assumptions above guide my choice of ethnographic methods, namely interviews and participant observation, to explore identity construction.

The use of these methods is justified in two ways. The first is that the primary topic of this study centers on the language patterns and practices of the participants – how they use particular language to construct a particular identity. Therefore, engaging them in conversation can elicit speech patterns and illuminate the practices in which each participant engages. For social constructionists, conversing together is an important act in creating meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1966): this position views the interview as co-constructed by both interviewer and interviewee, “offering insights into what participants *say* they believe or do” (Edley & Litosseliti, 2010, p. 173, emphasis in original). While these first-year students would not normally engage in interviews, these interactions still have the potential to elicit the participants’ speech patterns and experiences within the university community. Since I want to focus on what my participants actually say, interviews are a helpful method for obtaining this kind of data.

The second relates to my role within the community as a faculty member for over a decade (discussed more fully in section 3.2.4). Though I had not officially studied the

community culture prior to this study, as a member of the community, I have lived this culture for many years as a participant and an observer and have thus developed an emic perspective. One of the key characteristics of ethnography is participant observation for an extended period of time (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995); moreover, ethnographic studies typically involve the element of a longitudinal design in which researchers study the desired issue or people group for a considerable length of time (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004, p. 536). After a brief discussion on the debate of what time requirements exist for an ethnographic study to be counted as longitudinal, Jeffrey and Troman discussed different ethnographic time modes, focusing more on the researcher as an outsider to the selected research site. Their notion of a recurrent time mode for ethnographic research fits well with my study because it offers the “opportunity to follow the narrative of an experience...over a specific time period and to chart the development” of particular individuals over time (p. 542). Because my ongoing membership within the community depends on me performing my fulltime work requirements as a faculty member, I could not spend all of my time interviewing and observing. Thus, I selected periods throughout the academic year for interviewing my participants in order to note any changes in their own language practices as they became familiar with the community’s language practices. Ultimately, this is an ethnographically informed interview study with participant observation, all of which will be further explained in the sections below.

3.2. Data Collection and methods

3.2.1. Access

Because of my position in the university as a faculty member, I have created positive collegial relationships with faculty and staff across the university. With the approval of IWU’s Institutional Research Board (IRB) and Lancaster University’s Ethics Committee (see Appendices A and B respectively), I sent out a brief questionnaire on Survey Monkey (in

Appendix C) to all incoming first-year students one week before they came to campus for their New Student Orientation (NSO). The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine participant interest before the academic year began. This survey consisted of three questions. The first two questions listed five different words or phrases commonly used in Evangelical Christian communities chosen from my emic experience; the participants then checked the boxes of those words or phrases they had heard for the first question and used in their own speech for the second question. The third question solicited their interest in participating in this study.

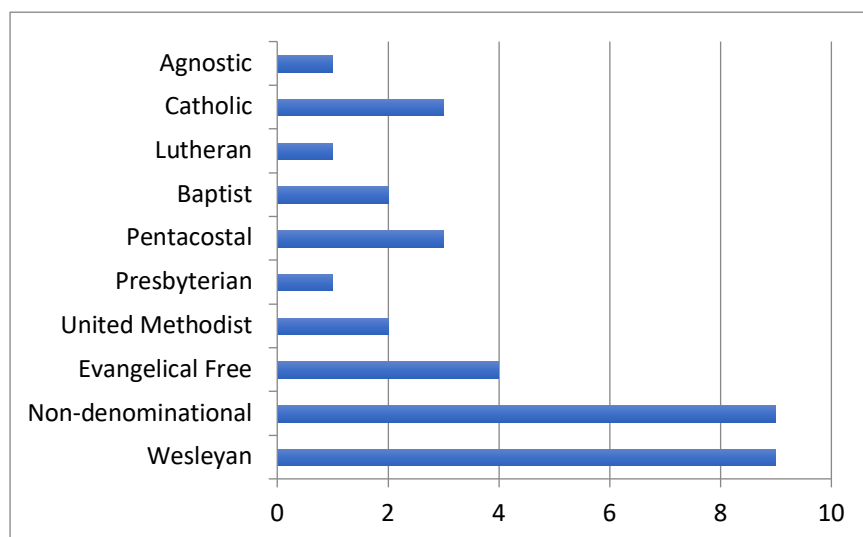
At Indiana Wesleyan University, NSO occurs immediately before the beginning of the academic year for all new students and orients them to the university, academic life, and extracurricular activities. During NSO, I solicited participants for individual interviews by speaking in select sessions led by faculty colleagues. I explained the basic premise of this study and took contact information from interested students. I also used the email list of willing students from the questionnaire, cross-listed with my current first-year students in the courses I taught, and contacted potential participants by email. I purposely chose to exclude any students who were registered for my courses in order to reduce any conflicts of interest. Once I had student interest, each participant signed the informed consent form available in Appendix D during the first interview.

3.2.2. Participants

The student participants of this study were all in their first year at IWU; twenty-five students were first-time university students, and six students transferred to IWU from other universities. Two of these transfer students had attended a different Christian university in the CCCU in their first experience of higher education, while the other four attended community colleges local to their hometowns. Three participants were “missionary kids” (MKs), having spent a significant portion of their formative years in Haiti, Nepal, and Germany. Of the

thirty-one participants, sixteen were female and fifteen were male. All of the participants had some type of experience with the Christian faith – either they were raised in a Christian home or became a Christian through a church or para-church organization at some point in their adolescence. They came from a variety of denominations, the majority being Wesleyan and non-denominational. See Figure 4.1 for a full list of denominational affiliation. Of the two Catholic students, I cross-listed one as also agnostic since she was raised Catholic as a child but rejected the faith as a teenager. At the time of data collection, she identified as agnostic, felt suspicious of religion in general, but remained open to other spiritual possibilities.

Figure 3.1 Denominational affiliation



Some students talked openly and verbosely about their faith, their commitment to Christ, and their thoughts about attending Indiana Wesleyan University, while other students were reticent to say much beyond a few words per answer.

3.2.3. Interviews

Interviews are the most frequently used method in qualitative research studies, possibly because they are a frequent part of social life (Dörnyei, 2007). When operating within the social constructionist perspective, interviews can be understood as conversations in which the interviewer and interviewee are co-constructors of knowledge (Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009). Ethnographically informed interviews can encourage the exploration of an emic, or insiders', perspective of a situation and thereby offer a means of creating a body of data that are "illustrative of particular social phenomena" (Edley & Litosseliti, 2010), or rather, an insiders' construction of that social phenomenon.

Semi-structured interviews

Among the various types of interviews, I chose to use the semi-structured variety as a means to elicit certain speech patterns from students and to get an understanding of their experiences as they related to the community and became adjusted (or not) to community practices. Structured interviews are similar to surveys in that the interviewer must follow the questions rigidly, and the interviewees must choose from closed-ended, fixed responses (Esterberg, 2002). Unstructured interviews allow for spontaneity and utmost flexibility, with the interviewer assuming a listening role as the interviewees take the conversation in unpredictable directions; this variety of interview occurs commonly with participant observation (Esterberg, 2002; Dörnyei, 2007). Semi-structured interviews, then, provide a middle ground in which there is continuity among interviews, as well as a level of flexibility regarding questions and responses. The semi-structured nature enables a common frame of reference across my participants while allowing the exploration of specific issues that arise in the individual interviews (Dörnyei, 2007).

Sensitive topics

During the interviews, I routinely asked the participants about their faith, spiritual growth practices, extracurricular involvement at the university, and their goals for each semester. Certain topics, such as personal faith and spiritual growth practices, could be considered sensitive in nature because they are extremely personal. Sensitive topic research has been defined as any study that could carry "potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the

research” (Sieber & Stanley, 1988, p. 49). Research surrounding sensitive topics tends to be situated in healthcare-related fields (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Elmir et al., 2009; Kavanaugh & Ayres, 1998); yet Lee and Renzetti (1993) argued that almost any topic could be sensitive when the researcher considers the topic within the social context. However, certain areas of research have the potential to cause more threat to the participants, namely, when the research explores a deeply personal experience, deals with a sacred topic, examines issues of deviance and social control, and involves power dynamics that negatively affect one or more parties under investigation (p. 6).

Within the context of a Christian Evangelical university, discussing spiritual issues, both personally and academically, occurs commonly across campus – in chapel, classes, and residence halls; it is not uncommon to walk by students praying openly for each other in public spaces. As discussed in Chapter 2, integrating the Christian faith with learning is a “distinctive task” at Christian higher education institutions (Holmes, 1987, p. 8), so students at IWU experience “faith integration” in their academic classes as well as in Residence Life (“Residence Life,” 2017). However, as revealed in my interviews not all students enter the university feeling comfortable about sharing their personal faith issues openly. This is a practice that surrounds them during their undergraduate experience as part of the IWU community of practice.

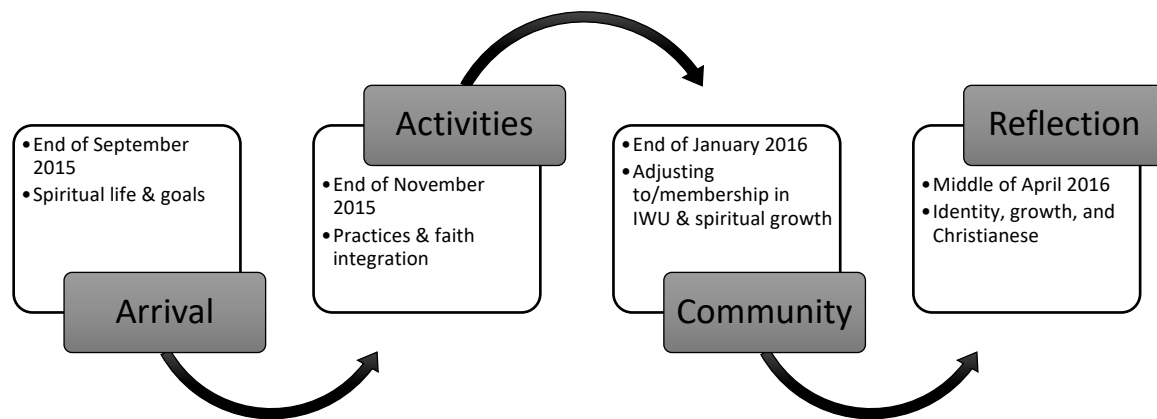
Because one’s faith and spiritual growth are personal issues, and potentially sensitive topics, I wanted to mitigate the potential risk of participant distress during the interviews by offering my own thoughts and experiences at various points in the interviews (Reinharz, & Chase, 2003). As these interviews included questions about participants’ spiritual practices, there was a high probability that they could feel shame or embarrassment if their answers did not meet certain expectations. I did not want a sense of inferiority to inhibit their response to any questions, so I willingly shared my thoughts, experience, and practice where I felt it was

pertinent. Appropriate self-disclosure can enhance the comfort level of the participants and their willingness to share openly about their experiences (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2011). With my own background of being raised in a religious family and choosing to stay religious as an adult, I feel comfortable discussing deeply held convictions or beliefs, including my personal spiritual practices or well-being. Similarly, since I attended a university much like IWU for my undergraduate degree and have been a member of the IWU community for many years, I can easily relate to many of the situations my participants experienced as new students within the IWU community. My willingness to disclose my experiences and thoughts with the participants was an effort to alleviate any discomfort on their part in the interviews.

Interview timeline

In order to gain something of a longitudinal perspective, I conducted four rounds of interviews over the academic year, two interviews per semester. In Fall 2015, I first interviewed the students near the end of September and again at the end of November. In Spring 2016, I interviewed the students at roughly the same intervals as the first semester: end of January and middle of April (see Figure 4.2 below). These intervals corresponded roughly with the third or fourth weeks of the semester and the twelfth or thirteenth weeks of a fourteen-week semester. I chose to interview at different points over the academic year in order to be able to compare their speech choices at these different points and to identify how these choices connected with their engagement within the IWU community (Wenger, 1998; Jeffrey & Troman, 2004).

Figure 3.2 Timeline of interviews



The semi-structured nature of the interviews enabled me to explore the same topics and issues with each participant but also allowed the freedom to pursue related issues that differed for each participant. Moreover, checking in with the students at various intervals over the academic year allowed me to observe changes in their language practices as well as follow their engagement within the university community.

The purpose of the first interview, titled *Arrival*, was to establish a baseline for their religious background and their interest in the IWU community. I asked participants to share their church denominational background and how they became a Christian, which (unbeknownst to me at the time) acted as a signal for them to share their personal testimony. As will be evidenced in Chapter 5, giving one's testimony is a common and expected practice in the Evangelical community. This first interview also offered a means for me to determine what Christianese they already knew in relation to a common topic among churchgoers.

The second interview, titled *Activities*, focused on the participants' curricular and extra-curricular involvement in the university. I wanted to learn how they viewed their first semester in higher education, what kinds of university-sponsored activities they were involved in, and if they regularly attended a church service on the weekend. I also inquired about their opinion of the required chapel services during the week and if those services

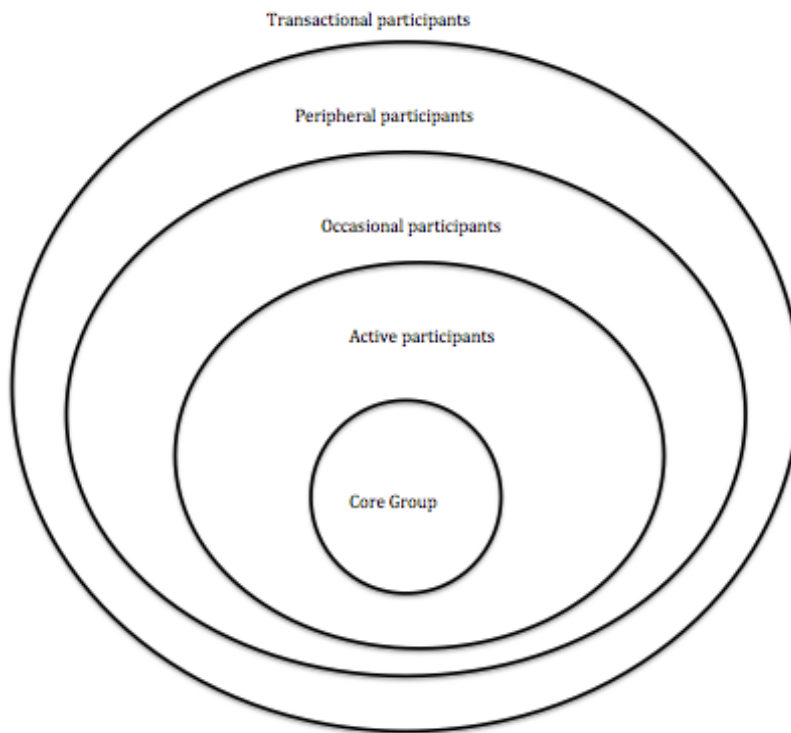
affected them at all. I closed this interview by asking if they had any new goals for the remaining year based on any meaningful encounters from this first semester.

During the third interview, titled *Community*, I wanted to gauge their awareness about the IWU community in terms of their personal experiences. I began the interview by asking them to reflect on their winter break and explain how it felt to be home after being at IWU for a few months. This question stemmed from my own experience as a first-year student at a small, conservative Christian college and the feeling of noted difference from my friends who attended secular universities. I was interested in knowing if this was a shared phenomenon with other students at Christian universities. I also asked the participants to reflect on any changes in their spiritual lives to determine if their activities and/or the IWU environment affected those changes. Furthermore, in the effort to connect participants' impressions with the way they described their own engagement with their use of Christianese, I used Wenger's (1998) graphic (see Figure 4.3 below) that illustrates levels of engagement within a community of practice (CoP) and asked them to identify how members of the IWU community related to each level, including themselves. See Appendix G for a summary of where participants located themselves within the CoP graphic below, along with their Christian denominational background, and their data counts (the latter of which are in their own table in section 7.3.2.).

The self-categorization information in Appendix G should be treated with a certain amount of caution because students demonstrated varying levels of understanding when I asked them to categorize themselves using the graphic. For example, some students described the levels of community membership in terms of their own personal activities and friend groups (e.g., their roommates or teammates were their core), while others discussed the levels based on a broader view of the community (e.g., the Dean of the Chapel, the university president, and the professors create the core identity of the community). Because of the wide

variety of how the participants understood and discussed the graphic, I felt that I could categorize them more systematically based on their language and my systematic analyses of that language rather than use their self-categorizations.

Figure 3.3 CoP levels of engagement graphic



The final interview, titled *Reflection*, included questions regarding spiritual growth, identity, community, and Christianese. I wanted to use this last interview to tie up any loose ends with the participants concerning the issues we had discussed in the previous three interviews. However, in this last interview as a concluding question, I chose to explicitly ask about the words people use on campus to discover how aware they were of Christianese as a means of marking their identity or membership within the IWU community.

Throughout all four interviews, I drew on my own knowledge of the community and its practices as it related to the participants: my experience as a community member contributed to the questions I generated to provide moderate structure to each interview (see Appendix E for the interview schedule for all four interviews). All of this helped build

rapport with the participants, helping them to feel more comfortable each time we met for the interviews and when I happened to see them on campus.

Length and location of interviews

In order to maintain the students' willingness to participate in the year-long series of interviews, I chose to aim for each interview to last roughly thirty minutes. I decided that thirty minutes would be adequate to elicit any Christianese from the participants if that was a typical linguistic resource for them, or perhaps an increasing one. The actual interviews varied in length from eleven to forty-three minutes; this time difference depended on the participants' willingness to elaborate on topics discussed.

The setting or location of interviews can enhance or detract from the actual session (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), so choosing where to conduct the interviews carries great importance. I wanted the students to feel comfortable, so I chose to use the office suite of the division in which I work at IWU because it could offer a slightly private space while still in a public work area. I carried out the initial interviews in a testing room, but I decided to change to my office due to scheduling conflicts with the room. Ultimately, this proved to be a more comfortable location: I could still close the door for privacy and maintain ethical considerations due to the thin, long vertical glass window in the door, and my office contains two somewhat comfortable chairs for the participants to sit in next to my desk. The office also has a large window that looks out on some trees and the building parking lot. Furthermore, students often meet professors in their offices to discuss class material or life issues, so this was not an uncommon setting for the students.

Transcription and representation of data

I recorded each interview using a Sony ICD-PX440 Stereo IC digital voice recorder with built-in 4 GB and direct USB access. I stored the data files on an encrypted hard drive to which only I have the password. I used the transcription software, F5, to transcribe the

interviews into written transcripts. Certain features eased the task of transcribing, namely, speed adjustment, spool time, and time stamps. In the interview transcriptions, I initially used the following components from the discourse transcription symbols explained by Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, and Paolino (1993): truncated word, speech overlap, and pause length; I included terminal pitch direction when I judged it to be particularly significant to the communication, specifically rising pitch. Finally, I deviated from standard transcription conventions by bolding emphasized stressed syllables or words in order to help them stand out for analysis.

For the first set of interview transcriptions (which I completed before I conducted the second set of interviews), I carefully transcribed all of the above discourse features because I was unsure of the particular patterns associated with Christianese. However, it quickly became clear that I would not be using these detailed features in my analyses. Instead, I used a modified naturalized orthographic transcription approach, in which the transcript conforms to written discourse conventions (Bucholtz, 2000) because I found it more accessible for the type of analyses I conducted on the discourse. I modified this approach in order to maximize the data's potential for analysis by using a hyphen to represent a truncated word or false start, illustrating stressed words or syllables with italics, and paying attention to pauses that could be associated with discomfort or deep thought in the second set of interviews. Ultimately, however, I abandoned the meticulous counting unless the pause length appeared to me as a transcriber to be particularly significant, and it became clear that the lexical aspect of Christianese, rather than the level of interactional detail, would be the most significant focus for this project.

Because I conducted three kinds of discourse analysis on the data (introduced in section 3.3), I used font styles in multiple ways to either highlight the particular linguistic features in the data or align with the traditional uses of the font styles for each type of

analysis. In Chapter 5, I **bolded** all God references and underlined the verb or verb phrase associated with each reference; this was for clarification or highlighting purposes. In Chapter 6, I followed the standard form of *italicizing* the metaphors discussed and **bolding** the semantic fields to which they belonged. In Chapter 7, I continued with the font choices from Chapter 6 of putting the metaphors in *italics* and their semantic fields in **bold**. I did not bold the God references nor did I underline the verb or verb phrase associated with them because I believed they were clear by this point in the thesis. Finally, there were places in the thesis where I chose to *italicize* a word or phrase either for emphasis in a quotation (or keep the italicized word with its original emphasis) or when it carried significance, such as the *communities of practice* theoretical framework, a special term like *narraphor* (see Chapter 6), or Christianese terms (as in Chapter 4).

3.2.4. Participant observation

As mentioned in section 3.1.2, participant observation has long been associated with ethnographic studies, in which the researcher becomes immersed in the social life of the researched group in order to provide a detailed description of various phenomena (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Esterberg, 2002; Dörnyei, 2007).

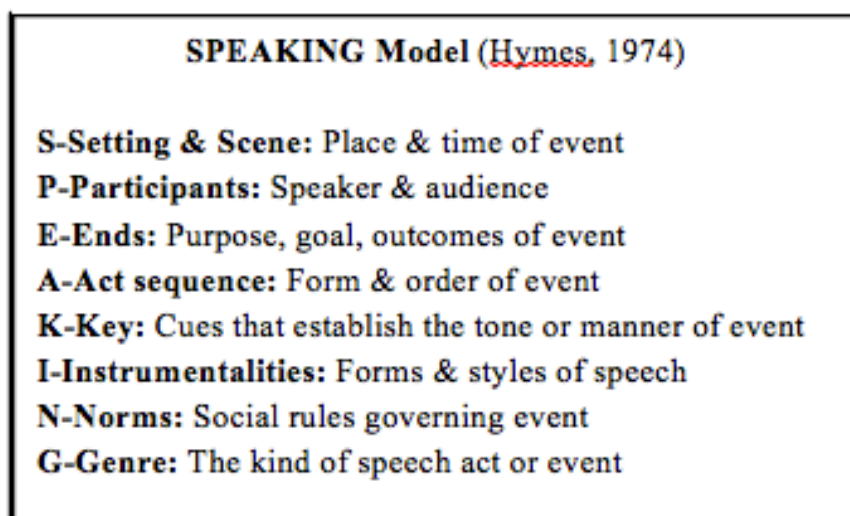
I have been a member of the IWU community as part of the faculty since 2006 and have thus participated in community events over the years. I have served on committees, attended chapel services, participated in community meetings, and spoken on panels sponsored by the Student Government Association (SGA). These experiences have contributed to my own identity formation as a Christian and a faculty member at a faith-based university. This emic perspective enables me to reflect on this process from both the insider and outsider perspectives.

I used the interviews with first-year students as the primary data source since my research questions directly related to their first-year experience. However, I also conducted

fieldwork on campus as a secondary data source. The purpose of the fieldwork was to identify the language used by the established members in conjunction with the established practices of the community. Wenger (1998) views membership in a community of practice as translated “into an identity as a form of competence” (p. 153). The fieldwork provided evidence of a repertoire of competence from which students can draw in their process of identity construction. Consequently, I observed and took notes in official university gatherings, chapel services, and faculty meetings during the 2015-2016 academic year. I chose these venues for participant observation because they represent the kinds of gatherings in which one commonly hears the language of established community members. These gatherings, particularly chapel services, also serve as instructive means for spiritual growth, specifically for the students, and would presumably offer a rich source for Christianese data.

Prior to beginning my fieldwork, I reviewed Hymes’ (1974) SPEAKING model to inform my approach to taking field notes. Hymes designed the model to analyze discourse as a series of speech events and speech acts within the broader framework of the ethnography of communication. Each letter of the acronym corresponds to the first letter of the term for speech components, as seen in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 SPEAKING model



I did not follow this model precisely as I took field notes because my study does not address the language data as speech events. However, the speech components in the model helped guide the kind of notes I took as well as my reflection on the field notes after each observation.

For the fieldwork, I attended and observed the University Convocation (mentioned in Chapter 1) that precedes the beginning of the academic year: during this gathering, the president of the university presents awards to various members of the university community and gives a message that serves to remind the faculty and staff of our purpose at IWU and exhort us to continue our work. I also observed three of the chapel services during the New Student Orientation (NSO) week (described in section 3.2.1), as well as a class that debriefed one of those chapel messages with the new first-year students. I attended a number of faculty meetings of which I took brief notes on two. I also observed two student-led events: the first was a forum on gender and sexuality sponsored by the Student Government Association (SGA), and the second was a kind of prayer meeting sponsored by three different groups of student spiritual leaders called *Project: Unify*. Finally, I observed several chapel services with the entire student body multiple times over the year.

I completed the majority of the fieldwork in the fall semester because I had a reduced teaching load in order to devote extra time to my research; I resumed my full teaching responsibilities in the spring semester in addition to completing the last two sets of interviews. Ultimately, the fieldwork, summarized in Table 4.1 below, enabled me to identify some of the common practices within the university that occurred early in the academic year.

Table 3.1 Fieldnotes summary

Location/Type of Event	Event Attended	Date Observed
University-wide gathering	University Convocation	August 25, 2015
Chapel	NSO Opening chapel NSO Life Calling chapel NSO Strengths Quest chapel 1 st chapel of academic year	August 31 September 2 September 3 September 7

	Joni Eareckson Tada Dean of Chapel John Bray MLK Summit evening service	October 16 October 19 January 15 January 20
Faculty-only event	MLL Division Retreat Faculty Meeting	August 27 September 23
Academic class	Debrief to Strengths Quest	September 3
Student-led event	SGA Forum: Gender & Sexuality Project: Unify	November 4 March 2

The majority of my field notes covered chapel experiences because chapel is considered a key avenue of spiritual growth for the students at IWU, required for all students three times per week. Each chapel service includes a worship band that plays two or three contemporary worship songs, prayer usually led by a student worship major, and a sermon-like message. For each of my field observations, I tried to sit near the back of the venue – either on the floor or in the balcony when available – because I had a better view of the rest of the room and audience.

As I mentioned earlier, this fieldwork offered evidence of the linguistic repertoire within the IWU community of practice, particularly as it relates to the faith element within the community. I took the majority of the fieldnotes in gatherings whose purpose served to encourage the growth and development of students' faith. However, it is important to note that these often occurred in formal settings, such as chapel, which differed from the setting where the interviews took place.

These settings maintain different levels of formality and corresponding levels of authority (Joos, 1967); for example, official worship services on campus can be categorized within a formal style in which speakers serve to inform the audience with no verbal response back from the audience (p. 35), thus bestowing a degree of authority on the speakers. In contrast, the semi-structured interviews overlap two styles of Joos' taxonomy: consultative and casual. In the consultative style, the speech participants engage in some kind of dialogue. These participants are typically strangers and must provide background information because

the listener may not understand without it (p. 23). The casual style is less formal and typically occurs among friends or close acquaintances. There is less need for background information because the participants have insider status (p. 23). As one goes down the ladder of formality, the speakers' authority decreases. Thus, the linguistic practices that came out in the interviews offered a kind of "echo" of the repertoire noted in the fieldwork. Despite their formal nature, the locations for the majority of the fieldwork offered a glimpse into the linguistic repertoire of those who hold authority within university community, and thus act as a kind of linguistic model, while the interviews provided evidence of the language used by newcomers to the community, which included those students who participated more and less with the linguistic repertoire in which they were currently immersed.

3.3. Analytical framework

In order to test the claim that the IWU community of practice includes the use of Christianese, it was crucial that I determine a systematic process for identifying and analyzing what actually constitutes Christianese. Because I have lived and worked in the Evangelical community for most of my adult life, and more specifically, the IWU community for the past decade, I have insider knowledge of the language and language practices that characterize Evangelicals in this community. Moreover, certain words and phrases emerged in the interview process as possible indexing features. Further identification and refinement occurred while reading the transcripts. This iterative aspect of the development towards formal analysis helped to formulate the next steps so that I could ensure that I was not simply relying on my emic perspective of the features of Christianese.

First, I read through each set of the four interviews, underlining anything that struck me as a possible Christianese expression. This included individual words or phrases. After I underlined them, I wrote them into a list. Then I transferred each item onto an individual post-it note, which I then stuck to a large piece of paper. As I stuck them on the large paper, I

started to see patterns and categories – ways in which the words and phrases had similar meanings or functioned in similar ways. (See Appendix F for a visual image of this process.)

After I had the lexical items categorized, I typed them into a numbered master list and generated six sets of randomized lists from this using the website, www.random.org. I included some words and phrases that are not unique to Christianese in order to provide a contrasting element to the data; I chose them based on lexical choices I would make when speaking with non-religious friends and colleagues at secular institutions. Then I gave each list to faculty and staff colleagues at IWU across disciplines to assess to what extent my identification of these items as “Christianese” matched their ideas of this variety. See Appendix G for the initial list of Christianese I identified from the interviews and Appendix H for the randomized lists.

This process enabled two important outcomes. The first was that it gave me an opportunity to check my intuition regarding the lexical features of Christianese with others in the community. This led to the second outcome: while I discovered that my intuition was supported for the most part, I also noted enough variation in my colleagues’ responses, which led me to further explore variations in the interviews with the students rather than looking for one overall Christianese discourse. Thus, while I included the list of Christianese I gathered from the data, it should not be treated as any kind of definitive work; rather, the list serves as a work-in-progress or the foundation for further exploration and analysis.

Since this study seeks to explore how first-year students use Christianese to construct their identity as an IWU student, and since there has been no comprehensive, systematic study of Christianese to date, I needed to employ various methods of analysis to describe certain features of Christianese and then address their role in identity construction among my participants. Ultimately, I decided to focus on how the participants talked about themselves, God, and relationships, exploring the language they used to accomplish these topics. Thus, I

examined rhetorical moves, agency, and metaphor usage. In the following analysis chapters, I will discuss each analytical framework in more depth, but I will offer a brief explanation before closing this chapter.

3.3.1. Rhetorical move analysis

I began the first interview with basic questions about faith background, church attendance, and participants' commitment to Christ. I did not explicitly request a testimony narrative, yet every participant launched into their testimony in response to my questions. Thus, I conducted a genre analysis on these narratives using Swales' (1990) rhetorical move framework and found that they followed a set pattern, aligning with Swales' designation of a genre, in terms of "structure, style, content, and intended audience" (p. 58). Prior to this study, just one other study applied this framework to religious testimony narratives (Dumanig, David, & Dealwis, 2011); the context of that study differed immensely from this context, providing a thought-provoking contrast between the two analyses, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3.3.2. Social actors network

The issue of attributing agency to God has been identified as a marker for "highly devoted" people of faith (Smith and Denton, 2005; Dean, 2010). Simply identifying agent and theme using active or passive voice limits the possibilities of understanding the nuance of how Christianese speakers attribute agency to God, themselves, and others. As a discourse analysis tool, the social actors network provides a more robust perspective for exploring agency in discourse: as van Leeuwen (2008) asserts, "Sociological agency is not always realized by linguistic agency" – yet both are necessary for understanding how social actors are represented in discourse (p. 23). For example, agency can be realized in more ways than just the grammatical role of "agent" using his sociosemantic inventory for representing the social actors in discourse. Other grammatical features that can enact agency using this

framework include, for example, possessive pronouns or prepositional phrases beginning with *from* (p. 23). The social actors network identifies how the participants, or social actors, can be represented in discourse and how those actors relate to each other. This network is more of a sociosemantic inventory as it blends both sociological and linguistic categories in order to offer an expanded perspective of how social actors function within discourse. Chapter 5 will address the issue of agency by means of a social actors analysis.

3.3.3. Metaphor analysis

I followed the metaphor identification procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group as summarized by Semino (2008) and determined that certain expressions were metaphors when their contextual meaning differed from their basic meaning (p. 12). Upon identifying multiple metaphors, I realized that they were used primarily to describe relationships. This is in keeping with the Evangelical focus on relationships, both a personal relationship with God and relationships with others in terms of accountability and social belonging (Bielo, 2011; Luhrmann, 2012). Therefore, metaphors in Christianese are not important so much for their cognitive function as examined within conceptual metaphor theory as they are discursive elements that mark and identify relationships. To organize my analysis in Chapter 7, I used semantic fields that I constructed based on categorically related metaphors (for example, *fruit*, *season*, and *growth* all fall into the semantic field of **agriculture**). While these metaphors are not unique to Christianese, they serve a role within the Evangelical community of practice to enable members to talk about the complex and abstract features of relationships in ways that other members of the community recognize.

3.4. Conclusion

In summary, I have outlined my methodological stance, explained my approach to data collection, and established the various frameworks for the analysis of the data. As a qualitative researcher, I chose to conduct an interview study using an ethnographic approach

in order to explore how my participants, thirty-one first-year students at Indiana Wesleyan University, used variants of Christianese (or not) to construct their identity. The next few chapters will explore the participants' testimony narratives (Chapter 4), how they attributed agency to God (Chapter 5), and the metaphors they used to discuss relationships (Chapter 6). The final analysis chapter (Chapter 7) will include several case studies of students who represent various identities of belonging as well as a comprehensive discussion integrating the three major analyses.

Chapter 4: Talking about Self: Testimony as genre in the Community of Practice

4. Introduction to testimony

“We borrow from the world of courtrooms and trials when we talk about ‘testimony.’

Testimony occurs in particular settings – a courtroom or a church – where a community expects to hear the truth spoken. Witnesses – those making the testimony – must speak the truth as they have seen, heard, and experienced it. The practice of testimony requires that there be witnesses to testify and others to receive and evaluate their testimony.” (Hoyt, 1997, p. 92)

Testimony plays an important role in the Evangelical Christian faith. It serves as the vehicle by which Evangelical Christians tell the story of what God has done in their lives (Hoyt, 1997, p. 94), something that serves to both encourage others in their faith and to solidify their own personal faith and trust in God (Long, 2004). It reminds both the speaker and listener(s) of God’s faithfulness and direction in the speaker’s life. By using Swales’ (1990) rhetorical move analysis as a framework on testimony data, I will demonstrate that there is a common structure among this type of testimony narrative and certain Christianese words and phrases are associated with specific moves, thus indexing a more specific Evangelical Christian identity. Ultimately, testimony as genre plays an important role in the identity construction within the faith-based university community of Indiana Wesleyan University.

4.1. Testimony as genre

Testimony is a Christian practice that is discussed and employed in Christian communities frequently. In Evangelical Christianity, it is expected that mature Christians will be able to articulate God’s work, whether regarding salvation or daily interventions, in their lives (Dean, 2010; Hoyt, 1997). Many times, Christian leaders assume that other Christians understand what a testimony is, as evidenced in an evangelism training program in which the

author mentioned giving one's testimony as part of the "Gospel presentation outline" (Burgess, 1986, p. 12), but it never explicitly defined the components of a testimony. Yet people in these particular communities have a sense of what a testimony is because it is modeled as a practice.

As an example, insiders from the Evangelical Christian community wrote, "[E]very believer has a faith testimony – a story of how Jesus has made all the difference – compelling us to be his representatives" (Baker, Jones, & Probst, 2015, p. 10). This quote clarifies an established emic perspective on what constitutes a testimony: it narrates some kind of change in one's life as a result of placing trust in Jesus. This kind of transformational story is more typical with people who had a dramatic life change: they participated in self-damaging activities and did not ascribe to Christianity or any other particular faith before their conversion to Christianity; then they converted; and now they have a story to tell about how God has worked in their lives.

A more recent example comes from an organization called Never The Same that conducts weeklong spiritually-oriented camps for adolescents around the United States. As part of their teaching academy during the week, they offer a thirty-minute session on how to give a two-minute testimony. Participants watch a brief video and then receive instruction regarding how to articulate the work God has done in their lives based on the formula of before/during/after one's "encounter with God". Before the session ends, they have the opportunity to practice their testimony with other session participants (Never The Same, 2017).

In working with conversion narratives from Christians in Malaysia, Dumanig, David, and Dealwis (2011) noted a similar three-step narrative, this time arranged in terms of "before, how, and after" the conversion (p. 320). Their further investigation used Swales' (1990) rhetorical move analysis and identified six moves within the conversion narratives

they examined. The testimony data used in my analysis does not include the “before/after” structure, which changes the patterning of the genre considerably and will be discussed in more detail in my analysis.

That *testimony* is widely recognized by Christians and written about by scholars, theologians, and ministers, and explicitly taught in Evangelical camps for young adults like *Never The Same*, demonstrates the establishment of testimony as a particular genre. The key concepts connected to testimony in the literature include “talking about our experience of God, out loud and with others”; specifically with Evangelical testimonies, stories about the transformative role Jesus has played in their lives are foundational (Dean, 2010, p. 132). This clear identification of the three-step narrative described by Dumanig et al. (2011) and the role of Jesus transforming lives (Crosetto, 2014; Dean, 2010) allows testimony to be viewed as a genre with characteristics shared by members as defined by Swales (1990). As we will see, however, variations occur within this genre based on the context of the community in which the testimonies are shared and received.

4.2. Move analysis

One of the requirements of genre identification is to be able to specify a set of shared communicative purposes, along with similar patterns of structure, style, content, and intended audience (Swales, 1990, p. 58). One of the central purposes for testimonies as stated above is to articulate God’s work in the lives of believers, both in terms of conversion and further spiritual transformation. Testimonies aid in the reinforcement of spiritual convictions held by a community (Long, 2004, p. 117), and they serve as a means of indexing one’s membership within the community: one’s ability to communicate how God has worked and continues to work in one’s life marks that person’s status of belonging. Along with purpose, Swales argued that exemplars of a genre could vary in their prototypicality (p. 49), which means variation among the structure, style, or content is possible. Yet there are constraints on

allowable contributions or variation in terms of content, positioning, and form (p. 52). In the case of testimonies, the context in which testimonies are shared matters, as Drury¹ (2015) discussed in her exploration of adolescents and testimonies. With reference to the interviews I conducted, I served as both a representative member of the community and the intended audience for the testimonies I analyzed for this study.

I chose to apply Swales' (1990) rhetorical move analysis model to the collected testimonies in order to identify their shared patterns. Another study that examined testimonies used the same method of analysis to determine the structure of conversion narratives among Christian Malaysians. Dumanig, David, and Dealwis (2011) identified six moves in the testimony narratives from their data, which were collected in a formal worship service and other church settings from adolescents and older adults: 1) introduction; 2) life before conversion; 3) process of conversion; 4) challenges after conversion; 5) differences after conversion; 6) concluding statement.

Through repeated reading and segmenting of the thirty-one transcripts from the first interview (Arrival), I identified five moves that differed in some ways from the other study:

Move 1: Family background

Move 2: Process of conversion

Move 3: Reflection on prior ignorance

Move 4: Personal appropriation

¹ Drury created a quadrant to illustrate a distinction between the different types and settings of testimonies. These included formal, informal, spontaneous, and ordered. The testimonies in my data set correspond to her categories of informal and ordered – informal because they occurred in my office and not during a worship service, as well as ordered because they follow a similar pattern of moves described in this chapter.

Move 5: Change in behavior or attitude

In Move 1, participants explained their family background in terms of going to church or growing up in a Christian family. Participants then conveyed the story of their initial conversion to Christianity in Move 2. Move 3 involved their reflection on their ignorance about their faith in their young conversion. In Move 4, participants relayed their experience in which they personally appropriated their faith. Move 5 appeared to be optional, in which participants discussed a change in their behavior or attitude that reflected their faith.

There are several key differences between the testimonies from the study done by Dumanig et al. (2011) and the ones I collected for my study. First, the Malaysian Christians were recent converts, that is, they converted as adults (either younger or older), whereas the participants in my study experienced conversion in their childhood. Second, the data in the Dumanig et al. study were formal testimonies because they occurred in a formal church setting. The testimonies in my data can be categorized as informal because they were shared outside of a formal church setting (Drury, 2015, p. 153). Third, the moves differ in content: while the testimonies in the study of Dumanig et al. included challenges and changes in the speakers' lives after conversion, the testimonies in my data included a reflection on how the speakers did not truly understand their early conversion and later embraced their faith with fuller knowledge and acceptance.

The following testimony from Haley illustrates these moves in a concise rendering of her conversion to Christianity and subsequent change and spiritual growth. I have underlined the most salient clauses for each move and italicized the relevant Christianese lexis, which I will discuss below. Names of participants and locations have been changed to preserve anonymity.

- Move 1** (Prior to the question that led to this testimony, Haley had explained that she had grown up in the church because her parents were missionaries. Repeating this within her actual testimony narrative would be redundant.)
- Move 2** When I was little, my dad told me about Jesus, so I *accepted Him into my heart*.
- Move 3** But it didn't really mean anything
- Move 4** until I was in fifth grade. That's when I first became aware of having a *personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ*. And that is about the time we moved to Southeast Asia, and I started attending Christian Academy. It's a school for missionary kids.
- Move 5** And there was when I first realized that this relationship required me to *actually do things*. (laughing) There was one time I was invited to an after-school program for middle schoolers even though I was a fifth grader. And when I went there, they were *sharing their testimonies*, and *I was moved by that*. So I started reading my Bible on a daily basis from then on and praying more regularly, and that really started my relationship with God, and since then I've been *growing in that*.

The family background in Move 1 had been covered in the previous question, but Move 2 demonstrates her young conversion. In Move 3, she explained her ignorance about her conversion until she was older. She identified the point in her life when she personally appropriated her faith in Move 4 and further explained how she changed her behavior in Move 5.

4.3. Testimony and its variations

For the IWU community, which includes elements from the Evangelical community, testimony plays a role in the shared repertoire of the community of practice as one of the genres that contribute to the ways in which members express their identity as belonging to this community (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). In many ways testimony serves the purpose of social maintenance of the community's beliefs and values, as Long (2004) asserted. He went on to argue, "In order to hold onto our beliefs, we need other people who believe them, too" (p. 117). The contents of a testimony in this community include a narrative about the person's spiritual conversion and ongoing transformation, which tend to encourage others in their own spiritual growth.

Wenger (1998) chose to refer to this kind of shared resource as a repertoire "to emphasize both its rehearsed character and its availability for further engagement in practice" (p. 83). Thus, as a genre, testimony narratives have similar components as evidenced by the move analysis above, which align with the "rehearsed character". However, there is also an element of variation within the testimony narrative: while some of the participants' testimonies included all five moves, many of the participants included only three moves, and six participants included only two.

In the discussion below, I have categorized these variations in terms of Wenger's (1998) types of trajectories in the context of communities of practice: insider, inbound, and peripheral (p. 154). The insider trajectory refers to the full participation of the practices of the community: the testimonies include all five moves. In Wenger's framework, the inbound trajectory refers to newcomers joining a community with the intention of becoming full participants in its practices: the testimonies in this category include three or four moves. Lastly, the peripheral trajectory, while never leading to full participation in the community, provides a degree of access to the community and its practices that result in contributing to

one's identity. The peripheral testimonies exemplify this with their variation in the testimony moves.

It is important to note that I constructed what constitutes these three categories based on patterns from the participants' testimonies, as well as my emic knowledge from having lived and worked in Evangelical communities for many years. At Indiana Wesleyan University in particular, I have noted the use of testimonies in job interviews, faculty meetings, and student gatherings during the years of my employment. Moreover, the participants in this study likely experienced some degree of exposure to the testimony genre prior to their arrival at IWU, either through church activities or church camp encounters, because of their shared background of growing up in the Christian faith. Thus, the trajectories taken from Wenger's (1998) framework serve as a way to categorize the participants' use of the testimony as part of the linguistic repertoire of the Evangelical community as it intersects with the faith-based university community.

4.3.1. Insider testimonies

Seven of the thirty-one first-year students included all five moves in their testimonies. These offer the paradigm for the testimony genre at Indiana Wesleyan University, thus embodying the insider category. In the following discussion, I will highlight examples for each move to illustrate the core pattern evidenced in the testimonies offered by these students. For the sake of brevity, I referenced the number of each interview (#1) rather than writing out the entire phrase, *interview 1*, in the first example in this chapter, as well as all of the examples and tables in subsequent chapters. Since all of the examples from the students' testimony narratives came from the first interview for this chapter, I omitted this designation after the first example (but only for this chapter).

For Haley, Kris, and Michelle, Move 1 was omitted because the prior question in the interview dealt with their church background. In each case, they had fully explained the fact

that they had been raised in families that prioritized church attendance. Both Abby and Melissa stated, “I grew up in a Christian family” (Abby, line 8; Maddie, line 54); and Joshua explained, “I’ve grown up in a Christian home” (line 6), adding the fact that his maternal grandparents were missionaries and all of his mother’s siblings were involved in some kind of church-related ministry. Charlotte signaled her childhood upbringing by saying, “Since my dad’s a pastor” (line 62), thereby implying that she participated in a religious family.

All seven of the testimony narratives had Move 2, in which they articulated a particular moment in time when they converted to Christianity. Another shared aspect of this move in the narratives is that all of the participants experienced this at a young age, between four and nine years old. I will discuss the language used in Move 2 in section 4.4 below.

This segues into Move 3, in which four of the seven participants reflected on the ignorance of their young conversion: they acknowledged that a young child simply could not have the same understanding about faith as a young adult. For example, Abby said, “When you’re four, you don’t really know what you’re saying” (line 12); and Haley bluntly stated, “But [my conversion] didn’t really mean anything” (line 24). Melissa noted, “I didn’t really know exactly what to do with that, so I just kept going to church through the motions” (line 72). Charlotte also made a comment about going “through the motions” – she had to attend and be involved at church because of her father’s role as pastor, not necessarily because she understood and desired this level of participation for her own personal spiritual edification. Joshua and Kris were less explicit about ignorance regarding conversion at a young age. Joshua focused more on his personal actions saying that he had “not been living for God even though [he said he had]” as a pre-adolescent (line 14). Kris generalized this ignorance by boldly stating, “Praying the prayer doesn’t make you a Christian” (line 12). “The prayer” to which he referred is commonly called “The Sinner’s Prayer” (Howard, 2005, p. 179) and will be discussed in more detail below.

The last student from this group of seven articulated this kind of ignorance in a different way, such that I labeled her Move 3 as *Anti-Move 3*. Michelle's narrative demonstrated an awareness of Move 3 by explicitly stating how her own experience contrasted with the more typical experience. She stated that she had known who God was her whole life. Rather than acknowledging her ignorance as a young child, Michelle explicitly stated her life-long understanding of God.

A significant change occurred in Move 4, in which the participants discussed the personal appropriation of their faith, or as community insiders would say, "they made their faith their own" (Rowe, 2014, p. 34). Michelle illustrated this with a clear distinction between her Anti-Move 3, in which she said, "I knew in my **head** [emphasis added] who God was" (line 81), and Move 4, "That was the first time I knew in my **heart** [emphasis added] who God was" (line 91). For five of the participants, this occurred by means of a special event, such as baptism, Bible study, or spiritual retreat. For the other two participants, this occurred gradually over time. This is signaled in Charlotte's testimony by her comment, "I think there are different times in my life when I can see me actually taking control of my own faith, and it wasn't just one particular moment where I decided to claim faith as my own" (line 62). Similarly, Abby stated, "Throughout the years I have multiple times just reaffirmed my faith" (line 12). For all of the participants, however, this personal appropriation of their faith is key to their ongoing spiritual development.

The final move appeared to be optional in the complete data set. However, Move 5 was evident in all seven of the testimonies in this group of narratives. They each described a change in behavior or attitude as it related to their faith. Six of the seven participants talked about needing to *do things*, like praying and reading the Bible (Haley), or follow Jesus' example in the Bible (Abby); Melissa stated, "I want to live my life for Him" (line 96), and Charlotte pointed out, "You have to decide on your own what you're going to do with your

life and with your relationship with God” (line 72). Three of the participants articulated a change in their attitude, how they viewed themselves in Christ: “Trying to really identify myself in Christ” (Charlotte, line 72); “This is me now – He’s part of me and I know who He is and I felt His love” (Michelle; line 95); and “I know more of what I’m getting myself into” (Abby, line 16). This change signals a desire to further their relationship with Jesus, which also indexes a clear alignment with Evangelical Christianity’s importance placed on a personal and dynamic relationship with Christ (Bennett-Carpenter, McCallion, & Maines, 2013; Guretzki, 2012).

These seven students demonstrated their competence in testimony as a practice in the IWU community as an extension of the Evangelical tradition of sharing testimonies (Drury, 2015). They included all five moves noted as components of this genre and spoke about the transformation that occurred as a result of their conversion and later personal appropriation. With their testimony narratives, they identified themselves as members in the IWU community of practice by demonstrating their full competence with the testimony genre, thus aligning with Wenger’s (1998) notion of “identity as a form of competence” (p. 153).

4.3.2. Inbound testimonies

I have identified the seven students who demonstrated their full competence with the testimony genre and categorized them as insiders of the IWU community. The next group of testimonies I will discuss is the inbound, which is the largest category involving seventeen students. Their testimony moves are summarized in Table 4.1. Twelve of the students used the same three moves: Move 1 – personal background, Move 2 – process of conversion, and Move 4 – personal appropriation. One student included Move 3 – reflection on prior ignorance, and two students added Move 5 – change in behavior or attitude. Five students omitted Move 2 but varied in the inclusion of the other moves. None of the testimonies in this category included all five of the moves together like the insider testimonies.

Table 4.1 Pattern of moves for inbound testimonies

Participant	Move 1	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4	Move 5
Moves 1, 2, & 4					
David	X	X		X	Anti-X
Heidi	X	X		X	
Jared	X	X		X	
Jeannie	X	X		X	
Johanna	X	X		X	
Kirk	X	X		X	
Mike	X	X		X	
Shannon	X	X		X	
Josefina	X	X		X	
Lydia	X	X	X	X	
Helen	X	X		X	X
Maddie	X	X		X	X
Omission of Move 2					
Alex	X		X	X	X
Adam	X		X	X	
Dylan	X			X	
Carson	X		X	X	X
John	X	Anti-X	Anti-X	X	

The biggest variation occurred among five testimonies in this group. Like every other testimony in the inbound set, all five testimonies included Moves 1 and 4; but unlike the others, they lacked Move 2. In these instances, the young men all described the point at which they personally appropriated their faith, which was between thirteen and eighteen years of age. This personal appropriation occurred as their conversion point as well. This contrasts with the young conversions that occurred between the ages of five and eleven in the rest of this inbound group.

The following examples in Table 4.2 offer a sample of the language used by the inbound group for each move in their testimonies. Note the connection between Adam's comments about how he attended church his whole life in Move 1 but then his acknowledgement that the practice of attending church does not automatically make someone become a Christian in Move 3. Moreover, Helen talked about her young conversion at the

age of six in Move 2 and then her personal appropriation that occurred at the age of thirteen in Move 4.

Table 4.2 Examples of the inbound moves

Move 1	Move 2	Move 3	Move 4	Move 5
I went to church my whole life. (Adam, line 24)	I was about six after Awana one night when I accepted Jesus into my heart. (Helen, line 4)	Just going to church doesn't make you a Christian. (Adam, line 24)	But it was really about seventh grade that I decided to make a really personal effort to become closer to Jesus and learn as much as I could. (Helen, line 4)	I was twelve.../the first time I remember scripture really coming alive to me/...from that God worked with me and taught me a lot. (Maddie, lines 110, 116, & 122)
I always grew up in a Christian home. (John, line 142)	I was either five or six.../and my dad walked me through the process of accepting Jesus into my heart. (Jared, lines 60 & 64)	When you're four, you don't really understand. (Lydia, line 20)	I decided after [a mission trip to Honduras] that I wanted to get baptized. (David, line 60)	Then I started reading the Bible for the first time, and I really got into that. (Carson, line 64)
	Anti-Move 2	Anti-Move 3		Anti-Move 5
	I didn't really have a particular moment where it was like when I was ten. (John, line 140)	It's always been there. (John, line 142)		After I was baptized, I can't say besides just the outward expression [of baptism] much changed my spiritual life. (David, line 62)

The anti-moves used by John and David play an important role in this group. They serve as a way for the speakers to acknowledge their existence in the testimony genre even though the speakers had not experienced them personally. For example, John talked about not having “a particular moment” at the age of “ten” (line 140). He clearly identified the young conversion in Move 2 that occurs in many testimonies, yet he did not experience that himself. He went on to say, “It’s always been there” (line 142), referring to his faith. This compares to Michelle’s Anti-Move 3 in the insider testimony group and confirms John’s lack of conversion moment as a young child. In a similar way, David expressed his awareness of testimony as a genre in Move 2 in a reflexive manner as well as with his Anti-Move 5. Regarding Move 2 he said, “If we’re going by the, you know, ‘when I asked Jesus into my

heart' type situation, um, Vacation Bible School when I was probably in second or third grade" (line 52). He labeled Move 2 as "when I asked Jesus into my heart" and identified it as an event of some kind when he called it a "situation." His later comment about his spiritual life not changing much after his baptism acts as an Anti-Move 5. He recognized that further spiritual growth typically occurs after appropriation, which happened at baptism for him after "an eye-opening" mission trip to Honduras; however, he confessed that any significant growth stopped there (line 62).

Thus, the consistent components of the testimonies in the inbound category are personal background (Move 1) and older personal appropriation of faith (Move 4). These two moves are at the heart of the required elements of the Evangelical testimony and thus signal the inbound trajectory: these students appeared to be aware of the necessary components for a testimony to be identifiable as Evangelical and therefore belonging to the larger Christian higher education environment of which the IWU community is a part. However, the young conversion in Move 2 indexes the speakers as near life-long members of the Evangelical community and therefore positions them closer to the insider testimony group than the speakers who omit Move 2. Since the majority of students who attend IWU come from family backgrounds in which religious life is prioritized and cultivated, it is appropriate for their testimonies to include a point at which they converted to Christianity at a young age.

By including these three moves, this group of twelve students began their first year at Indiana Wesleyan University by identifying with the Evangelical identity common to this community. They included the appropriate components in order to align their testimony with the required elements of experiencing an upbringing in the church, a young conversion, and a personal appropriation at a later time, thus identifying more closely with the insider practices of IWU testimonies. The students who added Moves 3 (reflecting on their prior ignorance) or 5 (changing their behavior or attitude regarding their faith) increased the strength of their

IWU Evangelical identity because the addition demonstrates that these people have thought about their faith to the point that it has become more personal and more mature. Four of the five students who omitted Move 2 included Moves 3 and/or 5, which enables their inclusion in the inbound group: they clearly identified with the Evangelical identity and demonstrated their active participation with the IWU community in terms of their testimony narrative. Finally, the two students who included the anti-moves also belong with this group because they demonstrated their understanding of the testimony genre despite not personally experiencing those moves.

4.3.3. Peripheral testimonies

The testimony narratives of seven participants can be viewed as peripheral testimonies since they vary yet again from both the insider and inbound testimony narratives. These peripheral testimonies can be further separated into two categories: Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals with four participants in the former category and three participants in the latter. The students with Evangelical church backgrounds whose testimony narratives can be considered more peripheral include Adria, Corbin, Eric, and Travis. Adria grew up attending a United Methodist church, Corbin attended a non-denominational church, and Eric and Travis both attended Wesleyan churches. All four students included only Moves 1 and 2 in their testimonies. They each noted their childhood in church as Move 1 with Travis offering the most details, “[Church] was part of my life and [I] went to Sunday School—you know, three weeks old and on” (line 8).

The event of their conversions in Move 2 differed among the students. Adria’s young conversion occurred during an after-school Bible study at her public school when she was eight years old (line 16). Eric recalled his conversion happening during a children’s lesson at church when he was six years old (line 6). Travis experienced his conversion at the age of thirteen during a youth conference held at Indiana Wesleyan University (line 10). Despite the

variations in location and age, these three students could pinpoint the particular moment in which they converted to Christianity. Corbin, however, could not remember his initial conversion and deferred to his mother's memory about it when he said, "The story my mom likes to tell is that I accepted Christ at VBS when I was three" (line 8). I asked him if he ever made a deeper commitment when he was older that might signal a personal appropriation of his faith. He responded, "There were a couple of times when I thought I was accepting Christ for the first time, but it was never a rededication kind of thing" (line 12). He went on to explain that this had occurred twice by the time he was ten years old. Thus, Corbin experienced an initial conversion multiple times as a young child with no significant change in his faith as a young adult.

Eric came close to including Move 4 in his testimony narrative. I had prompted him by asking if he had experienced any other defining moments in his spiritual development over the years since his conversion. He mentioned he had attended multiple church camps, in which the leaders asked the campers if they "wanted to rededicate themselves" (line 16), which is one form of personal appropriation for those who converted as young children. However, he never specifically noted that he himself had done this. This suggests that Eric, like Corbin, is aware of this move in an Evangelical testimony narrative, but he has not personally engaged his faith to this point.

The non-Evangelical students deviated from the testimony narrative moves in a significant way. Marci, Collin, and Astrid identified themselves as Lutheran, Catholic, and a Catholic-turned-agnostic respectively. When I asked if they would share how they became a Christian, the Lutheran and Catholic students replied with similar answers. The Lutheran, Marci, stated, "I have always, I mean, I just grew up in this church" (line 112); and the Catholic, Collin, said, "I always felt like I was a Christian" (line 18). They both included Move 1 when they talked about how they had attended church since their infancy and had

been involved in the life of those churches – Sunday school for Marci and first communion, confirmation, and CCD (Confraternity of Christian Doctrine) religious education classes for Collin. Both of them spoke about various experiences they had involving Bible study and their growing understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

Like Michelle from the insider testimonies, Marci included an Anti-Move 3 in which she stated, “I was already starting to grow before I even really could remember it, so it’s just always been a part of my life” (line 174). She went on to say that she had always believed the way she has. Just like Michelle, there was no reflection on any prior ignorance about her faith, only a firm statement of unchanging belief over time. She concluded her testimony narrative with something akin to Move 4, in which she affirmed, “I have always been able to find that perfect joy that Jesus loves me and that I am saved—that I know I’m going to heaven” (line 174). Clearly, she appropriated her faith, but that seemed to come from a gradual growth rather than a significant, intense faith experience.

Collin’s response to my question of how he became a Christian was unusual in two ways. He spoke of his faith identity as a “role,” a term which none of the other participants used. He explained, “About two or three years ago, I guess I kind of came into the role a little more” (line 18) because he and his father began discussing the topics from the Bible study his father attended. As a result, Collin became more interested in his faith as a Christian. Also, Collin’s response included hedging, such as “I guess” and “kind of,” which indicates hesitancy about this personal appropriation. While this is similar to Move 4, his hesitancy demonstrated the incompleteness of his personal appropriation process.

Finally, Astrid’s experience, moving from Catholicism to agnosticism, shaped her “testimony” in distinctive ways from the other participants. She explained how she was raised in a Catholic church and attended mass and CCD classes regularly until she was in eighth grade, which fits with Move 1. At that point, her grandfather became seriously ill, and

she declared her anger towards God as the primary reason she stopped attending church. The event of her grandfather's illness acted as the pivot point in which Astrid experienced a faith crisis. This functions as an Anti-Move 2, in that she "converted" away from the faith rather than to the faith. After turning away from the faith, she chose to take time, as she said, "to figure everything out" in her own way (line 18). This seems to be a similarly incomplete process of Move 4, like Collin, regarding her own personal appropriation of her decision to reject the faith.

Even though these three participants' faith identities lie outside the Evangelical community, they still referred to their religious experiences as children either at or near the question of how they became a Christian, thus including Move 1. After this, there was a range of variations. The testimony narratives from Marci and Collin both lacked Move 2, which may indicate that Move 2 is the primary distinguishing feature of an Evangelical testimony common to the IWU community. Astrid manifested an Anti-Move 2 using the testimony genre against itself. In addition to the absence/reversal of Move 2, none of these participants used the typical Christianese terms associated with these Moves. Marci included an Anti-Move 3 to clarify that she had no conversion experience akin to Move 2. Collin and Astrid both discussed their ongoing appropriation of their faith or lack thereof as a partial realization of what is usually rehearsed in Move 4. None of them included Move 5, which is in keeping with the majority of the participants in the full data set.

4.4. Christianese in the moves

Christianese was most prevalent in Move 2, the process of conversion, occurring in twenty-one of the thirty-one testimony narratives. The most common phrase, "I accepted Him/Jesus/Christ into my heart", is a mutually shared way of referring to one's conversion in Christianese. Another way of saying this in Christianese is to "ask Jesus into your heart." Of the thirty-one participants in this study, twelve used some form of this phrase. Some

Evangelicals will refer to this asking or accepting as “saying the prayer,” which is a reference to “The Sinner’s Prayer,” an emic title given to the formulaic prayer for Christian conversion (Howard, 2005, p. 179). This is the way in which Charlotte referred to her conversion in Move 2: “I just said the prayer and became a Christian” (line 62). Kris also talked about “the prayer” in his narrative in both Moves 2 and 3 (line 12).

Move 2 When I was younger – about 5 years old – it was something where I prayed the prayer. And I believe that’s important

Move 3 But praying the prayer doesn’t make you a Christian.

Maddie, in the inbound group, actually rehearsed “the prayer” in her testimony as she recalled her young conversion. She was four years old when her parents asked her to pray for lunch, but instead she surprisingly prayed, “Dear Jesus, I’m sorry for my sins, and I want you to forgive me and be my savior” (line 58). Her parents offered appropriate follow-up for the situation, but her words provide an unmistakable version of The Sinner’s Prayer adjusted for young children. This demonstrates her familiarity with the contents of the prayer even as a four-year-old.

Michelle and Joshua were the only participants from the insider testimony group whose speech did not completely conform to this Christianese lexis. Michelle’s recollection was the children’s minister asking, “Do you want to give your heart to God?” (line 79). This question still uses the metaphor of *heart* (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6), also found in the common, “ask/accept Jesus into your *heart*.” However, this nonconformity reflects one of the key differences in Michelle’s past from the other participants: she pointed out in her first interview that even though her family regularly attended church, her parents did not talk about God in their home or pray before meals. She noticed after just three weeks in the IWU community that her peers’ families had been much more vocal about their faith than hers had been. Even though she clearly articulated her sincere relationship with God, she did not use the typical lexis that indexes the Evangelical Christian identity. Joshua used significantly

different language in Move 2 when he said, “Around age nine I started to see it – claim it for my own and say, ‘Christ is real. Christ is true’” (line 8). Rather than inviting Jesus into his life through prayer, he acknowledged what he believed was true.

Nearly half of the inbound group used the Christianese lexis discussed at the beginning of this section, another indicator of their inbound trajectory in the IWU community. Both Dylan and Shannon used the phrase, “gave my life” (Dylan, line 94; Shannon, line 14), with “to Christ” implied as the unspoken indirect object. Josefina “felt like God was calling [her]” (line 48), and Heidi explained that “the sermon spoke to [her]” (line 12); both of these expressions served to explain their conversion point in Move 2 and draw on the Christianese use of divine agency as the primary force behind their conversions.

While Christianese lexis commonly occurred in Move 2, it also appeared in sixteen of the students’ testimonies outside of Move 2. This happened most frequently in Moves 4 and 5 where they discussed their personal appropriation and subsequent change in behavior or attitude. Some examples that occurred in Move 4 include *my walk*, *faith walk*, *His path and journey*, *on fire for God*, *God calling me* [to a vocation/ministry], and *dedicated my life to a personal relationship with Christ*. Examples occurring in Move 5 include *sharing testimonies*, *fellowshipping*, *pour into us*, *growing in [my faith]*, *Scripture coming alive*, and *living by the Spirit*.

Thus, Christianese primarily occurs in Moves 2, 4, and 5. Moves 2 and 4 seem logical since identity change occurs in each move. With conversion in Move 2, identity shifts from a non-believer to a Christian; deeper commitment occurs in Move 4 where the identity adapts to include the notion that the person has a fuller understanding of the belief. Move 5, where a change in behavior or attitude occurs, serves as an outgrowth of the deeper commitment in Move 4. It seems reasonable that the speaker would draw on Christianese to talk about that kind of change.

4.4.1. Peripheral use of Christianese

Within the data set, there were some unexpected instances regarding Christianese. My hypothesis maintained that Christianese would be common to certain moves in testimonies shared by those with Evangelical backgrounds and less common among the narratives from the peripheral group. However, there were some students whose intersection with Christianese surprised me. Carson, Eric, and Marci raised some interesting issues.

Carson was one of the students with an Evangelical upbringing categorized in the inbound group due to the number of moves included in his testimony (Moves 1, 2, 4, and 5); however, he never used any Christianese. Even in Move 2, he described his conversion by saying, “It was the first day here at college where I actually did really think I became a Christian” (line 18). He had been immersed in private, Christian schools throughout his life and had attended church, so it is highly likely that he was exposed to the Christianese commonly found in the testimony narrative. However, by not including any of this language in his narrative, he stepped away from the Evangelical identity despite demonstrating his understanding of the testimony genre by including four of the five moves in his own narrative.

Similarly, Eric experienced an Evangelical upbringing, but his testimony was categorized in the peripheral group because he included only Moves 1 and 2. However, Eric used Christianese twice outside of Move 2. The first was when he described his experiences at church camp when youth would “rededicate themselves” (line 16). I asked him to explain how that would typically happen at camp, and he described the atmosphere as serious and quiet: “It just seems like a good easy place if you feel the call to just accept God” (line 22). The phrase “feel the call” is Christianese, but the phrase “accept God” deviates from the typical Christianese “accept Jesus/Christ”. Yet Eric reiterated this idea just a few lines later and aligned it entirely with Christianese when he said, “If you feel some sort of calling, / you

should accept Christ into your heart” (lines 30 & 32). As I discussed above, Eric talked about the personal appropriation that occurs in Move 4 using Christianese, but he omitted describing his own appropriation of faith. This demonstrates how members of the IWU Evangelical community choose to incorporate Christianese in expected ways – in this case the testimony narrative – even if they have not experienced part of the narrative for themselves. Eric demonstrated his knowledge of the language in our conversation, but he did not identify himself with any moves beyond his young conversion. He used just enough Christianese to align his narrative with the Evangelical identity in order to belong to the IWU community as a peripheral member.

Finally, Marci demonstrated her awareness of and personal discomfort with certain Christianese terms in her testimony narrative. In her version of Move 4, she stated with confidence, “I’ve always been able to...find that joy...that I am saved, that I know I’m going to heaven” (line 174). She used the Christianese term “saved” without hesitation, which is unusual for Lutherans. Shortly after this statement, though, she expressed her discomfort with the phrase, “decision for Christ,” which is an Evangelical description for the call to conversion (Lang & Lang, 1960, p. 426). She further explained how conversion is not a decision on our part; instead she viewed it as “kind of a one-way thing. / You can decide to **not** let God in, but you can’t decide to let Him in” (lines 184 & 186, emphasis in original). She also took issue with the typical Christianese phrase, “accept Christ,” and made a distinction between accepting and surrendering; however, she struggled to clearly articulate a full explanation of her belief about this. Despite her inability to fully articulate these ideas, she clearly acknowledged the existence of certain Christianese lexis enough to disagree with the theology behind it. This, along with her Lutheran background, may explain why there was no other Christianese in her testimony narrative.

4.5. Conclusion: testimony as identity construction

In this chapter, I employed Swales' (1990) rhetorical move analysis model to identify the patterns with the testimony narratives from first-year students at Indiana Wesleyan University. I found five moves common across the data set, which varied from a similar study concerning testimony narratives from converted Christians in Malaysia (Dumanig, David, & Dealwis, 2011). The participants in my study all came from Christian backgrounds, so their testimonies logically differed from those in the other study. Furthermore, these participants were displaying identity in these interviews to someone they would have perceived as an established member of the IWU community. Thus, the data provides insight into the kinds of language the students believed to be appropriate to use with a senior member of the community. Students' perception of what constituted "appropriate language" may have varied according to their familiarity with the community practices and their sense of my status as the interviewer in the community.

Based on the variation among the testimonies within my data set, I grouped them into categories using Wenger's (1998) types of trajectories in the context of communities of practice: insider, inbound, and peripheral (p. 156). The insider testimonies contained all five moves, while the inbound testimonies contained a variation of three to four moves. The peripheral testimonies diverged from the first two groups more significantly. Regarding the moves specifically, Move 2 became the point at which students indexed the Evangelical Christian identity specific to the IWU community, by means of both the Christianese lexis and the conversion experience. The Christianese lexis fit with the broader Evangelical language used to describe one's conversion, and the young conversion demonstrated the life-long Christian commitment exhibited in the families of students who attend IWU. The personal appropriation at an older age in Move 4 related more generally to the Evangelical identity of owning one's faith (Rowe, 2014). It is possible that the inclusion of Move 5, in

which the speaker articulated a change in behavior or attitude, in one's testimony also indexed the Evangelical Christian identity in that the personal relationship with God is sincerely central to their identity. The particular practices of praying and reading the Bible in Move 5 helped shape the identity shift expressed in the attitude. Despite the variation of moves used in the testimonies, clear patterns emerged for each category I utilized to group the participants.

The closer examination of Christianese within the moves provided an additional means to investigate how students used this language (or not) to more fully align with (or distance themselves from) the IWU Evangelical identity. This investigation showed how students in the insider group used Christianese in Moves 2, 4, and/or 5 to construct their identity so that it fully aligned with the testimony practices at IWU. The students in the inbound group primarily used Christianese in Moves 2 and sometimes in Moves 4 and 5 in order to somewhat align with the IWU community. Lastly, the Evangelical students in the peripheral group used Christianese in Move 2 but mainly as a rehearsed quality from the genre they knew. This is in keeping with Wenger's (1998) notion regarding peripheral trajectories: while this trajectory may never lead to full participation in the community, it provides enough access to the community and its practices in order to contribute to one's identity (p. 154).

Chapter 5: Talking about God: Social Actors in the Community of Practice

5. Introduction

One of the characteristics of Christianese discourse is the way in which agency is located in particular ways, namely, giving God agency for certain actions. Dean (2010) highlighted the importance of agency in her interpretation of Smith and Denton's (2005) reference to "highly devoted teenagers" to include those who shared "stories in which *God had agency* [emphasis added] and was not merely a distant bystander" (p. 135) Thus, Dean identified God's agency as a distinguishing feature in the language of not just committed religious teenagers, but also committed religious people in general. More often than not, agency is given to God when describing positive actions that can bring comfort or explain God's current work in one's life. For example, "God is good *because* God provided me with a job" (Drury, 2015, p. 149, emphasis in original). The first clause of this statement describes God in terms of the attribute of good, and the second clause describes God in terms of function – thus activating God as a social actor or agent in the act of providing a job.

In order to explore how first-year students at Indiana Wesleyan University construct their identities using faith-related language, I applied aspects of van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor representation framework as a starting point in order to further understand the way in which the participants talked about God in their interviews. Initially, I focused on activation and passivation, and then developed my own categories for further analysis. Combining activation and passivation with my analysis categories allowed a more nuanced approach to better understand the role God plays in the participants' language.

5.1. Divine agency in the literature

In Drury's (2015) example above, the speaker attributes his new job to God's work, but he could easily have attributed this to non-divine causes, namely, his hard work,

background experience, or excellent interview skills. Yet in religious communities, people tend to attribute events, both positive and negative, to God's intervention in the situation; furthermore, the more religious someone is, the more likely that person is to attribute event outcomes to God (Gorsuch & Smith, 1983, p. 348).

Much work in this field draws on attribution theory, which is rooted in social psychology and is an amalgamation of "smaller theories" to understand causal explanations with regards to people, objects, and events (Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985, p. 2). Proudfoot and Shaver (1975) argued that attribution theory was a "natural path into the realm of religion" because of its "emphasis on beliefs and interpretations of experience" (p. 328). In substantiating their claim, they discussed Schachter's (1971) theory of emotion, Bem's (1972) self-perception theory, and Weiner's (1972) attributional approach to motivation and how each related to attributions connected to religious experiences. As research within this particular stream has continued, researchers have relied on quantitative methods such as surveys to determine the extent of attributions to divine causes (Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Lupfer, Hopkinson, & Kelley, 1988; Mallery, Mallery, & Gorsuch, 2000).

According to this theory, whether a person chooses to make religious or non-religious attributions depends on several factors: dispositional characteristics and the context of the attributor, and both the characteristics and context of the event (Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985). For example, in a religious context such as a Bible study in which religious explanations for events are common, the attributor is encouraged to make similar attributions (p. 12). However, when the event outcome seems incongruous with the attributor's image of God (e.g., as loving and powerful), researchers have found that religious people sometimes attribute the event to a non-religious or naturalistic explanation (Spilka, Spangler, & Nelson, 1983).

While attribution theory offers particular insight into the cognitive choices regarding how people understand events and their causes, I want to better *understand* how Christianese speakers *talk* about God – not just as the agent behind certain events – but also as the receiver of actions. Do speakers need to attribute agency to God, or does simply talking *about God* identify someone in a particular way? Moreover, how does the way in which they talk about God act as a means for constructing their identity as a member of the IWU community? Attribution theory allows for discussion of agency, though in a different scholarly field using different terminology, but the discussion is generally limited within set survey instruments using event vignettes (Gorsuch & Smith, 1983; Lupfer, Hopkinson, & Kelley, 1988) and sometimes with open-ended follow-up questions after the vignettes asking for an explanation about whether God had anything to do with the situation (Mallery, Mallery, & Gorsuch, 2000). The participants in these studies are often general psychology students answering questions to hypothetical scenarios.

Attribution theory and the methods used to explore real-life applications of it simply do not meet the needs of my research questions. In order to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants talk about God as a feature of Christianese and as a way of constructing their identity, I need to move beyond attribution theory and look more closely at the language used by these first-year university students. My study offers a more targeted sample of participants in that they all had a religious upbringing and thus gained exposure to “God references” to some varying degree. The data I have collected does not include hypothetical situations: the questions and answers were focused on the participants’ experiences in their first year at a faith-based institution. Finally, van Leeuwen’s (2008) analytical framework of representing social actors provides a more nuanced approach to examine the actual language used by the participants to discuss God in our interviews.

5.2. Social actor representation: activation and passivation

Using the social actor network to explore how speakers of Christianese talk about God as agent provides a better analytical tool than attribution theory for how agency works in this discourse. For example, agency can be realized in more ways than just by using the grammatical role of “agent”. These multiple ways can be distinguished using van Leeuwen’s (2008) sociosemantic approach toward identifying the social actors in discourse. This model maps the many different ways we can represent these social actors and considers the overlap of sociological and linguistic categories (p. 24). In my analysis, I will focus mainly on van Leeuwen’s categories of activated and passivated social actors in order to describe how the participants address agency in their speech.

Because I am primarily interested in exploring the “God references” in the speech of my participants, I analyzed each of the 124 interviews for references to *God*, *Jesus*, *Christ*, *Holy Spirit*, and *the Lord*, identifying the instances where they were activated or passivated. My analysis also included the personal pronouns *He*, *Him*, and *His* to represent the proper nouns. (None of the participants used a feminine pronoun to refer to God, but I have attempted to refrain from attributing gender to God in this chapter though this does mean, at times, a necessarily frequent use of the term “God” to avoid the use of gendered pronouns.) Activated social actors “are represented as the active, dynamic forces in an activity,” while passivated social actors “are represented as ‘undergoing’ the activity, or as being ‘at the receiving end of it’” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 33).

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, God’s agency in the lives of His followers is a central belief in Christianity. Smith and Denton (2005), along with Long (2004) and Dean (2010), discussed the importance for Christians to articulate the work God has done and continues to do both in the world and in individual lives. As an insider to the IWU community, I have witnessed faculty, staff, and students talk about this kind of personal

intervention in their lives numerous times; thus, I hypothesized that many of the participants in the study would frequently activate God as a social actor in our conversations. In particular, the students who came from Evangelical backgrounds were expected to follow this kind of pattern.

In my analysis, I marked all of the references to God: if there was both an activated and passivated reference in the same passage, I counted them individually. For example, when Helen stated in her second interview, “I don’t know what **God** has planned for me now, so I’m just giving that up to **Him** and believing that **He** will lead me” (line 22), she activated God in the first and third reference (God, He) and passivated God in the second reference (Him). In total, I counted 1,259 God references in the entire data set. Among these instances, God was activated as a social actor in 41% and passivated in 59%. When Dean (2010) discussed the highly devoted teenagers, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, she set up a troubling dichotomy between God as a primary active agent in someone’s life and God as a “distant bystander” (p. 135). If taken to its logical conclusion, Dean seemed to say that if speakers do not include God as the primary actor in their lives, then a distance is created to the point that indicates the speakers are not highly devoted Christians. Therefore, it is possible that Dean would determine the participants in my study to be less devoted because they talked about God as agent far less frequently than they passivated God as a social actor. Instead of identifying only “God as agent,” we can use van Leeuwen’s (2008) framework to identify God as a social actor and determine how the speakers identify God in common dialogue. To start, they passivated God more often.

In the table below and the examples throughout this chapter, I chose to **bold** the God reference and underline the verb (or verb phrase) associated with it. Table 5.1 provides examples to illustrate the identified activated and passivated usages in the participants’ discourse. Among the activated examples, God acted as the agent in reinvigorating John,

guiding Helen's life, speaking to Haley about a deeper level of dedication, and generally working in Kris' life. With the passivated examples, the God references acted as more of a topic for Michelle and the personal reference to a divine being with whom Helen, David, and Alex were in relationship. In most of these instances, God/Jesus/the Lord/He acted as a key social actor in the discourse – someone with whom these students have personal interaction in their lives. Michelle's statement about how her family did not talk about God at home was to contrast this realization with how other IWU students' families appeared to do this more; her comment was situated in a longer discussion about her religious family upbringing and how she noticed variety among her peers.

Table 5.1 Examples of activated and passivated divine social actors

Activated	Passivated
I felt God <u>fill me back up</u> . (John, #1, line 186)	We <u>didn't talk about</u> God in the home... (Michelle, #1, line 23)
I don't know what God <u>has planned</u> for me now, so I'm just giving that up to Him and believing that He <u>will lead</u> me. (Helen, #2, line 22)	I don't know what God has planned for me now, so I'm <u>just giving that up to</u> Him and believing that He will lead me. (Helen, #2, line 22)
God <u>was making it very clear</u> so that I could not deny what He was telling. And so He <u>spoke</u> to me about consecrating my life for Him and devoting all myself to Him... (Haley, #3, line 62)	I <u>am more committed to</u> God and <u>more in love with</u> Jesus every day...and I've <u>been following</u> Jesus more and more every day. (David, #3, line 184)
It's one of those things where you're observing how the Lord <u>is working</u> in your life... (Kris, #4, line 92)	It's been really hard <u>to walk with</u> God in some ways. (Alex, #4, line 60)

While God may not be activated as frequently as passivated, God is still an important social actor in the speech of the participants. If we ignore the times God references are passivated, then we lose the opportunity to explore the rich meanings behind these passivated actors. Additionally, if we bypass the activated instances to focus only on the passivated ones, then we overlook important usage of God as agent in the discourse. In both cases, it is not enough simply to identify the activated and passivated uses and draw conclusions from there. When examined more closely, the ways in which God is referenced in the text have

significant variations. Part of belonging in the community requires understanding when it is more common to activate or passivate God as a divine social actor.

5.3. Categories for talking about God

In order to build a deeper understanding of the passivation and activation practices, I determined categories for further illuminating how the participants talked about God. Among those categories, I discovered considerable differences in the passivation and activation patterns in the participants' usage. I identified thirteen categories and then grouped them into similar topics, along with their numerical instances, from most to least frequent in Table 5.2. The frequency count came from the total number of occurrences in the discourse. I will further discuss the categories and groupings below.

Table 5.2 Categories for activation and passivation of God

Talking about God				
Category	Number of instances		Total #	Total %
	Activated	Passivated		
Relationship	9	350	359	32%
Presence	25	13	38	
Communication	98	101	199	16%
Plan	175	21	196	16%
Attribute	24	83	107	16%
Identity	46	43	89	
Action	114	0	114	10%
Blessing	14	3	17	
God's opinion	13	0	13	
Topic	0	90	90	7%
Conversion	0	23	23	3%
Belief	0	8	8	
Surrender	0	6	6	
	518	741	1,259	

5.3.1. Relationship and presence

I grouped the categories of Relationship and Presence together because of their interpersonal connection. Being present with another person can often encourage a relationship to grow; presence can bring comfort, particularly when the person present is associated with positive connotations. In the same way, when participants talked about God in terms of Relationship and Presence, the ideas connected enough to form a logical group. Moreover, these references helped illustrate an understanding of God as the participants' friend.

The highest number of God references out of all the categories occurred with Relationship, which amounted to 28% of the data. First-year students at IWU spoke frequently about their relationship with God and with others at the university. Some also integrated discussion of their studies with discussion of their growing relationship with God. While the vast majority of these references passivated God, Table 5.3 displays examples that include God as activated and passivated.

Table 5.3 Relationship examples of activation and passivation

Relationship	
Activated	Passivated
"How little we talk about the gospel/and in comparison to how much God <u>loves</u> us..." (Alex, #1, lines 470 & 472)	"[Past experiences] forced me <u>to really fall in love with Him</u> in a whole new way." (Alex, #1, line 68)
"Just the Spirit <u>doing the growing work</u> in us..." (Travis, #1, line 134)	"...I'm continuing <u>to honor God</u> in my life and <u>pursue Him</u> ..." (Kris, #2, line 182)
"... He's a cool friend..." (Lydia, #3, line 24)	"[Our spiritual formation groups] were talking about how you view God...and I said, 'Like my friend, and I <u>look to Him for comfort</u> .'" (Melissa, #3, line 42)
"Maybe God <u>is trying to focus</u> us as a whole...back on Him." (Dylan, #4, line 114)	"I think [a really strong support group] <i>did</i> affect <u>my walk with God</u> in a positive way because it forced me <u>to go back to Him</u> ." (Haley, #4, line 26, emphasis in original)

Since the majority of Relationship references were passivated, I will primarily focus on them in the following paragraphs. However, the activated uses deserve a brief discussion. The examples in Table 5.3 illustrate how students activated God in terms of loving them (Alex), growing their relationship (Travis), acting as a friend (Lydia), and gaining attention in their friendship (Dylan). Four of the nine activated Relationship references came from Maddie. In her first interview, she voiced several emotions as she activated God in terms of their relationship. First, she worried that “**God** [would] be disappointed in [her]” (#1, line 352), but in the next breath attributed God as the source of growth in their relationship: “**God** has caused me to grow the most” (#1, line 352). She expressed confidence as she stated, “**He** comes alongside you” (#1, line 386) and affirmed her growing relationship with God as the agentive force, “**God’s** been working with me through these past couple weeks” (#1, line 414). In the majority of these instances, the participants activated God in a way that positioned Him as a friend with some level of authority in their lives.

The passivated examples minimized that authority to the point that the participants described their relationships with God as they might describe a human friendship. Alex talked about “falling in love with [**God**]” (#1, line 68), and Melissa explicitly referred to God as her friend and how she “look[ed] to **Him** for comfort” (#3, line 42). Kris and Haley used Christianese phrases to talk about their relationships with God: *pursue* and *my walk*. Kris wanted to “honor **God** in [his] life” as he “pursue[d] **Him**” (#2, line 182), which is another way to articulate improving his relationship with God in everything he does. This aligns with Kris’ ongoing narrative about wanting to serve God through baseball by demonstrating integrity both on and off the field (#3, line 219; #4, line 88). Haley mentioned how her strong support group encouraged her relationship, or “walk with **God**,” by reminding her “to go back to **Him**” (#4, line 26) when she faced challenges during the academic year.

Ninety-seven percent of the Relationship references passivated God, and these passivated references accounted for 28% of the God references in the entire data set. This overwhelming majority speaks to the way in which the participants understood both the Evangelical importance of having a relationship with God (Bennett-Carpenter, McCallion, & Maines, 2013) and their own place as the agentive force in that relationship. In order to develop their relationship, participants talked about attending unit devotionals, praying, and reading their Bibles more frequently. Even participants like Adria, who referred to God only ten times over the four interviews, talked about improving her relationship with God:

“I feel like now I lean on **God** more. At the beginning of the semester, I really didn’t pray a lot – like maybe once a month. And that’s something I wanted to work on, and now I do it like twice a week” (#3, line 52).

Increasing her prayer frequency from one time per month to twice per week was a significant step for her, and she did not do this alone. She attributed this change to a friend who encouraged her to write down her prayers. In this way, Adria acted as the agent in developing her relationship with God, while God was the passivated receiver who listened to her prayers.

In terms of the category Presence, 66% of the references activated God while 34% passivated God. While the divide between activated and passivated is not as extreme as it was for Relationship, this illustrates that the participants preferred to activate God as being present rather than passivating God. For example, Johanna contrasted her experience regarding how people in her life talked about God and touched on this idea of the divine presence at IWU: “And then here [in contrast to high school] we talk about God like **He’s here – everywhere** – and we all sense that” (#3, line 36). God’s presence brings comfort to the participants and contributes to a spiritual atmosphere that encourages them to develop their relationship with God. The majority of the passivated instances talked about *feeling*

God's presence (Carson, #1, line 16), *feeling God* (Alex, #1, line 424; Michelle, #1, line 97), or metaphorically *seeing God* (Alex, #3, line 44).

Furthermore, presence implies no action, just existence. In this way, despite there being activated and passivated instances of Presence, the activation of God in terms of Presence is similar to the passivation of God in the Relationship category since God is simply present rather than performing some kind of action. Despite the high number of passivated God references in these categories, the participants identified their devotion to God by talking about their relationships with God and His presence in their lives in a highly personal way.

5.3.2. Communication

The second highest group of God references involved Communication, with 198 references. For this group, I included any God reference that was involved in communication of some kind, whether God initiated the interaction or the participants communicated in some way with God. This was one of two categories in which the activated and passivated references were nearly equal in number. When participants activated God as the communicator, they typically used verbs such as *say* (Abby, #4, line 70), *show* (Helen, #4, line 18), *call* (Josefina, #1, line 48), and the verb phrase *put on my heart* (Kirk, #2, line 50). When they passivated God as the one being communicated with, they used verbs like *talk*, *pray*, *praise*, and *worship* most frequently, as well as other phrases such as *message from the Lord* (Kirk, #2, line 50), *acknowledge the Lord* (Kris, #2, line 174), and *interaction with God* (Marci, #2, line 190). These examples are listed in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Communication examples of activation and passivation

Communication	
Activated	Passivated
“What does God <u>wanna say</u> to me through this?” (Abby, #4, line 70)	“It was nice to have that release in <u>worshipping God</u> .” (Haley, #2, line 212)
“But I think God’s <u>really been showing</u> me that it’s important to treasure your friends...”	“It’s harder to have a <u>message</u> that really is from the Lord .” (Kirk, #2, line 50)

(Helen, #4, line 18)	
“I just felt like God <u>was calling</u> me [up to the altar].” (Josefina, #1, line 48)	“I can <u>acknowledge</u> the Lord in all my situations.” (Kris, #2, line 174)
“The Lord ’s <u>put</u> this on my heart.” (Kirk, #2, line 50)	“I have to be careful that I don’t lose the <u>interaction with</u> God [while interacting with others].” (Marci, #2, line 190)

The Communication group acts as an extension of the Relationship group in that the participants discussed their interaction with God as one way of further defining or explaining their relationship with God (Luhrman, 2012). However, while the Relationship and Presence references illustrate God as a friend, the Communication references portray God more as an authoritative figure. The participants were open about the kind of communication God provided as activated social actor, commonly using the kind of communicative verbs, which might be associated with an authoritative teacher or parent. For example, Jeannie stated, “I felt like **God** was telling me to go to IWU” (#1, line 54) instead of her other choice of university. Maddie recalled her early adolescence when “**God** worked with [her] and taught [her] a lot” (#1, line 122) about her young faith. Kirk mentioned how during one of the fall chapel services, “**God** confirmed” His plan for Kirk to be involved in a revival somehow (#2, line 102). At that point, he did not know the end result, but he believed that God communicated this part of the plan to him.

Some participants clearly viewed God communicating to them via the Bible, still as the activated social actor. Haley quoted 1 Peter 5:10 as something “which **God** used to speak to [her]” (#3, line 56), so she decided to make it her theme verse for the year. Members of the IWU community will often choose a “theme verse” that brings them comfort or gives them special purpose for a set time. She quoted the verse, “After you’ve suffered for a little while...the **God** of all grace will call himself to eternal glory in **Jesus Christ** and **He** will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (#3, line 56). She went on to explain

that what she read during her devotions were echoed during the special Summit chapel services in January:

“So it was kind of like **God** making it very clear so that I could not deny what **He** was telling me. **He** spoke to me about consecrating my life for Him and devoting all myself to Him and how that’s going to be a continual process and not just a one-time decision.” (Haley, #3, line 62)

Just as Haley identified God speaking directly to her through the Bible, Alex demonstrated his own processing of coming to terms with his past experience in inner-city Boston and the near-luxurious IWU campus by comparison. He said he was “thinking about what **Jesus** says in Matthew 25, which is, ‘When I was thirsty, did you give me a drink?’ and what is IWU doing – are we representing Christ in Marion?” (#2, line 182). Alex used the words of Jesus as a direct message for describing how Christ-followers should live. Earlier in that second interview, he asked the question, “What does **Jesus** teach?” (#2, line 48) in the context of expressing disappointment at the way Christians were responding to the refugee crisis in the autumn of 2015.

Communication from God did not always bring comfort; sometimes God communicated a message that prompted the participants about an issue that would encourage them to change their behavior or thinking, much like Alex’s examples in the paragraph above. Maddie expressed her growth over the first semester in terms of learning how “faith isn’t just about information, it’s about formation...and being open to what **God’s** trying to convict me of or help me pay attention to...” (#2, line 76). In the same interview, she later asserted, “**God’s** been teaching me that true freedom comes through submission” (#2, line 246), which can be an unpleasant experience at times.

Finally, participants spoke frequently about their prayer life, often recounting bits and pieces of actual prayer “conversations” to me during their interviews. In these instances, they

passivated God as the listener in the communicative act. Helen, Johanna, and Kirk spoke freely and at great length about their conversations with God. Helen's statement, "I pray to Him in the good times and I pray to Him in the bad times" (#2, line 42) summarizes the many references she made to communicating with God throughout her interviews. She further added, "I sort of just have to give up my worries to God and hope for the best" (#2, line 42), which illustrated her ongoing positivity over the year despite difficulties she experienced in making deep friendships (#4, line 18).

In some of these instances, participants referred to God in the vocative, recounting how they talked *to God* during their prayers. Johanna expressed a variety of emotions in her prayer retellings, ranging from confusion during a church service as a child (#1, line 124) to fear about where God might want her to go in life (#4, line 32). In each example, she demonstrated vulnerability by sharing her personal communication to God with an outside person. Twenty-one percent of the God references related to Communication came from Kirk, the highest number out of all the participants. In one interview line alone, he used the vocative to address God four times, which helped illustrate his vibrant prayer life. In this one utterance, he wanted to know where God was in his life, asked God to reveal the next steps in His plan for Kirk, requested that God change his attitude, and finally acknowledged God's presence despite not knowing the next step (#2, line 68).

5.3.3. Plan

The common adage spoken in Christian circles, "God has a plan for your life," surfaced numerous times in the interviews. The data revealed layers of specificity regarding the plan: participants discussed it as a specific time or event, an ambiguous larger plan, and even a negative event or circumstance in their lives that had a positive outcome. The overwhelming majority of God references related to a Plan activated God as the agent behind that plan. Examples of these can be found in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 Plan examples of activation and passivation

Plan	
Activated	Passivated
“ God <u>shut</u> a lot of doors and opened this one wide open.” (Alex, #1, line 460)	“I see spiritual growth as just an increasing accordance with God ’s <u>will</u> in your life.” (David, #1, line 186)
“I don’t know what God <u>has planned</u> for me now, so I’m just sort of giving that up to Him and believing that He <u>will lead</u> me.” (Helen, #2, line 22)	“I’ve learned... His <u>path</u> is the right one even if I don’t see it at first.” (Abby, #1, line 183)
“ God <u>has</u> a purpose for each person.” (Kris, #3, line 213)	“[Speaking about praying the Lord’s Prayer,] just cuz it’s not about me, it’s about Your <u>kingdom here</u> .” (Jared, #2, line 95)
“I feel like [the saying, ‘God has a plan for my life,’] might even risk having a laissez faire feeling about it where [students] are like, ‘I don’t need to worry about it cuz God ’s <u>got</u> a plan.” (Dylan, #4, line 72)	“When [students] feel a conviction to go into a certain major, they talk about like, ‘I feel like this is God ’s <u>plan</u> for my life.” (Dylan, #4, line 68)

Based on the interview data, the “plan” typically referred to a generalized confidence about God handling all the uncertainties of the future, though less frequently, it also referred to immediate events. These notions, both general and specific, are supported by the teachings of the well-known Evangelical preacher, Charles Stanley (2008), in his book about discovering God’s plan for one’s life. With regard to the data, Kirk spoke about getting involved with an evangelism group, who went around the town where the university is located, telling people about Jesus. He activated the God reference in terms of the plan for the morning: “On Saturday, we start at 11:00. We have this huge prep time, like prayer time, just seeing where **the Lord** wants us to go, and so we just pray about where to go” (#2, line 26). God’s plan in Kirk’s example involved the specific location for their evangelism ministry that morning. Likewise, Kris broadened this notion with the comment about “little decisions” playing a role in God’s plan for his life: “I believe that all these little decisions can affect me in some way, so for example, even choosing classes next semester, praying about that and

making sure that's where **God** wants me to go" (#2, line 174). Kris demonstrated his belief that God will guide his class choices for a given semester as a specific part of His plan for Kris' life.

In a similar way, the "plan" can be a kind of directed learning from God. Maddie explained, "I definitely think that **God**'s been teaching me and leading me. I feel like in some ways I pray better now... like really understanding what I'm praying. So I feel like in that regard, I've definitely grown a lot" (#3, line 121). The key verbs with God's activation in that statement were *teaching* and *leading*, in that God was directing her growth in understanding her prayers more fully.

Within the data, 92% of the God references regarding Plan activated God as the agent, while only 8% passivated God. The passivated instances still implied that God handles uncertainties or authors the participants' life plans; however, the speakers typically referred to these as *God's will/plan*, *[God's] kingdom*, or *His path*, the last of which is a common Christianese metaphor, this time insinuating the Plan. This passivation illustrates God's involvement in the "plan" as a social actor but not in the spotlight as the primary agent. The limited references used in this way suggest the participants, for the most part, understand God as the agent behind the plan. Activating God as the agent who writes one's life plan brings comfort to the speaker or the listener. Many participants affirmed this usage in the final reflection interview in which I explicitly asked why people say, "God has a plan for my life."

This saying usually connotes a positive sense, even in the midst of great ambiguity. The participants often laughed as acknowledgement that this saying offered vague—but very real—hope in times of uncertainty. Throughout the interviews, they activated God as agent regarding the plan, purpose, or direction for their lives 164 times. The activated examples in Table 5.5 clearly illustrate these kinds of God references. Abby seemed to try and convince herself not to worry about her future because she claimed, "**God** has it in His hands...and just

trust that **God** has a plan” (#1, lines 136 & 140). She connected the metaphor of “His hands” to God’s plan a few lines later. Helen also used the plan as a way to stop worrying about the future and trust that God would lead her (#2, line 22); she echoed that sentiment again at the end of the final interview but this time with a dose of doubt:

“I’ve been asking [God] if **He** wants me to work in the inner city...so
I’ve been talking to Jeannie recently about future plans and thoughts,
but I also don’t know if that’s just something that I’m passionate about
because I’m passionate about kids or if that’s specifically laid on my
heart.” (Helen, #4, line 102)

Helen was clearly in the process of sorting out some big life questions at the end of the academic year but was not certain if her desires came from herself or from God (*specifically laid on my heart*). Yet she remained sensitive to understanding God’s plan for her future. Similarly, both Alex and Kris demonstrated their belief in God’s plan – Alex, like Helen, applied it to his own life when he said, “**God** has really good things for me here” (#3, line 50), while Kris expanded that to include everyone when he affirmed, “**God** has a purpose for each person” (#3, line 213).

In a similar way, the category of Plan in the data included some kind of negative event that ultimately ended with a good result. In all of these instances, the participants discussed events or situations that exhibited some degree of difficulty or challenge for them wherein they activated God as the agent who “allowed” something negative to happen, or even carried out the negative action, in order for them to achieve God’s greater plan. In each of these eleven instances, the participants identified God as the agent, either directly or with uncertainty. For example, as Collin explained why he chose to attend IWU and play baseball with the team, he directly ascribed agency to God in the circumstances that surrounded this decision: “I mean, if **God** tore my ACL for me to come here, I wish **He** would have done it a

different way, but I'm fine now" (# 1, line 48). A torn ACL injury is incredibly painful – thus, a negative experience – but he ultimately felt pleased with the outcome of receiving an athletic scholarship to play baseball at IWU. Collin displayed no qualms directly attributing his torn ACL to God's agency.

Likewise, Melissa described a youth group at a small local church with which she had considered becoming involved. She explained that the youth group was "so much smaller than anything I've ever been used to, but I thought, 'Ok, maybe this is a challenge **God set** for me,' and I want to check it out" (# 2, line 94). She activated God as the agent for giving her a challenge – but with some uncertainty due to the additional word *maybe*. She further explained how this had indeed been a challenging learning experience in her first semester at college. The descriptions of how this experience increased her anxiety, added to her busy schedule, and taught her the need for personal boundaries in her relationships with the youth group students all contributed to a negative cast on this "challenge". Yet she believed in a positive outcome because of the effect on her spiritual growth that semester, which resonates with Gorsuch and Smith's (1983) conclusions regarding the likelihood of a person of faith attributing outcomes to God.

Finally, as Lydia spoke about her childhood adoption and family issues in the final interview, she identified how God had possibly been working in her life through the challenges of adoption and death of a parent:

"I *knew* all of these things in my head, but I just didn't connect it, I guess, to my heart, and I wasn't quite sure, you know, if **God purposefully put** me in all these experiences to shape me and mold me to who I was supposed to be."

(Lydia, #4, line 32, emphasis in original).

Lydia hedged a great deal, using *I guess* and *I wasn't quite sure*, as she tried to make sense of the challenges she experienced growing up. She was uncertain whether she could attribute the

cause of those experiences to God, but she ultimately affirmed the positive end result from those difficulties. Later in that same line, Lydia inserted, “Everything is for a reason,” in the midst of her identifying God’s presence with her throughout those experiences, again confirming her belief in God’s agentic work in her life through her difficult childhood.

Thus, despite the participants’ uncertainty regarding big life decisions or negative events, they demonstrated their desire to make sense of the ambiguity by trying to relate it to God’s bigger plan. The specific examples from Collin, Melissa, and Lydia demonstrate their direct association of God as the activated social actor behind their negative circumstances that ended with a positive outcome.

5.3.4. Attribute and identity

I decided to group the categories of Attribute and Identity together because these references to God related to each other semantically: one’s attributes often contribute to one’s identity. However, since Attribute and Identity are closely related in meaning, I decided to differentiate these categories by labeling God references as Attribute if they specified a characteristic of God and Identity if they offered a more general comment about identity, as will be evidenced in the following discussion. In the language used by the participants, God was passivated more frequently in terms of Attribute but activated and passivated more equally in relation to Identity.

Grammatically speaking, the Attribute category contained an assortment of constructions, particularly when the God references were passivated: noun phrase containing a possessive proper noun (**Christ’s** love—David, #1, line 190), noun-plus-prepositional phrase (glory **of God**—Alex, #4, line 102), noun-plus-participle (**God**-honoring—Joshua, #3, line 46), and noun-plus-noun (**Christ**-followers—Kirk, #1, line 178). In these various constructions, God was passivated in order to describe another entity – namely, people, themselves, or behavior – with divine characteristics. For example, Helen talked about the

importance of “**Godly** women” in her life (#1, line 14); Joshua described having “**God-honoring**” relationships with others (#3, line 46); and Collin felt that he had started to become “more like **Christ** in [his] actions and words” since arriving at IWU (#2, line 106).

While there were multiple ways in which participants passivated God concerning Attribute, one attributive term surfaced numerous times over all four interviews. Eight different participants used *Christ-centered* sixteen times, with an additional variation (*Jesus-centered*) by one more person. This description appears in IWU’s mission statement, which is repeated in chapel and by many faculty in their classes: “Indiana Wesleyan University is a Christ-centered academic community committed to changing the world by developing students in character, scholarship, and leadership” (“Mission,” 2017). Thus, it is not surprising that multiple students appropriated it in their own language use. Both Kris and Kirk used it to describe IWU, Kris in terms of describing “the life of the campus, which is **Christ-centered**” (#2, line 224) and Kirk in terms of “the statement of what IWU is, like **Christ-centered**” (#2, line 94). But other students applied it to more specific examples, such as conversations (Melissa, #4, line 68), dining experiences (Dylan, #3, line 84), and professors’ classes (Marci, #1, line 14).

When the participants activated God as the social actor in the Attribute category, they described specific attributes of God’s character sometimes with a predicate nominative but more frequently with a predicate adjective. In the examples with the predicate nominatives, the participants described God’s character with a metaphor: “I see **God** as the armor that allows me to bite off whatever it is that’s crushing me down” (John, #4, line 88) and “I opened my Bible and it was Psalm 62 where it talks about **God** is our rock and our fortress” (Maddie, #1, line 114). The former example describes God’s character as *armor*, while the latter uses *rock* and *fortress*: all three images illustrate a characteristic of strength. The most common references that activated God offered attributes using the predicate adjective

grammatical structure. Some examples included “**God** is amazing” (Johanna, #2, line 144), “**God** was merciful” (Marci, #1, line 164), and “**He**’ll remain faithful to that call” (Kirk, #4, line 28).

Participants talked about Identity more frequently in terms of “who **God** is” (Adam, #4, line 60) or “who **He** is in the Bible” (John, #1, line 144), activating God in these references. Yet the context of the references often lacked descriptive elements that detailed God’s or their own particular identity, as in the examples in the previous sentence. Moreover, many of the references included “vision” verbs, such as *see*, *view*, and *show*, to preface the activated God reference: “the way **God** sees [other people]” (Haley, #3, line 68), “how **God** views me” (Joshua, #2, line 144), and “show them who **Christ** is through that” (Joshua, #4, line 34).

Similar to Adam’s comment above, Maddie mentioned a deepening “understanding of who **God** is” (#2, line 84) through her classes in the John Wesley Honors College, while Adam attributed that growing knowledge to his theology class. In contrast, others described God’s identity in terms of actions. For example, Michelle explained, “[In New Testament Survey class] I learned a lot about who **God** is and how He sent His son and that He loves us that much...” (#4, line 30). God’s identity is described in terms of sending Jesus because He loves humanity. Similarly, Joshua described God’s identity through how His followers should behave based on the example Jesus gave them: “When we’re just interacting with people on a day-to-day basis, especially if they’re a non-believer, we’re called to love them, pour all we have into them, and show them who **Christ** is through that” (#4, line 34). In this way, behavior is closely connected to one’s identity for these participants.

5.3.5. Action, blessing, and God’s opinion

The vast majority (98%) of the God references in this grouping activated God as the social actor behind the action, blessings, and opinions. This may be the group of God

references Dean (2010) alluded to concerning God’s agency since these utterances primarily place God in the subject position. Regarding the Action references, the most common verbs used by participants included *do*, *work*, *move*, and *create*; and these occurred 61 times out of the 114 references in the data. Table 5.6 offers examples of the most common Action references.

Table 5.6 Examples of the most common Action references

Action		
Verbs	Frequency across interviews	Examples
do	32	“This is what God’s doing in my life.” (Kirk, #1, line 68)
		“ God has done it for us,” in reference to specific blessings like a job. (Shannon, #4, line 110)
work	13 + 5 nouns	“ God worked in [other female college students’] lives.” (Melissa, #2, line 38)
		“ God has definitely done a work in my church.” (Maddie, #1, line 40)
move	8	“I am seeing God ready to move and change .” (Abby, #1, line 28)
		“Just be aware of other people that He’s moving in .” (Kirk, #2, line 70)
create	8	“I’m always pouring into...who He’s created me to be...” (Joshua, #3, line 46)
		“ God created us to be the image of God.” (Kris, #4, line 12)
help	3	“ He will help you with everything.” (Johanna, #1, line 164)
change	3	“ God has really changed my life.” (Alex, #1, line 66)

The first four verbs listed in Table 5.6 encompassed 54% of the verbs used in the Action references. With these instances, the work God does is referenced in a vague way but heavily implies God’s active involvement in the participants’ lives. For example, “what **God is doing**” was a common phrase among the participants, but rarely did they specify any particular action, as in Kirk’s example in the table above. When asked about spiritual growth in the first interview, Michelle mentioned engaging in activities “that bring out your best

qualities and allow you to figure out what **God** can do in your life” (#1, line 325). Even though she ascribed agency to God’s action in her life, she prefaced this by talking about activities in which she or others would have agency, such as spending time with people (line 315) or singing or writing (line 323). While she specified the kind of actions in which people have agency, she gave agency to God in vague terms. Shannon was one of the few participants who identified what God had done when she connected this to the common Christianese saying, “I’m so blessed.” She explained, “When we say, ‘Oh, I’m so blessed to have this job’ ...we don’t consider that **God** has done it for us” (#4, line 110).

Along with the verb *do*, *work* was the second most common verb in this category. Again, common uses of this verb offered vague references of God’s actions in the participants’ lives. For example, as a result of hearing the Dean of the Chapel’s personal stories about God working in his life, Joshua stated, “I could relate to how **God** was working in his life and how I see **Him** working in mine” (#2, line 88). At times *do* and *work* were combined in the phrase, *do a work*, as in Maddie’s example in the table above and Johanna’s comment in reference to God alleviating her stress: “Let things go/...and let **Him** do the work” (#1, lines 136 and 138).

Participants used the verbs *move* and *create* eight times each. They tended to say *move* when they viewed God as the agent in their own spiritual growth or that of others around them. Both of the examples in Table 5.6 illustrate this notion – Abby mentioned God moving in regard to herself and others, and Kirk said this about others. Responding to my question in the last interview about how her faith had changed over the year, Maddie stated, “I’ve been feeling a bit this semester like I’m walking into a strong headwind spiritually...I mean, I definitely see **God** moving, and I’m still learning so much in my classes, but I’m kind of very overwhelmed” (#4, line 4). Despite Maddie’s challenging spiritual life, she still attributed agency to God regarding her spiritual growth.

The verb *create* was most often connected to identity. Joshua and Kris spoke several times about identity and becoming more comfortable with their identity clearly connected to God, but they also stated the assertion, “He created me,” several times to refer to the kind of person God had created them to be. For example, Joshua said this twice in one line to refer to his identity and as someone who should be in a relationship with God: “I’m always pouring into who God is, who **He’s created** me to be, and how **He has created** me to be in relation with Him” (#3, line 46). Interestingly, he prefaced God’s agency with his own in terms of his relationship with God. Kris used the verb *make* as a substitute for *create* when he stated, “I’m understanding that if I stick to the identity and the purpose that **Christ made** me as the image of God...then that’s really all that matters...” (Kris, #4, line 22). Kris reiterated his focus on his identity as the image of God several times in the final interview. His use of the verbs *create* and *make* illustrate the link between “God creating” and certain participants’ identity.

The category of Blessing connects to Action in that all of the references spoke to God’s *blessing*, *provision*, or *gifts* given to the participants. Several of these instances came from the final interview in which I explicitly asked the participants about the Christianese term *blessed*, as in “I feel so blessed to be here.” In my example, God is excluded, yet it is recognized by members of the community that God is the agent behind the blessing. However, each time the participants referenced God in terms of Blessing, they activated God as agent: “**God has blessed** me with these talents” (Collin, #4, line 238), “**God ended up providing** [a brand new phone]” (Haley, #2, line 184), and “You have to...make life decisions based on what you feel like **He’s gifted** you with and what **He’s blessed** you with...” (Helen, #4, line 54).

Finally, God’s Opinion was really just that. In thirteen different utterances, participants stated what they believed God’s opinion would be concerning a topic or situation. In these cases, they activated God as agent each time and usually prefaced it with

their own personal assertion, as when Michelle described her shift in thought and behavior by the end of the first semester. She stated, “I like it, and I think it’s what **God wants**” (#2, line 152). Similarly, participants mentioned *what God thinks* or *what God wants* regarding their behavior: “I’m just trying to pursue what **God thinks** is right” (Alex, #1, line 34) and “it’s actually living like **God would want** us to live” (Johannah, #1, line 363). In these instances, participants attempted to discern God’s opinion about their habits and lifestyles, a common practice in Evangelical Christianity typically achieved through prayer, talking with others, and reading the Bible.

5.3.6. Topic

Just seven percent of the God references from the data belonged to the category of Topic. With these references, participants spoke about God as a topic of discussion, in which God was always passivated as a social actor. For example, “You can study **God** academically” (Travis, #1, line 128), and “[Other departments at IWU] talk about **Christ**” (Melissa, #4, line 68). In these examples, *God* and *Christ* are the passivated actors at the receiving end of the verbs *study* and *talk about*. When Michelle talked about her spiritual growth over the year, she attributed part of that to chapel: “Chapel has definitely been a huge thing that’s kept **God** on my mind a lot more” (#4, line 30). Again, *God* is the passivated actor that is brought to Michelle’s mind by the agent *chapel*.

Twenty-five of the participants made at least one reference to God as a topic, so this was not an unusual kind of reference despite its low frequency in the data. However, one student’s references in this way intrigued me based on the remainder of his interviews. Carson made nine references to God in the first interview but none in the remaining three interviews. Of these nine, five references fell into the Topic category. Carson attended private Christian schools prior to his arrival at IWU, but he asserted, “[The students] never really talked about **God**. Like ever” (#1, line 51) in contrast to the environment he had already

experienced in the first three weeks at the university. He further described how he and his best friend who attended a different university had recently begun “talking about God” (#1, lines 287 & 305) with each other. The last three references in the first interview were his retellings of what their hall chaplain had said during a special devotion at the beginning of the semester. Carson’s numerous references to God as a topic demonstrate a lack of personal experience with God but also a recognition of the centrality of that experience in the community of practice at IWU. For more discussion about Carson’s specific language use, see section 7.2.2.

5.3.7. Conversion, belief, and surrender

I grouped together the categories of Conversion, Belief, and Surrender to form the final set. This grouping contained the lowest count of references in the data, yet these concepts are key to the Christian faith. Conversion is one of four defining characteristics of Evangelicalism (Bebbington, 1989, p. 2), and the concepts of belief and surrender remain central in Evangelical teaching (Dobson, 2002; “What is an Evangelical,” n.d.). In each of these categories the God references in the data were always passivated. Participants talked about accepting *Jesus*, believing *in God*, and used colloquial versions of surrendering *to God*.

Eighty-seven percent of the twenty-three *Conversion* references occurred in the final interview when I asked the participants about the word *testimony*. In each instance they explained *testimony* in terms of the “conversion question,” *When did you accept Jesus?* (see Table 5.7 for examples of this), or they briefly recounted their own conversion experience. (Refer to Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of their testimony narratives.) Apparently, some IWU students used the “conversion question” as a way to open a conversation when making new acquaintances, according to Johanna: “...especially in the beginning of the year...so that’s almost the conversation starter. I’ll sit there like, ‘So, what are you doing here? When did you accept Jesus?’” (#4, line 128). After further thought, she recalled how that question

would be preceded by, “What’s your story?” (#4, line 134), implying one’s testimony or conversion story.

The eight references to Belief ranged from students describing their own personal belief as in Johanna’s and Eric’s examples in Table 5.7, to the beliefs of others on or off campus as in, “They just kind of believe that there’s a **God**...but none of them would go to church ever” (Lydia, #3, line 24). With Johanna’s and Eric’s examples, there exists a separation of identities. Johanna expresses her certainty in her beliefs and how that trickles over into her acceptance of God’s plan (*why I’m here*); in contrast, Eric uses his general belief in God as a marker to indicate his belonging to the IWU community, but then he qualifies that belief by adding, “but I’m not very spiritual or religious or whatever you want to call it” (#3, line 36), and thereby moves himself closer to the periphery in terms of Wenger’s (1998) levels of engagement in the IWU community of practice.

Table 5.7 Examples of Conversion, Belief, and Surrender references

Conversion, Belief, & Surrender	
Conversion	“When did you <u>accept</u> Christ ?” (Michelle, #4, line 92)
	“Well I don’t have that ‘ <u>come to Jesus</u> ’ moment that you hear about.” (John, #4, line 76)
Belief	“I <u>believe</u> in God and why I’m here.” (Johanna, #2, line 116)
	“I mean, I <u>believe</u> in God and all that, but I’m not very spiritual or religious or whatever you want to call it.” (Eric, #3, line 36)
Surrender	“You’re supposed to <u>give</u> it all to God , and that’s hard to do.” (Heidi, #4, line 92)
	“[Spiritual people are] the people that are <u>willing to turn everything to God</u> .” (Mike, #1, line 167)

The last category of Surrender had the least frequent references with only six, but it is interesting to note that none of the references used the term *surrender*. Substitutions for this

included *consecrating my life for Him* (Haley, #3, line 62), *give it all to God* (Heidi, #4, line 92; John, #2, line 38), and *turn everything to God* (Mike, #1, lines 157 & 167).

5.4. Conclusion: the role of God's agency in identity construction

The purpose of this chapter was to develop a deeper understanding of how Christianese speakers talk about God – to go beyond the simple assumption that they primarily ascribe agency to God as a way to demonstrate their devotion (Dean, 2010). I employed van Leeuwen's (2008) sociosemantic network to determine how God was referenced as a social actor in the participants' discourse throughout the interviews. I identified whether God was activated as the agent of some action or passivated as the receiving end of some action and then further identified thirteen categories that assisted in the description of when and how they talked about God.

Overall, I found that participants passivated God more frequently in the categories of Relationship, Attribute, Topic, Conversion, Belief, and Surrender; while they activated God more frequently in the categories of Presence, Plan, Action, Blessing, and God's Opinion. Only two categories contained a close split, with three occurrences more on the passivation side for Communication and three more on the activation side for Identity. This contrasts between the relatively even split of activation and passivation overall, with passivation occurring more often, and the very uneven split within certain categories illustrates that a person uses specific sets of language competence to mark their identity within the IWU student community of practice. The practice includes knowing *when* to activate or passivate God, not just that one can do either in approximately equal amounts. Thus, talking about God goes beyond Dean's (2010) simple explanation that God's agency is a distinguishing feature in the language of highly devoted believers. God's agency is an important feature, but just as important is when and about what topic God's agency is mentioned. For example, when people talk about their relationship with God, the norm is to passivate God. But if they talk

about “the plan,” it is more likely that they will activate God as the agent. Furthermore, participants passivated God at times when they relayed the importance of God in their lives, whether as a friend or as an authoritative figure since God carried both roles for many of the participants.

Some students clearly felt more comfortable referencing God in their interviews than others, which could explain these God references as a particular practice that marks membership within the IWU community. Johanna suggested this when she stated, “Most of my friends that came from a public school where they didn’t talk much about God...didn’t know how to fit in with the others [at IWU]” (#3, line 94). Perhaps Johanna meant that exposure to people talking about God enables others to learn the common ways of talking about God within the IWU community. Heidi serves as a helpful example of this because she had attended a public high school prior to beginning at IWU. In her first interview, she referred to God only twice. The second and third interviews contained three and two God references respectively. However, the last interview included fifteen references to God in the categories of Relationship, Attribute, Plan, and Surrender. She appeared to increase her comfort level for talking about God in a variety of ways over her first year at IWU.

When I compared these practices among the participants with the community of practice categories used in Chapter 4 on testimonies, there was no clear connection between those who talked about God according to the patterns presented in this chapter and their insider/inbound/peripheral status from Chapter 4. I had hypothesized that the insider students would have referenced God more frequently than the inbound or peripheral students. However, this proved not to be the case as some of the peripheral students referred to God more frequently than inbound and insider students, and one peripheral student had the same number of God references as an insider student. This important result problematizes the notion that someone’s identity can be categorized in one simple way.

In conclusion, membership in IWU's community of practice is not just about naming God as the agent but knowing when to either passivate or activate God, given the topic or category that is being discussed. Looking at actual language use among the participants revealed particular patterns of activation and passivation of God in different categories, patterns employed by members of the community of practice to help form their identity and secure their place in the community.

Chapter 6: Talking about Relationships: Metaphors in Community Practice

6. Introduction

“Like saying, ‘My walk with God,’ or ‘How’s life?’ – like going into a deeper sense in your conversation” (David, #4, line 74).

David’s reply to my question for some examples of how people talk in the IWU community demonstrated the importance this community places on relationships. I prompted this with inquiring about “the *way* people talk” (italics mine, Anne, #4, line 69), not about the topic of their conversation. Yet David offered two examples that deal with relationships: one’s “walk with God” and “going into a deeper sense” in conversation with others.

Relationships play a key role in Evangelicalism (Chandler, 2014): “there is no better place to begin than with friendship, singleness, marriage and family (Webster, 1999, p. 9). Healthy marriages, family values, and one’s relationship with God are important issues within Evangelical teaching (“About Focus on the Family,” 2018; Griffith, 1997), so it is a natural effect that these issues are also important within the IWU community – adjusted somewhat for young adults. From my fieldwork, attending chapel numerous times during the year of data collection, I know that the chapel theme in the second semester was “Relationships,” which demonstrates again the importance of this topic within the community. As the interviews progressed over the year, the participants talked a great deal about relationships – with others, with God, and with themselves in terms of personal well-being – and they used metaphors to describe these relationships. As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explained, “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). Taking this one step further, an Evangelical pastor and scholar coined an enlightening term for this blending of narrative and metaphor: *narraphor*, which refers to “a story made with metaphors that help us understand the world, ourselves,

and God better” (Sweet, 2014, p. 3). While he focused on how narraphors in particular “build our identity and stabilize our relationships” (p. 3), I will argue that metaphors themselves play an important role in the interaction of members within the IWU community as they talk about relationships.

David’s examples above include the metaphorical references of *walk*, as part of one’s JOURNEY in one’s relationship with God, and *deep*, as DEPTH IS SIGNIFICANCE in terms of a meaningful conversation that serves to enhance one’s relationship with another person. Jeannie’s commentary below went straight to the point about the use of metaphors in Christianese discourse:

“I feel like a lot of people use Christianese here. So if people who had no idea came in [to our community], they’d be like, ‘What? Born again?’ Things like that. / [Christianese] is kind of like the idioms of Christianity: *born again*, Jesus coming *into my heart* – like a man’s not physically coming into your heart (laughs).” (Jeannie, #4, lines 40 & 42)

She recognized that the discourse employs certain words and phrases that carry specific meaning to the community that uses them, which relates to Charteris-Black’s (2004) claim that “metaphors are always used within a specific communication context that governs their role” (p. 9). In her example above, she referred to the *heart* metaphor found in the majority of the insider testimony narratives discussed in Chapter 5, and she outright laughed at the literal possibility of that metaphorical phrase. Yet she also demonstrated her observation of the role Christianese plays in the IWU community and that outsiders to the community might not understand the community’s way of speaking.

Thus, the focus of this chapter is to identify how the participants in my study used metaphors common to Christianese discourse as a social practice within their interviews to talk about relationships. While much work has been done on conceptual metaphor theory,

which will be discussed briefly below, I will not address the cognitive process of metaphor usage by my participants. Instead, I will argue that using certain metaphorical references enables the participants to construct their Christian identity within social interaction.

6.1. A nod to conceptual metaphor theory

Conceptual metaphor theory, though not the focus of this chapter, offers an important foundation for understanding how metaphors function in interactive discourse. Metaphors, according to this theory, play a foundational role in the human conceptual system (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003); they claim that “human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical” (p. 6, emphasis in original). Metaphors appear to be an important element of Christianese, possibly because, as Semino (2008) states, “metaphor enables us to think and talk about abstract, complex, subjective and/or poorly delineated areas of experience in terms of concrete, simpler, physical and/or better delineated areas of experience” (p. 30). In the IWU community of practice, talking about one’s faith or how one experiences God moves the speakers into these abstract, complex, subjective, and poorly delineated realms of experience; thus, metaphors assist community members in articulating these important areas of their faith. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) also recognized this use of metaphor: “Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness” (p. 193). Issues of faith certainly fall into the realm of the partially comprehended, with hundreds of years of religious scholars attempting to explain these mysterious concepts.

Moreover, metaphors are used throughout the Bible, so it follows that they would also be incorporated in the speech of those who read the Bible and ascribe to Christianity. Leiter (2013) had noted the inclusion of metaphors in Christianese as discussed earlier in section 2.1.3. In a critical metaphor analysis, Charteris-Black (2004) examined the metaphors in four books of the Bible, two in the Old Testament (Job and Psalms) and two in the New

Testament (Matthew and John). He categorized these metaphors into fourteen semantic fields² with an additional “other” group, which will be discussed below according to their relevance to this study. Some of these categories overlapped with my groupings below, but Charteris-Black noted his sample as being limited because he chose two Old Testament books that included a great deal of imagery and two of the gospels in the New Testament that differ significantly in content and structure from the remaining non-gospel books (p. 181). However, his study serves as a systematic approach to understanding the use of a sample of metaphors in the Bible.

While there is a place for conceptual metaphor theory in the study of Christianese discourse, the purpose of this study is to identify the participants’ use of Christianese in identity construction. When I began exploring the metaphors in my interview data, I discovered that they were used to talk mainly about relationships within (and outside of) the IWU community—relationships that focused on others, self, and God. It is also important to remember that these metaphors are not unique to Christianese, but they are used to mark membership within the community: they comprise a part of the linguistic resources in the shared repertoire of the community (Wenger, 1998, p. 83). Therefore, for the rest of this chapter, I will identify the most common metaphorical references used by the participants and then demonstrate how the participants used them to construct identity.

6.2. Reflection on the role of the interviewer

Before I move on to the analysis, it is important to offer a moment of transparency in my data collection and subsequent analysis by explaining my role in co-constructing

² The semantic fields identified by Charteris-Black (2004) included animals, conflict, plants, light, building/shelter, food & drink, body, journeys, weather, fishing & hunting, fire, treasure/money, dirt & cleanliness, clothes, and other (p. 181).

metaphorical expression with the participants. As I interviewed the participants four times throughout the academic year, each round of interviews had a particular theme: Arrival, Activities, Community, and Reflection. (The interview questions can be found in Appendix E.) During the interviews, I decided to use language common in the community at times and use more “secularized” language at other times. I did not want to prompt any particular answers from the participants, but I also wanted to make them feel more comfortable by demonstrating my membership in the community. I generally tried to avoid specific Christianese in my questions and comments, but sometimes it came naturally to me (as a community insider), and it would have sounded odd to the interviewee if I did not use it at all. For example, when I asked them to define spiritual growth in the Arrival interview, I had not considered that the concept of *growth* would play an important role in the participants’ identity, and I had not thought of *growth* as a metaphor. Some participants would repeat the phrase of *spiritual growth* in their immediate response and then add other **agricultural** metaphors to describe this. For example, David started by defining *spiritual growth* and then added comments about growth as a “natural, *organic* outpouring of love” (#1, line 188), *the fruits of the Spirit* (#1, line 190), which was an intertextual reference to Galatians 5:21, and proceeded to mention *growing* and *spiritual growth* three more times within four minutes of the initial interview question. Contrary to David’s example, Adam provided nearly the opposite. I asked him to define *spiritual growth*, and he responded without using the same phrase and without drawing on any metaphors; yet he added that one of his goals for the semester, nearly six minutes after the question to define *spiritual growth*, was “to continue my *growth* in the *walk* of faith” (#1, line 244), drawing on the additional metaphor of *journey*.

In each interview session, I asked at least one question about their faith, faith development, or the role their faith played in their lives, along with questions specific to each

interview theme. For example, in the second interview, Activities, I asked questions about their involvement in university events, their thoughts about the required chapel services, and any significant experiences they could describe from their first semester at IWU. Throughout the data, these first-year students used metaphorical references to talk about relationships within (and outside of) the community regarding God and people. These metaphors were used alone and mixed together throughout the data, and they will now be discussed in further detail.

6.3. Semantic fields and metaphors

After reading through the entire dataset and underlining words and phrases that seemed to me to be characteristic of the Christianese variety with which I am familiar, I identified a total of 923 metaphorical references. While these are not necessarily unique to Christianese, I will demonstrate in this section that metaphors serve as an important feature of this discourse and contribute to marking member identity within the community.

Because of the large number of metaphorical references in the data, I decided to organize them by semantic fields or domains, which are sets of lexical items with related meaning (Hatch and Brown, 1995, p. 33). The identified metaphors could all be categorized within ten different semantic fields, along with a miscellaneous category, which are listed from the most frequently used metaphors to the least used in Table 6.1 below. These domains include **agriculture**, **conflict**, **network**, **stability**, **depth**, **journey**, **construction**, **heart**, **water**, and **atmosphere**. As we will see below, the participants primarily used them to talk about the community of IWU and their place within it. In the subsequent sections, I will use **boldface** to identify the semantic field and *italics* to identify the metaphors in focus. I will also include a table that details the spread of metaphors within each semantic field.

Table 6.1 Semantic fields and their metaphor counts

Semantic fields	#1	#2	#3	#4	Total
Agriculture	102	25	56	26	209

Conflict	20	30	26	78	154
Network	39	26	36	7	108
Stability	20	10	28	30	88
Depth	31	15	15	22	83
Journey	30	7	10	27	74
Construction	21	8	12	10	51
Heart	15	9	8	12	44
Water	8	5	10	17	40
Atmosphere	6	7	20	4	37
Miscellaneous	14	4	12	4	35
					923

6.3.1. Agriculture

The largest semantic field in the data was **agriculture**³. Typical metaphors within this field were *growing* or *growth*, *season*, *fruits* (of the Spirit), *plant seeds*, *weed*, *cultivate*, and *dig*. While these all carry meanings related to agriculture, they work as metaphors in the data because the participants used them to reference the notion of their developing spiritual life and/or friendships at IWU. The verb *grow* was used both intransitively as in, “Since coming to IWU, I’ve actually *grown* a lot closer to God” (Haley, #1, line 114), and transitively as in “[The IWU community] has been so helpful in *growing* my faith” (Abby, #4, line 16). *Growth* mainly centered on spiritual and personal development, and other concepts contributed to this *growth*: getting *seeds planted* (Dylan, #3, line 100), *weeding* through a few friendships (Melissa, #4, line 28), *cultivating* relationships (Kirk, #1, line 276), and *digging* in to God’s Word (Jeannie, #2, line 118).

³ Charteris-Black (2004) included the semantic field of **plant** rather than **agriculture**.

However, he focused on the “natural cycle of organic growth...[relying] on there being suitable environmental factors such as sufficient nutrients, water, sunlight, etc.” (p. 190). I chose **agriculture** because the semantic field in my data dealt more broadly with the farming process.

While the vast majority of the metaphors used in this domain included the noun and verb forms of the word *grow*, several participants used other agriculture-related metaphors, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. As I discussed in section 6.2 above, I specifically asked the participants about spiritual growth in the first interview, which explains the highest number of references in Table 6.2. However, as I asked about their faith development in the remaining interviews, some participants continued to use the *grow/growth* metaphor despite the lack of an explicit “growth” prompt.

Table 6.2 **Agriculture** metaphors

Agriculture Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Grow (v)	68	17	47	20	152
Growth	25	2	4	1	32
Fruit	5	0	0	0	5
Organic	1	0	3	1	5
Dig in	1	1	0	2	4
Greenhouse	0	3	0	0	3
Plant	0	0	1	1	2
Plateau	1	0	0	0	1
Cultivate	1	0	0	0	1
Season	0	1	1	0	2
Dryness	0	1	0	0	1
Weed	0	0	0	1	1
					209

In the first interview, I asked the participants to define spiritual growth and to give an example of someone they knew who exhibited the qualities they used in their definition. Some of the students offered specific ideas, but other students remained vague. For example, Abby talked about the importance of having a supportive community (#1, line 154), as well as “be[ing] invested in the Word” (#1, line 158) and how “being in that personal relationship with God helps with *growth* and / gets you to keep *growing* and keep learning” (#1, lines 160 & 162). Thus, Abby listed the key characteristics of having like-minded support, reading the Bible, and maintaining a personal relationship with God – all central practices within Evangelicalism (Icenogle, 1994). On the other hand, Adam answered the same question

without using any agricultural metaphors by equating spiritual growth with “a change in the attitudes and actions of a person” (#1, line 176).

These agricultural metaphors were not only used in reference to relationship with God, however. Participants used these metaphors to describe personal development as well as relational development with others. For example, when Joshua said he was “actively *growing* myself” during his summer ministry position (#1, line 96), he explained how he missed reaching out to others and desired to get involved in some kind of ministry during the academic year. Part of the experience of “reaching out to others” enabled him to grow personally. Melissa talked about her involvement in a women’s ministry on campus called “Delight” and how she was “excited to just *grow* those relationships” [within the group] (#1, line 100). Just a few lines later, she added, “I’m definitely excited about *growing* friendships...I’m excited to have those solid friends and *grow* with them and stuff” (#1, line 112). The second usage referred to *growth* in terms of corporate growth on an individual level. In this way, she used the metaphor *grow* to reference her relationships with friends and with God.

Some students mixed several metaphors together throughout their interviews, including when discussing the issue of spiritual growth in the first interview. Joshua included metaphors from three of the semantic fields listed in Table 6.1, namely, **agriculture**, **network**, and **depth** when he stated, “[Spiritual growth] is having a *deep connection* to Christ, having that *deep connection* where you *grow*, and then you’ve *grown* into Christ” (#1, line 72). For Joshua, spiritual growth involves creating and maintaining a meaningful relationship with Christ.

Not all students used these agricultural metaphors. Astrid and Heidi never used any in their interviews, and eight participants uttered these only once or twice. Seven of the eight used the *grow* metaphor each time, while Mike only used the metaphor *dig in*, as in “*digging*

into the [Bible] stories” to explain the concept of spiritual growth (#1, line 197). Thus, it seemed more common for students who were less familiar with the other agricultural metaphors to use the *grow* metaphor; only two of these seven students referenced this metaphor outside the first interview. Without explicit prompting, Eric mentioned that he felt he had “*grown* closer to God” (#3, line 36) due to “all the exposure” (#3, line 38) during his few months at IWU. Shannon talked about her IWU friends’ influence as a source for helping her *grow* (#4, line 10), but I had explicitly asked her in the previous line if she had experienced any influences at IWU that had helped her grow.

Haley used the *grow* metaphor several times in the first three interviews, but then demonstrated her acquisition of the *dig in* metaphor when she said, “It’s just this particular period right now where I’m going through a lot of different stresses where I feel like I need to *dig in* deeper, I think, is the right term” (#4, line 28). With this utterance, she displayed her previous lack of knowledge about this metaphor, as well as her attempt to begin using it in her own vocabulary. In this way, Haley showed her inbound trajectory by “trying out” the new-to-her metaphor from the shared repertoire of the community (Wenger, 1998, p. 83) and marking her desire to speak as an insider within the community.

6.3.2. Conflict

The **conflict** domain included a variety of concepts all related to this idea and involved the metaphors of *struggle*, *challenge*, *wrestle*, *battle*, *trial*, and *test*. None of these references from the participants was in a physical sense but rather used in a metaphorical sense. The most common metaphor in this domain was *struggle*, occurring a total of 92 times throughout the interviews, yet 55% of these instances occurred in the final interview (see Table 6.3). This is likely due to the fact that I explicitly prompted the usage by asking, “Have you *struggled* with anything that has affected your *walk*?” As I explained in section 6.2 above, I chose to include community “buzz words” occasionally throughout the interviews in

order to identify myself as a community insider, but I had not realized the extent of the metaphor usage when I developed the interview questions. For example, I included the **conflict** metaphor *struggle* and the **journey** metaphor *walk* without recognizing them as metaphors at the time. None of the students responded with surprise or confusion when I asked this question, and many had ready responses or even preempted my question by talking about these issues before I had the chance to ask.

Table 6.3 **Conflict** metaphors

Conflict Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Struggle	12	17	12	51	92
Challenge	4	2	2	9	17
Wrestle	0	3	0	7	10
Test	0	0	3	5	8
Battle(field)	0	1	5	1	7
Trial	0	4	2	0	6
Stretched	2	0	0	1	3
Crush	0	0	0	2	2
Warfare	0	1	0	1	2
Fight	0	2	0	0	2
Attacked	1	0	0	0	1
Grappling	1	0	0	0	1
On guard	0	0	1	0	1
Confront	0	0	0	1	1
Red flag	0	0	1	0	1
					154

The primary topic that participants spoke about with regard to **conflict** was their relationship with God, and they used a variety of **conflict** metaphors to describe these issues. For example, Alex talked about how he was “just *struggling* to see God clearly” (#2, line 46), and Dylan mentioned one of his friends “was being spiritually *attacked*” (#1, line 357). Joshua talked about the benefits of attending the weekly early morning prayer walk because he “was *struggling, wrestling* – how am I doing with my faith?” (#2, line 144). Maddie spoke of “spiritual *warfare*” (#4, line 6) and her desire to “*confront* evil” (#4, line 34). Moreover, Johanna added the element of Satan’s agency when she stated, “I need to be *on guard* for

everything because there might be something that Satan *throws* at me” (#3, line 54). With both Maddie and Johanna, they intensified the **conflict** metaphor by adding the opposition to their relationship with God and by taking action against it. The usage of military metaphors within this domain echo Sawin’s (2013) study that analyzed the discourse of a men’s Bible study as well as an older study that examined military imagery frequently used by Evangelical men in the Promise Keeper’s movement (Donovan, 1998). Additionally, many of the **conflict** metaphors in the Old Testament relate directly to military imagery, in terms of both offense and defense (Charteris-Black, 2004, pp. 207-208).

Within the **conflict** of relationship with God, participants spoke about the conflict they experienced within themselves. This was often a vague reference to *struggling* in general: “I love Delight because we’re just open and honest about prayer requests and things that we’re *struggling* with in our life” (Helen, #3, line 50). But they also provided specific issues about which they were having a difficult time, like self-confidence, feeling loved by parents, or keeping their “hearts” in the right place. For example, Melissa stated, “I really *struggle* with self-doubt” (#1, line 274); and Lydia, an adoptee at a young age, admitted, “I have been told I’m loved, which is something I *struggled* with, by my parents” (#4, line 32). Ultimately, these issues affected their trust in and relationship with God. Some participants took up the military imagery when talking about these self-conflicts. Kirk wanted to confirm that his evangelism activities had the appropriate motivation when he said, “That’s really the *battle* I constantly have...doing this for the right reason” (#3, line 18).

However, students also talked about friends with whom they felt comfortable enough to share their challenges and how that contributed to their ability to experience development in their relationship with God and with others. Helen spoke enthusiastically about her friend, Jeannie (another participant in this study): “If I had to think of one person to go to if I had a

big problem, or like one person I really want to talk to when I'm *struggling*, it'd be her" (#3, line 56).

In addition to discussing the challenges in their relationships with God and within themselves, participants also described difficulties in typical life issues for university students: homework or classes, finding balance, and discerning the future. Alex confessed, "My last class was a bit of a *struggle*" (#2, line 14), while Shannon's reference was slightly more serious: "[Going to church on Sunday] is something that I'm *struggling* with and trying to balance that well with my homework and new friendships and just all of this" (#1, line 154). For Charlotte, classes in her major "*challenged* [her] academically" (#4, line 4), but she also talked about feeling overwhelmed with not knowing the future, "so that would *test* [her] in [her] faith" (#4, line 26). She concluded, "I'm still kind of *struggling* with that" (#4, line 28).

The metaphor of *struggle* is certainly not unique to the IWU community, yet the frequent usage by twenty-five of the thirty-one participants demonstrates its place in the linguistic repertoire of the community. Michelle reflected during the final interview, "At the beginning [of the year], my faith was really *tested*" due to her "major adjustment" to IWU (#4, line 28). She also had a moment where she began to say "hard" but then switched mid-utterance demonstrating her understanding of this piece of the linguistic repertoire at IWU: "I need to be more intentional in my prayer life – that's one I have a hard—I *struggle* with" (#4, line 74). Moreover, other **conflict** metaphors play a role in enabling members of the community to articulate the challenges they experience in their efforts to develop relationships with God, others, and themselves.

6.3.3. Network

The **network** semantic field focused primarily on relationships. The most frequent metaphors included *connecting* and making *connections*, contributing to 95% of the

metaphors in this domain (see Table 6.4). *Plugged in* occurred three times while *energized* and *conduit* occurred once each. Nevertheless, these **network** metaphors contributed to the participants' talk about relationships with people, the community, and God.

Table 6.4 **Network** metaphors

Network Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Connect (v)	20	17	24	5	66
Connection	18	6	12	1	37
Plug in	1	2	0	0	3
Energize	0	1	0	0	1
Conduit	0	0	0	1	1
					108

Most of the participants were concerned about developing relationships with the people around them at IWU. Abby actually chose IWU based on what she observed with people in the IWU community as a prospective student; she was impressed by seeing people stop and pray with each other (#1, line 44), and she noted, “There really wasn’t any of that *connection* with the students [at other colleges]” (#1, line 64). One of her goals for her first year was “to *connect* people on [her] floor” (#1, line 238) in her dormitory because community was an important aspect of college life for her. Developing relationships in the residence halls is one of the hallmarks of a residential campus like IWU (“Residence halls,” 2018), so the staff will create opportunities for the students to get to know each other better. For example, Kris talked about a recurring event called “Root beer and Bros,” where they’ll “have root beer and...just share – it will be a time to *connect* and...a time to have fun...and enjoy fellowship with each other” (#2, line 54). This kind of intentional bringing people together enabled Kris to become “really close with two juniors across the hall and...to *connect* with them” (#2, line 98).

Melissa mentioned how other students in her dormitory unit had “*connected* to each other a little bit more” than she had (#1, line 346), but she went on to say, “I *connected* with

some girls who are in my ministry classes,” (#1, line 348) and, “I probably am going to have more *connections* with people in my major” (#1, line 352). Thus, relationships also develop through mutual academic interests. As a commuter student, Eric stated at the beginning of spring semester, “I’ve already started to *connect* to more people because I have more classes with them now and more opportunity to talk” (#3, line 32). Michelle spoke with excitement about people interested in accounting, “When I see that in other people, we have a *connection*, like something we have in common” (#1, line 375).

They also developed relationships in extra-curricular activities. Adam felt like intramural sports were “an excellent *connecting* opportunity” (#1, line 46) even though he did not offer any examples of anyone with whom he had connected in this way. Thus, students networked with others in their dormitories, classes, and extracurricular activities.

In a similar way, participants incorporated **network** metaphors when they discussed their interest in becoming more involved in the community. Kirk talked about the roles of a Resident Assistant (RA) and Resident Director (RD) involving mentorship and how they “can mentor individuals that [they] *connect* more with” (#2, line 82). When describing an answer to one of his prayers, Kirk added, “I’ve spoken to...my RD who knew my brother [who previously attended IWU], and I can *connect* well with [him]” (#2, line 88). These metaphors also extended to networking outside the IWU community. This largely centered on involvement in a local church or ministry of some kind. Both Maddie and Abby mentioned their desire to “get *plugged in*” (Maddie, #1, line 146; Abby, #2, 22) at a church; Abby ultimately volunteered at the church nearest to campus while Maddie decided to serve at a small church in a nearby farming community.

While participants primarily used **network** metaphors to discuss relationships with others, they also incorporated them when referencing their relationship with God. Josefina first mentioned this during her testimony narrative where she described her “first encounter

with God” (#1, line 34) and continued, “I have always had this strong *connection* ever since I was little” (#1, line 38). Corbin offered, “I feel more *connected* to God and spiritual stuff” [at IWU] (#3, line 60). Other students talked about chapel as a venue for experiencing their relationship with God. Marci described how she felt “closest to God when [she’s] either playing or singing or listening to [music]” (#2, line 132), so she “feel[s] a really strong *connection* during...chapel” (#2, line 134). Both John and Joshua used metaphors in this domain when they described the concept of spiritual growth. John described the role his mother played in guiding his spirituality, “always bringing it back to the God-*connection*” (#1, line 346). Joshua went straight to his definition: “[Spiritual growth] is having a deep *connection* to Christ, having that deep *connection* where you grow and then you’ve grown into Christ” (#1, line 72). He developed what this meant by offering specific practices, namely, “getting to know Christ’s prayer, reading His word, and delving into what His word means” (#1, line 72).

One last area of usage within this domain dealt with the notion of *disconnectedness*. In Helen’s eagerness to find her place within the IWU community, she felt “more *disconnected* from home” (#3, line 4) but believed she was finding more balance between home and IWU by the end of her first month back in the spring semester. In a different way, Mike used his sense of connectedness to make a decision about changing his major. He realized, “I don’t really have that [outgoing] personality. It’s harder for me to make those *connections*, and I don’t particularly like making those kinds of *connections*” needed as a youth pastor (#3, line 54). Consequently, he changed his major from youth ministry to exercise science in the spring semester.

Several students noted connection or disconnection during the communities of practice task I included in the third interview, Community. I asked the students to identify which members of the community fit into the different levels of participation based on a

simple CoP graphic (see Figure 3.3 in Chapter 3). For example, John, like several others, placed those who “have a hard time *connecting* with people” in the peripheral circle of engagement, illustrating his understanding of the community’s emphasis placed on developing relationships with each other. In the final Reflection interview, Eric candidly offered commentary about hearing some students say the opposite of the statement, “I’m so blessed to be here,” because “they felt *disconnected*. Usually it was because they had no friends here” (#4, line 174). Even with Eric’s opposite statement, he highlighted the community practice of engaging in meaningful relationships. When students cannot develop these friendships, their lack of network encourages them to leave the community.

6.3.4. Stability

The semantic field of **stability** included the following metaphors: *strong*, *strength*, *rooted*, *grounded*, *solid*, and *firm*. Table 6.5 provides the numerical spread for the usage of these metaphors. Participants used them to identify the stable relationships in their lives, as well as to state their desire to find or create stable relationships. Yet this metaphor in the IWU community extends beyond the basic corporeal interpersonal aspect; **stability** also includes the spiritual realm, and this spiritual stability serves as a foundation for all kinds of relationships: *strong* relationships with people are *rooted* in shared faith, which includes their relationship with God.

Table 6.5 **Stability** metaphors

Stability Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Strong(er)	13	2	13	21	49
Solid	3	1	7	6	17
Strength(en)(ing)	3	1	1	2	7
Ground(ed)/(ing)	1	1	2	0	4
Rooted	0	1	2	0	3
Firm	0	3	0	0	3
Foundation	0	0	2	0	2
Rock	0	0	0	1	1
Sound	0	1	0	0	1
Power	0	0	1	0	1

The primary use of the metaphors in this domain illustrates the importance of having stable faith in and/or a meaningful relationship with God. A number of participants referenced their own relationship as *strong* or *solid*. As discussed in section 6.3.3, Josefina mentioned her “*strong* connection” to God during her testimony narrative with the additional comment, “and then it just got *stronger* over the years” (#1, line 38), presumably through her involvement in her family’s religious practices. Similarly, Adam asserted that the moment of salvation “provides a *grounding*” (#1, line 64), which has the potential to serve as a foundation or starting point for a life of faith.

Some participants merged behavior with stability within the context of relationship. For example, Alex recalled his experience living in inner city Boston for a year and how that challenging environment “actually ended up *strengthening* [his] faith / and *strengthening* [his] convictions” (#1, lines 270 & 272). He later talked about practices as contributing to a stable relationship with God: “You can’t get *stronger* spiritually if you don’t have disciplines that are going to make you / *stronger* and more in love with God” (#1, lines 358 & 360). Likewise, Collin used this metaphor in his own synthesis of spiritual growth with behavior: “When you start reacting to things like Jesus did, that’s when you know that you are spiritually *strong*” (#1, line 176). Finally, Travis acknowledged the need for God’s support when he remarked, “We really have no *strength* without Him...There’s such a *power* behind all of us” (#3, line 24).

In addition to their own stable faith, participants noted examples of friends with a *strong* faith and/or relationship with God. Adria cited a friend from home with whom she had spent time over the holidays; she seemed to suggest that despite her friend attending a non-religious university, “She’s been *strong* in [her faith]” (#3, line 36). In the same interview (Community), Collin merged the stable faith of his IWU friends with his own by saying,

“[My] friends here are more *solid* in their own personal beliefs” (#3, line 72), and “I feel like [my spiritual life] was always *strong*, but being here, I think it *solidified* it” (#3, line 74). This is likely due to having friends with stable religious beliefs (Bryant, 2005; Magolda & Ebben, 2006; Perry & Armstrong, 2007). Shannon affirmed this notion: “I have a different me that’s at school because I feel like my faith is *stronger* when I’m here because of the people I surround myself with versus being at home” (#3, line 62). For Shannon, then, her identity shifted depending on the religious stability of the people around her.

While participants primarily applied the **stability** metaphors to one’s relationship with God or personal faith, they also extended the domain to express similar ideas about relationships with people: students sought out stable relationships that ultimately had their foundation in shared faith. For example, Melissa expressed, “I’m excited to have those *solid* friends and kind of grow with them” (#3, line 112). “*Solid* friends” are those people with whom others can further their own relationship with God, that is, developing spiritually within a like-minded group of people (Wuthnow, 1994, p. 347). Haley talked about a recent death of a close family friend but emphasized, “The good thing was I had a really *strong* support group around me” to help her through (#3, line 24). Thus, when participants had stable relationships with shared faith, they felt a sense of belonging within the IWU community.

6.3.5. Depth

Depth included grammatical variations on the metaphor *deep* as evidenced in Table 6.6 below, which contributed to descriptions of participants’ relationships with people and God. The students applied these **depth** metaphors to conversations, friendships, and intrapersonal descriptions of thoughts and emotions. Forty-seven percent of the metaphors in this domain referred to conversations with people. When Collin talked about his solid friends (discussed in 6.3.4), he also mentioned their conversations. “You can talk to them about

deeper things than just basketball” (Collin, #3, line 72). Joshua found friends among other attendees of the early Wednesday morning prayer walk through their shared interest in spiritual **depth**. He commented, “We can share the *deep* stuff; we can share our hurts, our struggles, and our pains, but we’ll also encourage each other” (#2, line 146). Abby explicitly explained the **heart** metaphor in terms of “when people are opening up to each other and really going *deep*” (Abby, #4, line 138). Thus, *deep* conversations offer avenues for meaningful connections in developing relationships.

Table 6.6 **Depth** metaphors

Depth Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Deep	10	7	3	15	35
Deeper	11	6	6	5	28
Shallow	6	0	0	1	7
Deeply	2	0	3	0	5
Delve	2	1	0	0	3
Surface	0	1	1	1	3
Depth	0	0	2	0	2
					83

Not all participants appreciated what they felt like was an onslaught of fellow students wanting these deep conversations. Melissa shared, “In the ministry department, ...people really want to get *deep* and more than just *surface* level, which I appreciate. But sometimes it’s a little draining because we’re constantly trying to get *deep* with each other and it’s tiring” (#4, line 68). She expressed the same sentiment but regarding some of her friends in her residence hall:

“I do have a couple friends on my floor who...really like having *deep* relationships and *deep* conversations all the time...She was like, ‘Melissa, what are you struggling with? Let’s just get *deep*.’...Sometimes it’s awkward and brought up like that. I don’t always want to talk *deep* all the time.” (Melissa, #4, line 108)

Yet Melissa's thoughts provide a description of how *deep* is understood by members of the community: like Abby's account, deep relationships require an element of vulnerability, and they take time and energy to achieve. While Melissa affirmed her appreciation of these conversations, she clearly did not want to engage in them constantly.

Next, participants used **depth** metaphors to describe friendships or relationships, primarily with other people. Some students spoke of their goal to develop meaningful relationships with the people around them. For example, Charlotte talked about "building relationships with people around [her]" and desired "just to grow *deeper* relationships to the people [in her residence hall]" (#1, line 342). Moreover, Jared planned on "building *deeper* relationships with other students" (#1, line 296), while John had already noticed by the third week of classes in the fall semester that there were "more connections being built on a *deeper* level" (#1, line 404). In each of these examples, the participants combined *deeper* with the metaphors, *build* and *connect*, to intensify the profundity of the desired relationships. Later in the year, Lydia described her IWU friends this way, "We have a *deeper* relationship even though we don't even know each other that well, which we do, but there's a whole other past life to each one of us that we don't even know about" (#3, line 62). Lydia hinted at the fact that their lives prior to IWU are not what brought them together; instead, their living proximity and shared faith and experiences at IWU have enabled them to develop meaningful friendships (Ma, 2003).

Thus, there also appeared to be an expectation that students would experience meaningful relationships. Helen stated, "I haven't really met my *deep* friends yet...but I am very excited throughout the years to become closer to specific people and just have those friends that I can rely on" (#2, line 56). Helen used key phrases to further identify how to interpret "*deep* friends": "become closer" and friends to "rely on". Helen later confided, "I'm a *deeply* relational person, so I'd like to have *deep* conversations, and I feel like last semester

was a lot more *surface*—like acquaintances” (#3, line 50). Here Helen contrasted *deep* with *surface* – something that several other participants did with regards to acquaintance-level relationships (John, #3, line 88; Kris, #2, line 220; Melissa, #4, line 68). This concept of *surface*-level friendships also appeared with the *shallow* metaphor when Jared talked about being “able to have *shallow* conversations because they’re really easy” with people he did not know very well (#1, line 146). Likewise, Alex used this metaphor to explain the notion of “nice” in relation to the community of IWU: “The word ‘nice’ is kind of a little *shallow*. It’s just kind of nice on the *surface*, but does it really have value?” (#4, line 98). Alex suggested that depth carries value; if relationships remain on the surface, they potentially lack substance.

In addition to relational **depth** with people, participants used metaphors from this semantic domain to describe one’s relationship with God, either their own or another person’s: “Some people...are really *deeply grounded* in their faith” (Haley, #3, line 84). Kirk acknowledged, “There are people here who aren’t here to follow God or go after a *deeper* relationship with Him” (#1, line 144), but he later shared, “God has been calling me to go *deeper in the water* with Him (#1, line 210). Not everyone at IWU wants to have a meaningful relationship with God, yet Kirk talked freely about his own desire for that, using the **water** metaphor to symbolize his trust in God. Shannon believed that “being here surrounded by believers—it’s kind of just *deepening* [her faith]” (#2, line 118). Like Kirk had mentioned above, Alex commented five times about the community’s lack of depth with regards to one’s relationship with God – what he referred to as a *shallow* faith (#1, lines 76, 286, 384, 408, 504). Because of his experience in Boston prior to his studies at IWU, he spent the academic year working through the extreme differences between his life there and his life at IWU, which included the state of his faith before, during, and after his time in Boston. As a

result, he believed, “[His Christian friends’] genuine belief had never really existed, and it was just so *shallow*” (#1, line 504).

The last category for how the **depth** metaphors were used involves descriptions of people’s inner thoughts and emotions. This category captures a small range of usage from describing personal thoughts to searching for meaning, usually in the Bible. For instance, several students referenced “*deep* inside” when I asked them to explain the Christianese expression, “What’s on your heart?” or “I want to share what’s on my heart.” Heidi responded that someone is “willing to tell you what’s been going on *deep* inside” (#4, line 176). Jared also explained, “It might mean they’re getting into some *deeper* personal stuff” (#4, line 136). Three participants used the verb *delve* in the context of searching for meaning. Both John and Joshua used the phrase “*delve* into the Word” with slight variation: “[A local church]...allows us to *delve* into the Word a bit” (John, #2, line 46) and “...*delving* into what His Word means” (Joshua, #1, line 72). In these quotations, “Word” refers to the Bible; thus, these students desire to search the Bible for meaning and learn from that study. Marci talked about how her father was “willing to go into really *deep* discussions...and help us to grow in that and be able to *delve deeply* with us” during Bible studies (#1, line 266). Marci’s comment confirms this notion of searching for meaning in order to develop their relationship with God.

6.3.6. Journey

Metaphors within the **journey** domain involved *walk*, *path*, *journey*, *steps*, *movement*, and a couple others listed in Table 6.7. These metaphors incorporated the notion of movement or progress and were primarily applied to some kind of faith context. Seventy-nine percent of these references were used to describe either the participants’ own spiritual development or that of others. For example, Adam stated, “I am making *steps* towards [personal spiritual growth]” (#1, line 198), while Adria recognized, “In every person’s

spiritual growth, the *journey* is different” (#1, line 104). Both of these include movement from point A to point B of some kind.

Table 6.7 **Journey** metaphors

Journey Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Walk	9	2	5	12	28
Path	3	3	4	4	14
Journey	6	1	1	5	13
Steps	9	1	0	2	12
Moving	3	0	0	1	4
Road	0	0	0	2	2
Footing	0	0	0	1	1
					74

Even though I asked the students about their spiritual development throughout the year, they often brought it into the conversation on their own. They talked about their “faith walk” (Shannon, #1, line 14; Maddie, #3, line 125) or just their “walk” (Jared, #1, line 70; Lydia, #4, line 130) and how their spiritual lives were progressing. Some students talked about this more frequently than others, namely, Alex, John, and Maddie; but others made no references to this semantic field, in particular, Eric, Astrid, Carson, Corbin, Marci, Mike, and Joshua. Still, twenty-four of the participants used some kind of metaphor within this domain at least once during the interviews.

In addition to spiritual progress, some participants used the metaphor *stepping out* to refer to taking a risk by trusting God. Michelle used this metaphor to explain a change in her faith development: “[Confirmation] was actually a big *step* in my faith; that’s when I got to know a lot of kids in my church” (#1, line 61). For her, confirmation was an avenue by which she began making Christian friends who encouraged her to mature in her faith. In a slight variation, Kirk asserted, “There’s a lot more that He can show you / by *stepping out* in faith” (#1, lines 98 & 100). He acknowledged how one’s action of trust can bring about God’s agency in that relationship. Melissa took this idea further when she recounted her prayer “to

get rid of that self-doubt and have confidence and *step out* of my comfort zone...I've really learned to rely on Him and / *step out* of my comfort zone" (#1, lines 292 & 294). She expressed her change in being able to trust God and take risks with that faith.

Among the twenty-one percent of **journey** metaphors not used within a faith context, most occurred within the context of personal life experiences. Alex mentioned his experiences in Boston several times, saying, "It's been quite a *road*" (#4, line 56) and talking about how he and another friend in the City Year program "*walked* through this *journey* together" (#4, line 64). He mentioned how that changed him "because you just *walk* their *walk*" (#4, line 88), that is, he joined in the lived experience with others who lived in inner-city poverty. He worked through the transition from Boston to a Christian university campus, "just trying to *walk* through that and how these pieces shape who I am" (#4, line 92). For Alex, his personal *journey* included identity construction based on his varied lived experiences.

Ultimately, the metaphors of **journey** occurred the most frequently in the first and last interviews, possibly because the participants saw their first year of university life as its own *journey* as well as part of their life's *journey*. But intrinsic to that *journey* for most of the participants was the grounding in their relationship with God, and they viewed movement in that relationship as both necessary and positive.

6.3.7. Construction

The **construction** semantic field involved the metaphor *build* as a verb in every instance but one (see Table 6.8). From my emic perspective within the community, I had hypothesized that the majority of these would include the phrase *build relationships*, based on the high importance placed on relationships at IWU; however, that comprised only 31% of the examples. Others included *build* identity (Maddie, #2, line 220), *build* each other up (Helen, #1, line 30), and *build* the community (Jared, #4, line 118). Yet all of the construction

metaphors dealt with the concept of constructing relationships of some kind, whether they were with oneself, others, or God. This is in contrast to the **construction** metaphors represented in Charteris-Black's (2004) Biblical sample, referred to as "building metaphors," that carried the metaphoric sense of "foundation" (p. 202).

Table 6.8 **Construction** metaphors

Construction Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Build (relationships)	5	1	7	3	16
Build (other)	16	7	5	6	34
Shape	0	0	0	1	1
					51

When students talked about *building* concerning themselves, they spoke of "*building* of my character" (Adam, #2, line 100), "*building* more [beliefs] on my own" (Abby, #2, line 86), and "*buil[ding]* up our own opinion" (John, #1, line 28). These students talked about constructing an element of how they identified themselves: character, beliefs, and opinions. Other examples explicitly involved *building* the person. Joshua talked about "an edifying conversation...that can help *build* me up and challenge me" (#3, line 56). This raises the issue of reciprocity involved in having others *build* an individual while the individual gives back to *build* the others. In all of these examples, the students used a metaphor typical of the IWU community to discuss personal identity construction.

The notion of constructing others comprised a segment of these **construction** examples. Joshua explicitly linked the reciprocity often involved in this construction process with other people: "I also need time with the community, *building* each other up. / I'm helping *build* others up, and they're helping *build* me up" (#1, lines 80 & 82). He even used the reciprocal pronoun "each other" in his explanation. Similarly, Johanna described her fellow students by saying, "They try to help each other out and *build* each other up instead of down" (#4, line 66). This reciprocal construction requires relational interactions with others.

Likewise, John used this metaphor when he recalled his “protocols” for playing games (#4, line 22); he said, “I try to play everything to help people, you know, to *build* people” (#4, line 32).

Finally, students talked about constructing the community, as in John’s latter example above. Furthermore, he applied this to “*connections* that [he had] been able to *build* inside the dorms” (#4, line 72), drawing on the **network** domain to describe the relationships he had created among people in his dormitory. Jared made the same association when he talked about “seek[ing] out people that I know I can be personal with” (#2, line 201) and “I believe it’s important to do that to *build connections*” (#2, line 209). His interest in building connections within the IWU community required relational construction with his peers and professors.

Ultimately, the **construction** metaphors were used to explain the development of various kinds of relationships. In many ways, these metaphors serve to describe the stage that occurs between the creation of relationships under the **network** metaphors and much more profound relationships expressed using either the **stability** or **depth** metaphors. This resulted in students constructing their personal identity in reciprocal ways with other members of the community, along with contributing to the construction of others’ identity and the community of relationships in which they operated.

6.3.8. Heart

In keeping with the pattern of semantic fields, the next one is **heart**, though this domain included only the metaphor *heart*. This metaphor intersected with the **depth** field because issues relating to the *heart* in the data involved the notion of emotional depth, as well as mental decisions that involved emotion. Some participants used this metaphor in their testimony, while others used it to identify personal issues of great importance. Table 6.9 details the spread of these two manners of usage.

Table 6.9 **Heart** metaphors

Heart Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Used in testimony narrative	10	0	0	0	10
Used in other context	5	9	8	12	34
					44

As discussed in Chapter 4, twelve participants used some variation of “accepted Jesus into my *heart*” in their testimony narratives in the first interview, with ten including the *heart* metaphor. This is a common Evangelical phrase that involves a metonymical understanding of *heart* to represent a person and is used to describe the moment of conversion. One unique variation that still incorporated *heart* was from Michelle, when she recounted her children’s minister asking, “Do any of you want to give your *heart* to God?” (#1, line 79). Of course, no one physically cut their heart from their body to place on the church altar. The metaphorical action of giving one’s *heart* to God in one’s testimony signified a change in belief and behavior.

Participants also used this metaphor to identify personal issues of great importance. When students recalled issues that caused them grief, they used the phrase “break my *heart*.” For instance, Helen spoke animatedly about her recent discovery of the childhood poverty rate in the community surrounding IWU. She stated, “But it does break my *heart* that there’s people right outside of our campus that need help and could use our time” (#2, line 76). She went on to share an idea for which she attributed agency to God, “I’ve always loved service projects. That’s been put on my *heart* by the Lord to be connected in [the town] and do what I can while I’m here” (#2, line 76). None of the students used the expression “broke my heart” to refer to romantic relationships; instead, the source of the *breaking* was always some type of social problem to which students had become sensitized because of their faith.

When students used the *heart* metaphor, they often did so with the underlying assumption that God was the agent behind the deep emotions and ideas. The idea of Abby

majoring in children’s ministry “kept tugging on [her] *heart*, so [she] was like, ‘Ok, God, are you trying to tell me something?’” (#2, line 62). Despite the idea coming to her, she attributed that to God’s leading in her decision regarding her future vocation. This was frequently more explicit as several participants stated a variation of the following: “God placed [something] on my *heart*” (Kirk, #2, lines 50 & 52; Helen, #4, line 102; Melissa, #4, line 42; Travis, #4, line 26). Thus, *heart* serves as a metaphor that taps into emotional **depth** due to the importance placed on issues of great importance with members of the community.

6.3.9. Water

The **water**⁴ domain consisted of the metaphor that the participants were vessels to be *filled* or vessels that could *pour into* others or *be poured into* by others. (See Table 6.10 for the full list of **water** metaphors.) Various entities could *fill* the participants, namely, God, scripture, or other people. Twice John asserted, “God *filled* me back up” (#1, line 186), recounting an event at church camp as an eleven-year-old, and “God usually *refills* me” (#3, line 82), demonstrating his trust that God will provide his needs. Kris relayed a recent habit, “When I’m feeling low or weak...I’ll go to scripture and feel like I can be *filled* with that, which is very cool” (#3, line 127).

Table 6.10 **Water** metaphors

Water Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Pour	4	1	3	14	22
Fill	2	0	4	2	8
Water	1	2	0	0	3

⁴ The ways my participants used the **water** metaphors differed greatly from the metaphors noted in Charteris-Black’s (2004) analysis of metaphors in the Bible. He claimed that the water metaphors did not meet his classification parameters to include them in his list of fourteen semantic fields, yet when he discussed any **water** metaphors, they were in the context of **food/drink** metaphors, specifically with reference to *thirst* (pp. 182, 199).

Drowning	0	1	1	0	2
Diving	0	0	2	0	2
Deep end	1	0	0	0	1
Flow	0	1	0	0	1
Stagnant	0	0	0	1	1
					40

Several students mentioned people who had *poured into* their lives. Helen recalled the two youth leaders from her high school youth group, “They just really helped *pour into* us” (#1, line 14). Speaking about his experiences thus far at IWU, Jared said, “I’ve seen the people that are willing to *pour into* my life, whether it be professors or other students” (#1, line 118). Heidi noted, “Our faculty care more and they *pour into* you on the educational level and the spiritual level” (#4, line 140). Maddie shared one of her goals in the first interview, “I really want to find people that *pour into* me” (#1, line 522).

Just like in the **construction** domain, Joshua noted an element of reciprocity with these **water** metaphors. Joshua recounted his experience from his summer ministry work, “I was able to *pour into* others and have others *pour into* me” (#3, line 36). Because of his focus on ministry, Joshua viewed *filling* others and *being filled* by others as necessary to one’s spiritual development. He proclaimed, “Especially if they’re a non-believer, we’re called to love them, to *pour* all we have *into* them, and show them who Christ is through that” (#4, line 34). When I explicitly asked Kris about this particular metaphor, he replied, “Yeah, I think we use the analogy of a cup a lot, like we’re *being filled*, but we want to *pour out*, and I think that’s a common analogy for a lot of Christians” (#4, line 62). He viewed the *filling* process as preceding the process of *pouring out* as he explained, “I said I’d been *being filled* a lot, but I want to *pour out*. And it kind of relates to my year being more learning and then next year being more intentional with doing, *pouring out*” (#4, line 64).

In addition to the affirmative uses of the **water** metaphors, two participants used these in negative ways. Alex later shared, “Christianity can be really *watered down*” (#2, line 18)

to contrast his experiences from Boston and his time at IWU. Alex was one of only a few students who came into the study fully aware of Christianese, again because of his Boston experience where the people in his life there did not use or understand it, and declared that he was “*drowning* in Christianese” by late January (#3, line 44). David chose another negative **water** metaphor to describe his current spiritual state in the last interview: “As far as just my spiritual development, I kind of feel at a *stagnant* place” (#4, line 28), yet he went on to explain, “I seek God out, I am prayerful...I feel at peace about that” (#4, line 28). Despite the undesirable quality of stagnation, David believed that his relationship with God was in a good place despite his lack of movement in further spiritual development.

In all, just over half of the participants used any of the metaphors within this semantic field. When they did, they demonstrated their insider knowledge of how to use these **water** metaphors, and they showed a distinctive exuberance for intentional service toward others as in Helen’s straightforward statement, “I really like to *pour into* others” (#4, line 82).

6.3.10. Atmosphere

The semantic field of **atmosphere** primarily included the idea of living in a *bubble* within the IWU community. Table 6.11 below provides a list of the metaphors used in this domain. This is a common metaphor used by university community members to describe the university’s culture and atmosphere as different from the broader community in which IWU is located. More broadly, it serves as a common way for students to describe the culture among many CCCU institutions (Woodfin, 2012). Fifty-seven percent of these metaphorical references mentioned the *bubble* as a way of acknowledging this difference as well as speaking to many community members’ lack of engagement with the community outside of IWU.

Table 6.11 **Atmosphere** metaphors

Atmosphere Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	

Bubble	1	7	11	1	20
Atmosphere	3	0	5	1	9
Environment	1	0	0	0	1
Sphere	1	0	1	0	2
Mountaintop	0	0	1	1	2
Valley	0	0	1	0	1
Headwind	0	0	0	1	1
Surround	0	0	1	0	1
					37

The majority of these *bubble* references occurred in the second and third interviews, which illustrates the fact that participants became aware of this notion of *bubble* by the middle of the academic year. Johanna explicitly referenced this notion of a unique environment:

“I’m sure you’ve heard of this – I didn’t even know this existed – but a lot of people talked about the IWU *bubble*. / (Laughing) I didn’t think that was true until I brought some friends here, and they’re like, ‘Wow! It’s like I entered a whole different world!’ ... / You are now in the IWU *bubble*. Welcome.” (Johanna, #3, lines 40, 42, & 46)

It wasn’t until a visit from her friends who attended a non-religious university that she recognized the distinctive environment in which she lived at IWU. On the other hand, Kirk acknowledged that he had “grown up [in]...this *bubble*, and here, it’s still a *bubble* of what Christianity is, but it’s bigger than what I’m used to” (#3, line 16). Kirk viewed the IWU *bubble* as a positive environment in which he could learn and grow in his spiritual development and relationship with God.

While Johanna took a neutral position on the IWU *bubble* and Kirk a positive one, a few participants viewed the *bubble* as negative. These students took great interest in service to the community. While describing a visit to a local food pantry, Helen acknowledged, “There’s a lot of brokenness in [the town] that we don’t exactly see from IWU; we call it the IWU *bubble*” (#2, line 76). When I asked if his impression of the university community had

changed since arriving, Joshua bluntly stated, “I’ve gotten more annoyed with the IWU *bubble*” (#2, line 170). He went to explain,

“I still see the spiritual aspect, but I also see hurt and brokenness that doesn’t get addressed, that people aren’t willing to step out of their own personal *bubble*...I think [the chancellor] said at the beginning of the semester, ‘Don’t think of it as a *bubble*, think of it as a greenhouse.’ / ...I don’t care for the greenhouse analogy, and I don’t like the IWU *bubble*.” (Joshua, #2, lines 172 & 176)

One of the leaders in the community had swapped the *bubble* metaphor for *greenhouse*, another **atmosphere** metaphor but one that also intersects with **agriculture**. Even still, Joshua could not support either one because he believed they were both too insular and self-focused. Kris likewise took the view that it was important to look beyond oneself. He stated, “One negative aspect could be ‘the *bubble*’ that a lot of people talk about” (#3, line 141) because “if we’re so focused on ourselves, then we don’t reach out to others past the *bubble*” (#3, line 143). Maddie pointed out the superficiality of the service some community members claimed, “I feel like everybody talks about the IWU *bubble*, but it’s something that people are even like, ‘Oh well, I did mentoring work here, so I’m outside the *bubble*’” (#2, line 230), but she pointed out how these mentors would not maintain their service for even one year and commented on the damaging effect that has in the community surrounding the university. In many ways, this *bubble* notion relates to the concept of “haven” (Perry & Armstrong, 2007) or “fortress mentality” (Hammond & Hunter, 1984) in that the community creates an insulated atmosphere that offers safety from outside influences in order to all the spiritual growth and development of those on the inside.

While over half of the **atmosphere** metaphors were applied to negative contexts, several participants highlighted the positive effect the **atmosphere** at IWU had on them personally. Travis noticed the effect of *atmosphere* on his friends who attended universities

with Greek life (#3, line 4), but he admitted that while over Christmas break, he missed “the *atmosphere* of spiritual encouragement” (#3, line 18) at IWU. He continued, “The consistency of that *atmosphere* has really done a lot for me...I feel like a much stronger and better person” (#3, line 20). Shannon also noted the *atmosphere* playing a role in the difference between her friends at home and at IWU (#3, line 34). As discussed in section 6.3.4 regarding **stability**, Shannon attributed her identity shift to “the people I *surround* myself with” at IWU (#3, line 62). The *atmosphere* of *strong* faith among her friends contributed to her own personal development.

6.3.11. Miscellaneous metaphors

While the majority of the metaphors in the data clearly fit into the ten semantic fields discussed above, four percent of the metaphors used by the participants fell into a miscellaneous category. These miscellaneous metaphors included notions of investment, personification, light, passion, drugs, and gaming. Table 6.12 shows the spread of these metaphors throughout the interviews.

Table 6.12 Miscellaneous metaphors

Miscellaneous Metaphors	Frequency				Total
	#1	#2	#3	#4	
Investment	4	1	8	1	14
Personification	3	2	0	1	6
Light	1	1	2	1	5
Passion	2	0	2	1	5
Drugs	3	0	0	0	3
Gaming	2	0	0	0	2
					35

Even with this seemingly random mix of metaphors, the primary emphasis remained on relationships with God, others, and self. With the **investment** metaphors, participants talked about putting time and effort in their relationships – either their own effort or someone putting effort into a relationship with them. For example, Abby, David, and Melissa mentioned this in the context of relationships with professors. Abby said, “They really *invest*

in you more than the other schools I visited” (#1, line 54); David, talking about the professors in his major, said, “These professors are going to be able to *invest* in me in a huge way” (#3, line 268). Melissa equated one’s Christian identity with this idea when she stated, “I feel like if you’re here as a Christian and really want to *grow* spiritually, you’re going to *invest* more time into getting to know your professors and doing the work so that you’re *filling* yourself” (#3, line 28). In this one utterance, Melissa intersected the **agriculture** metaphor *grow* and the **water** metaphor *fill* with the notion of *investment* of one’s time and energy to expand relationships with others as well as developing herself as a person.

The **personification** metaphors included references to God in five of the six uses. These included “His *hands*” (Abby, #1, line 136), “seeking His *face*” (Jared, #1, line 218), “His *eyes*” (Travis, #2, line 148), “God still has a *grip* on what’s going on” (Melissa, #2, line 52), and “the *feet* of Jesus” (Haley, #4, line 74). In both Abby’s and Melissa’s examples, their personified metaphors refer to God’s *hands* and use that to imply God’s plan for their lives. Maddie offered the outlier of this group when she said, “If scripture is the *heart*, you can’t just pull it out of the *body*” (#1, line 276). In this instance, the *heart* does not refer to God’s body part; rather she employed the general body metaphor to explain how she wanted to learn more about church history to gain a fuller understanding of the place of scripture in her faith.

I initially hypothesized that the **light** metaphors would have been used more frequently given the use of this metaphor in the Bible (e.g., John 3:19-20; 1 John 1:5-7). See also Charteris-Black (2004) for a discussion on the **light** metaphors in the Bible (pp. 185-190). However, there were a total of five of these in the data, yet with each instance uttered by a different participant. These metaphors included “a happy *glow*” (Carson, #1, line 108) to refer to students enjoying themselves at IWU, “being a *light* in the darkness” (David, #3, line 206), and *shine* as in a “different spirit about you that really just *shines* through” (Charlotte,

#3, line 18) and “[being nice] *shines* through you” (Mike, #4, line 96). Also, Kirk used this in describing different kinds of chapel speakers, “Are they trying to...have the Lord reveal stuff to you that needs to be *shone* upon by His *light*?” (#2, line 50).

The **passion** metaphors included just one phrase in each of the five instances: *on fire*. This functions more as an adjective to describe one’s excitement or intensity for God, sometimes known as one’s “zeal for the Lord”. Melissa used this metaphor in her testimony narrative describing a night at camp when she “felt so *on fire* for God” (#1, line 78). Dylan, Eric and Travis used this phrase to describe others’ excitement for God (Dylan, #1, line 76; Eric, #3, line 122; Travis, #4, line 28), but Alex mentioned it as a Christian “cliché” (#3, line 106) acknowledging his awareness and distaste for the expression.

In keeping with the negative tone, Alex used two **drug** expressions as metaphors to describe a superficial aspect of Christian faith he observed in what he called the “white-washed Christian community” (#1, line 136; #2, line 180). He spoke of a “spiritual *rush*” (#1, line 338) and a “spiritual *cheap high*” (#1, line 342) as “meaningless emotion” (#1, line 340) sometimes expressed in people’s relationships with God. Jared also referenced the “spiritual *high*” (#1, line 208) as the opposite of true spiritual growth in one’s relationship with God (#1, line 212).

Finally, the **gaming** metaphors came from John, who was a self-described avid gamer. He talked about growing in his relationship with God in terms of video game language. For example, he brought together **journey** metaphors with **gaming** metaphors when he said, “I’m always on a continuation of a *journey* of being able to *move* to a *higher level*, / to transcend my *previous ranking*” (#1, lines 364 & 366). In this way, John seamlessly integrated his love for gaming with his love for God by articulating this connection.

In summary, the miscellaneous metaphors continued the theme of relationships despite the apparent random expressions involved. Some reflected aspects of participants’

lives, as in John's idiosyncratic **gaming** metaphors, while others were drawn from Biblical metaphors or drug culture.

6.4. Conclusion: The role of metaphors in identity construction

In summary, the metaphors within all eleven of the semantic fields contributed to the concept of relationships in the data. **Agriculture** was used to talk about one's personal and spiritual growth. **Conflict** included everything that can hinder growth and development of relationships, while **network** was all about establishing relationships. Participants worked toward strong, **stable** relationships, and **deep** conversations and friendships added to the stability of those relationships. The **journey** involved movement in one's relationship primarily with God but with other elements as well. **Construction** was all about the creation of relationships, along with building a better self and others. The **heart** was where emotions lie, and this included thoughts or ideas that involve emotional depth. **Water** provided the image of giving oneself to another relationship or receiving that from another person. Finally, the **atmosphere** was where all of the above took place.

Ultimately, talking about relationships using the metaphors within the semantic fields described above serves to mark one's identity as a member of the IWU community, which is embedded within the subcultures of Evangelicalism and Christian higher education.

Throughout the data, participants who used these metaphors demonstrated their competence with this element of Christianese discourse. The identity constructing power of these metaphors was recognized by many of the participants in this study; it is an acknowledged feature of Christianese (Coleman, 1980; Leiter, 2013; Notman, 2017; Sweet, 2014). Some of the participants recognized that they use these metaphors, that the metaphors are meaningful to the community, and that these words and phrases are metaphorical in nature. Thus, it may be that the use of metaphor, particularly to discuss different dimensions of relationship or relatedness, are more intentionally leveraged in order to construct one's identity as a member

of this community. In chapter 7, I will go on to demonstrate how the participants used testimony, agency, and metaphors to construct themselves as belonging or not belonging to the IWU community.

Chapter 7: Christianese and Insider Identities

7. Introduction

Prior to this chapter, I detailed specific elements of Christianese discourse, namely, testimony, agency, and metaphor; with the purpose of identifying how first-year students at Indiana Wesleyan University use Christianese to construct a particular kind of identity—one that marks their membership within the Christian university's community of practice. In this particular chapter, I *dig deeper* into several participants' experiences in their first year to describe how they use Christianese (or not) to construct their identity. I chose to use Wenger's (1998) categories of *participation* and *non-participation* as a means to characterize the participants' level of engagement and belonging within the university based on their use of linguistic resources and self-reported activities. After these brief case studies, I discuss the participants as a whole in light of my analyses across their testimony narratives, use of agency, and metaphor usage.

In chapter 4, I organized the participants in terms of *insider*, *inbound*, or *peripheral* trajectories based on the rhetorical moves they used in their testimony. The *insider* trajectory characterized full membership in the community; the *inbound* referred to newcomers entering the community with the intention of becoming full members but not demonstrating complete competence with the practices of the community; and the *peripheral* trajectory indicated those who were neither fully inside nor fully outside the community (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). For this chapter, I chose four participants based on these categories, one from the *insider* group, one from the *inbound* group, and two from the *peripheral* group. I further divided the *peripheral* group to include Wenger's (1998) notion of *marginality* (p. 166) since there was a clear connection between the language and behavior of Carson, one of the peripheral participants, in all four interviews, and his identity of non-participation at IWU. This will be discussed at length in section 7.2.2.

7.1. Participation (insider and inbound)

Students expressed their identities of participation in the IWU community in various ways: they included at least three of the five identified rhetorical moves in their testimony genres, they talked about God in observable patterns, and they employed specific metaphors to articulate their thoughts about relationships. In this way, they produced particular identities of belonging in the community through these linguistic practices (Wenger, 1998, p. 164). In the subsequent subsections, I will highlight two students' language of belonging as insiders or inbound community members.

7.1.1. Kris (insider)

Kris joined the Indiana Wesleyan University community as a baseball player. He had initially received a sports scholarship at a different Christian university; however, the baseball coach whom he greatly admired transferred to coach at IWU. Kris decided to follow him to Indiana Wesleyan University and play on this team in order to be able to learn under this coach. Kris spoke of the sport, his team members, and playing with integrity throughout all four interviews. In each interview, he was dressed comfortably and wore a cross necklace.

Based on Kris' testimony narrative, I initially identified him as an insider of the IWU community of practice: he included all five moves in his testimony (reviewed in Figure 7.1), demonstrating his competence with the genre as well as articulating his commitment to his personal relationship with Jesus and the practices involved in developing that relationship.

Figure 7.1 Testimony moves

Testimony Moves
Move 1: Family background
Move 2: Process of conversion
Move 3: Reflection on prior ignorance
Move 4: Personal appropriation
Move 5: Change in behavior or attitude

Since I had asked about his church background prior to the question that typically signaled a request for one's testimony, Kris did not repeat Move 1; however, he had shared previously that he grew up in a Christian home, attending an Evangelical Free church (#1, line 2). Kris aligned with the typically young conversion in Move 2 when he reported how he "prayed the prayer" at the age of 5 (#1, line 12). Within the same line, though, he went to Move 3: "...but praying the prayer doesn't make you a Christian" (#1, line 12). He then mentioned how he "really made it personal" (#1, line 18) at a "Dare to Share conference" (#1, line 14) when he was 14 – a clear Move 4 in his testimony narrative. He reiterated this by adding, "I believe that 14 was really the time that God turned my life around" (#1, line 20). He went on to Move 5 in the next line: "As I continue to grow even this year, I'm noticing changes that are focusing my life more towards Christ" (#1, line 22). Without any prompting, Kris acknowledged his own change in attitude about his faith, which identified him as wanting to further his relationship with Jesus and thus placed him soundly in the insider trajectory of the IWU community of practice.

In addition to the testimony moves, Kris talked about God frequently throughout the four interviews and followed the observed pattern of activating and passivating God according to topics. While he did not address all thirteen of the topics I identified in Chapter 5, he talked about God regarding ten of those topics, and the way in which he did this aligned with the common practices among the other participants for the categories of majority passivated and majority activated categories. Table 7.1 demonstrates this alignment with these majority categories. In nearly all of the categories for talking about God, Kris aligned with participants as a whole in terms of when he passivated or activated God. The only place where Kris deviated from the results of the whole group was with regard to the near-even split with the category of Identity. While the full data set included forty-six activated and forty-three passivated references to God, Kris activated God only three times but passivated

God eight times. The majority of the references in which he spoke about his identity relating to God included phrases like “man of God” (#2, line 322), “disciple of Christ” (#3, lines 5 & 83), and “image of God” (#4, lines 12 & 22). While the full data set included a near-even split, the slight majority of references activated God as the agent behind this identity as he articulated his own identity that involved becoming more like Christ.

Table 7.1 Alignment of Kris' passivation and activation patterns to all participants

Majority Passivated			Majority Activated			Split	
Category	Group	Kris	Category	Group	Kris	Category	Kris
Relationship	350	40	Plan	175	10	Communication 101P/98A	9P/2A
Attribute	83	8	Action	114	5		
Topic	90	2	Presence	25	NA	Identity 43P/46A	8P/3A
Conversion	23	2	Blessing	14	2		
Belief	8	NA	God's opinion	13	1		
Surrender	6	NA					

Overall, Kris established his obvious ease with talking about God across a range of topics; and though he did not have the distinction of having the most God references out of the participants, he had the third highest number. Moreover, he demonstrated his competency with the practices of when to activate and passivate God as they aligned with the dominant pattern amongst the participants whom I positioned as insiders. As I mentioned above, he passivated God forty times regarding the topic of Relationship. This particular category included the highest frequency of God references, totaling 28% of the 1,259 references to God and demonstrating its importance to the community. Of all the participants, Kris talked about his relationship with God the most and passivated each of those references. Thus, Kris aligned with the community's focus on relationships – in this case with God – and he tapped into the community practice of using metaphors to further discuss relationship issues.

As I discussed in Chapter 6, many of the participants used metaphors to describe their relationships. I grouped these metaphors into ten semantic fields based on their meaning and usage, with an additional miscellaneous grouping of metaphors used by a handful of the

participants. Kris used metaphors from all ten of the semantic fields, ordered here by his frequency of usage: **agriculture** (29 instances), **stability** (11), **conflict** (9), **network** (8), **water** (7), **atmosphere** (5), **journey** (3), **depth** (2), **construction** (1), and **heart** (1).

Throughout the interviews, he continued to talk about the importance of relationships in his life. For example, when I asked him in the first interview about his favorite aspects of the university thus far, he replied, “The community [at his residence hall], and I’ve really enjoyed that” (#1, line 157). He further explained,

“There are 5 or 6 guys...that I’ve been able to intentionally *grow* with / and be vulnerable and *connect* with. / ... so it helps to have guys –*strong* men of the Lord / to come alongside with and talk with.” (Kris, #1, lines 159, 161, 175, & 177)

Kris used metaphors from the domains of **agriculture**, **network**, and **stability** to describe his excitement about having relationships with other men. For Kris, *connecting* with *strong* Christian young men helped him *grow* or further develop his relationships with them as well as with God. He also drew from the **water** metaphors to explain a method of rejuvenation:

“When I’m feeling low or weak like I need energy, I’ll go to Scripture and feel like I can *be filled with* that” (#3, line 127). But it did not stop with simply *being filled*. In the final interview, he connected the metaphors of *being filled* and *pouring out* when he said, “I said I’d been *being filled* a lot, but I want to *pour out*...being intentional with doing, I guess, *pouring out*” (#4, line 64). The implied object of this was other people, especially since he frequently mentioned his appreciation for the community of people around him.

Finally, Kris specified people and practices in the community that influenced the “slow increase of [his] faith” over the year (#3, line 133); these practices contributed to the overall environment at IWU: “friends that are *strong* in their faith,” learning in his ministry classes, and “just things around campus that have been really good, like the baseball Bible study, chapel, Summit – all those things help to increase my faith” (#3, line 133). In this way,

Kris experienced the kind of social and spiritual support Bryant (2005) discussed in her study about a Christian campus organization, but Kris expanded the nature of this support to include elements such as chapel and academic classes. Even though he acknowledged being “blessed by a year of a long *mountaintop*⁵” (#4, line 14) in the final interview, he had also recognized in the previous interview, “What will happen is we’ll be on *mountaintops* and we’ll know there’s a *valley* coming to *test* us in *trials*” (#3, line 137). In this way, he merged the **atmosphere** metaphors with **conflict** metaphors. He even went on to mention Job, the Biblical character equated with great suffering (#3, line 139). Despite his positive attitude about his own experiences, he recognized how the environment around him had the power to shape those in the community – and not always for the better: “One negative aspect could be the *bubble* /... If we’re so focused on ourselves, then we don’t reach out to others past the *bubble*” (#3, lines 141 & 143).

Thus, Kris demonstrated his insider status through the ways in which he drew from the linguistic repertoire of the IWU community. Through his testimony with all five moves, the patterns of how he talked about God, and the use of metaphors to describe relationships, Kris participated fully with the IWU community of practice and identified as belonging within the community.

⁵ I included *mountaintop* and *valley* in the **atmosphere** metaphors because of the way they functioned in the context of the interviews and the way they are typically used in the Evangelical community, as Kris used them here. He was the only one who included them, and he used *mountaintop* to imply a clear (high altitude), positive atmosphere for growth and *valley* to indicate a dark (low altitude), negative atmosphere that brings hardship (integrated with the **conflict** metaphors in line 137 of the third interview).

7.1.2. Johanna (inbound)

Johanna, a biology/pre-medicine major and John Wesley Honors College student at IWU, came to each interview with a big smile, a willingness to talk, and lots of laughter. She immigrated to the United States from Southeast Asia when she was a young child and moved to a small community in North Central Indiana about an hour north of IWU. In her first semester at IWU, she drove home most weekends and attended a charismatic church with her mom. However, as she became more involved with the university, she stopped going home for the weekend and attended the Wesleyan church next to campus. The focus on church history and theology she gained from the John Wesley Honors College curriculum in that first year began a shift in how she understood a number of aspects about her faith, and she talked freely about these topics.

Throughout all four interviews, Johanna established her identity of participation in the IWU community of practice. In chapter 4, I located Johanna in the inbound group of participants based on her testimony narrative. Like eleven others in the data sample, she included Moves 1 (family background), 2 (process of conversion), and 4 (personal appropriation). In this way, her testimony aligned more closely with the insider practices of IWU testimonies that included the required elements of experiencing an upbringing in the church, a relatively young conversion, and a personal appropriation at a later time; but she still lacked Moves 3 (reflection on prior ignorance) and 5 (change in behavior or attitude) that demonstrate full participation in the testimony genre at IWU. She seemed to fit into the inbound trajectory based on some of her comments as well. When I asked her to define spiritual growth, she replied, “Spiritual growth – that’s what I’m trying to achieve, but I don’t even know what it means; it’s not just knowing facts about God and the Bible. / It’s actually living like God would want us to live” (#1, lines 360 & 362). Even though she admitted she did not know an exact definition, she asserted her effort to develop this and recognized the

importance of certain practices in one's life – practices that carry significance in the IWU community.

Over the year, a change occurred in her testimony, which came out in the final interview when I asked about the expression, "I accepted Jesus when I was..." At this point in the conversation, Johanna amended how she would give her testimony. She explained,

"I knew Jesus when I was a kid, but I don't think I fully accepted who He was until I was old enough to understand who He is... Usually I would just say, 'Yes, I grew up in the church, but I didn't'—I always have the 'but'—'I didn't fully accept Him until I was maybe 12 or 13 – enough to understand who He was.' So I wouldn't say that in a testimony unless there's that 'but' just to clarify." (Johanna, #4, line 140)

The "but" here signifies the beginning of Move 3 (reflection of prior ignorance), where Johanna explained her lack of understanding as a pre-adolescent child. Moreover, I used Move 3 (and Move 5) to locate participants squarely in the insider group, the ones who were proficient with the full testimony genre common to the IWU community of practice. The fact that Johanna provided this additional explanation regarding one of the key expressions in testimonies at IWU near the end of her first year illustrated her increasing competence with the linguistic repertoire of this community of practice and marked her as a participating member.

I discussed Johanna's references to God numerous times in Chapter 5. Throughout the interviews, she shared willingly and enthusiastically about her experiences, faith, and thoughts about God. While she had the second highest usage of God references of all the participants, mentioning God 108 times over the year, she deviated from the participant trend of passivating God more than activating God. She activated God 58 times but only passivated God 50 times in her interviews. Even though she did not fully align with the practice of passivating God more often, she clearly felt comfortable discussing God with others. She

might even have been labelled as “highly articulate” about her faith by Smith and Denton (2005) because she talked openly about her faith and occasionally incorporated theological concepts she was learning in her honors courses.

Johanna’s top two categories for talking about God included Relationship and Plan, two topics that carried great importance among the participants. She mentioned God in terms of Relationship in all four interviews and talked about God in terms of Plan in the first, third, and final interview. Johanna participated in the community’s focus on relationships and first year students’ focus on discerning God’s plan (or will) for their lives; through this participation, Johanna demonstrated her belonging in the IWU community. Activating God more than passivating God further identified Johanna as an inbound participant – someone who marked her membership with certain discourse patterns common to the community but whose practices did not yet fully match the most common practices among those of the insider group in the participants.

Regarding metaphor usage, Johanna used thirty-five metaphors over the four interviews, drawing from ten of the semantic fields: **conflict** (12), **atmosphere** (5), **agriculture** (4), **heart** (4), **journey** (3), **stability** (2), **depth** (2), **network** (1), **construction** (1), and **water** (1) (listed in order of usage frequency). Only four of those thirty-five occurred in the first interview with an additional three occurring in the second interview; thus, 80% of her metaphor usage happened in the final two interviews. This suggests that Johanna was exposed to the common metaphors in the community throughout her first year and added them to her linguistic repertoire as the year progressed, thus strengthening her participation in linguistic practices of the community and securing her feeling of belonging at IWU.

Johanna shifted her use of some metaphors over the course of the year. For example, she drew from the **conflict** metaphors in the first interview to explain her academic experience in a John Wesley Honors College class: “I feel like I’m *struggling* in some of my

classes actually” (#1, line 310). She further explained that a certain professor *challenged* her in the Foundations of Christian Tradition course, “He *challenges* me because he’s helping me understand things that I did not know about the Bible” (#1, line 328). Likewise, she used another **conflict** metaphor in the third interview to describe the tension she felt in high school, “I was *battling* that because there’s my life as a Christian and there’s also this life as a student” (#3, line 36). She shifted the usage, however, when she mentioned leaving the “IWU *bubble*” (#3, line 50), an **atmosphere** metaphor, when she went home. “When I do go home, it’s different. I feel like I need to be *on guard* for everything because there might be something that Satan *throws* at me and I’ll be caught *off guard*” (#3, line 54). By shifting her environment, she also shifted the agency of who creates conflict, moving it from academics or a professor to Satan.

Regarding the **atmosphere** metaphors, she admitted, “I didn’t know this existed, but a lot of people talked about the IWU *bubble*” (#3, line 44). Prior to her attendance at the university, Johanna had not known of this term and had not been aware of the possibly unique environment here. She continued, “I didn’t think that was true until I brought some friends here, and they’re like, ‘Wow! It’s like I entered a whole different world!’” (#3, line 42). She described the “different” environment as a place where everyone at IWU is “just really, really nice” (#3, line 44).

While she drew from the ten main semantic fields of metaphors I identified in chapter 6, Johanna primarily used them to describe her relationship with God. For example, she used a **stability** metaphor when she said, “I feel a *stronger* bond with God, and I feel like I understand Him more now” (#4, line 18). She used **journey** metaphors to talk about “following His *path*, like what He wants me to do” (#4, line 18) and to link this journey with God to relationships with others: “Professors actually would say sometimes that in order to be closer with God, one of the *steps* is letting people into your *heart* and sharing things with

them” (#4, line 212). Thus, relationships with others could lead to developing one’s relationship with God, as with the use of the **heart** metaphor. She also used **depth** metaphors to link discussion with others as a way to enhance one’s relationship with God as she talked about the change in her relationship with peers in the John Wesley Honors College over the first semester: “Now we can actually get involved in a really *deep* conversation and talk about our faith” (#2, line 182). The “*deep* conversation” for Johanna, like so many other participants, led to discussing faith issues with her new friends in the IWU community.

Moreover, 54% of her metaphor usage occurred in the final interview alone, which could be explained in two ways. First, this increased usage could demonstrate her inbound trajectory with IWU as she developed a level of competency with the metaphor element of the community’s linguistic repertoire. Though she included a number of community-accepted metaphors, she did not always use them in the same way. For example, with the **water** metaphor, rather than talking about *filling up* or *pouring out*, she explained how learning about the YikYak app from a friend during chapel “*poured cold water over [her]*” when she realized that people are not always so nice to each other at the university (#2, line 160).

Second, this could also be a result of the nature of the fourth interview, titled *Reflection*, since I asked participants about specific language used in the community. When I raised her awareness about these phrases, she exclaimed, “Wow! These phrases *are* used a lot. I didn’t realize that!” (#4, line 166, emphasis in original). Yet she included **agriculture** and **depth** metaphors in her response to my question about the **heart** metaphor, “sharing from your *heart*”: “Yes. Sharing from your *heart*. Or *digging deep* and telling people what’s in your *heart* and letting them know that you care. I have definitely heard that a lot” (#4, line 214). To be clear, I had not previously asked about “digging deep” in the interview, so I did not prompt her answer. However, this response reflects her knowledge and proficiency with these metaphors since she used the **agriculture** and **depth** metaphors to describe the

emotional aspect of the **heart** metaphor. Additionally, her pronoun choice for “what’s *in* [emphasis added] your heart” confirms Johanna’s inbound status since the insider version expresses it as “what’s *on* [emphasis added] your heart.” Despite her increasing understanding and usage of these metaphors and expressions, Johanna had not entirely mastered them by the end of her first year at IWU.

7.2. Non-participation (peripheral and marginal)

After discussing two examples of students whose language use marks them as participating in the IWU community of practice, I turn now to explore two examples of students whose language use marks them as not fully participating in the IWU community of practice. Participation and non-participation are both meaningful forms of identity. As Wenger (1998) stated, “We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through practices we do not engage in” (p. 164). Some students expressed identities of non-participation in the IWU community through their interviews by drawing on few linguistic resources offered by Christianese and practiced in the community. They demonstrated partial competence with pieces of the testimony genre, talked about God infrequently, and used few metaphors common to Christianese. In the subsequent sections, I will discuss two students who demonstrated non-participation – one peripheral and one marginal.

Both peripherality and marginality contain a mix of participation and non-participation, but “the line between them can be subtle. Yet they produce qualitatively different experiences and identities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 166). Peripheral participation is enabled by non-participation, while marginal participation is prevented by non-participation (p. 167). The peripheral members are not full participants in the community but are closer to participation than marginal members who are on the edges of the community. Peripheral members may move toward greater participation in the community (and thus become

inbound), or they may maintain their peripheral status without any clear trajectory. Marginal members may either maintain their marginal status or move even farther away from the core of the community.

7.2.1. Eric (peripheral)

Eric grew up attending a Wesleyan church in the same local community as Indiana Wesleyan University. He talked about attending church camp as a child and demonstrated his familiarity with Christianese in terms of his testimony and metaphor usage. Yet the way in which Eric told his testimony, talked about God, and used certain metaphors in reference to others positioned him as a peripheral member of the IWU community.

I determined Eric's peripheral status based on the rhetorical moves he included in his testimony narrative as discussed in chapter 4. He included only Move 1 (personal background), "I've gone to church basically since I was born" (#1, line 2) and Move 2 (process of conversion), "I was pretty young, I think probably about 6. / It was during a children's lesson during church and they asked if anyone wanted to accept Jesus into their *heart* and become a Christian, and I did it then" (#1, lines 12 & 14). Eric followed the pattern of a young conversion typical to the IWU community and easily used the Christianese phrase "accept Jesus into their *heart*," tapping into the *heart* metaphor regarding his conversion. Even at this point, he demonstrated a level of competence with the practice of testimony within the community. However, he subsequently positioned himself away from the next stage in the testimony when he described the **atmosphere** of church camp encouraging students to have moments of rededicating their faith (Move 4). He stated, "It's usually a quiet moment and it's all serious, and other people around you are doing it. It just seems like a good easy place if you feel the call / to just accept God" (#1, lines 22 & 24). Yet he never explained that he himself experienced that next step.

In terms of talking about God, Eric made only twelve references to God throughout the four interviews, with four in interview 1, none in interview 2, five in interview 3, and three in interview 4. Of these twelve references, he activated God only twice, both in instances of negative action. He doubted God's ability to forgive in some cases: "People say no matter what you've done, God can forgive you. Or no matter how you are. I don't know if that's totally true or not. I think there are certain things that are maybe unforgivable" (#4, line 56). He went on to say, "If there's a certain (pause) like sexual orientation or something, if that's wrong, if that's something God looks down upon, if then that's something you continue to identify as, I suppose, is there hope? Is there a chance?" (#4, line 60). While he hinted at the "unforgivable" issue in line 56, he named it in line 60 as "sexual orientation," and in so doing attributed God's agency to judging and not forgiving despite his acknowledgment of the community's message about God's all-encompassing forgiveness.

Furthermore, Eric passivated God in the other ten references. In each of these instances, he positioned himself to demonstrate his knowledge of community practices but not his own participation in them. For example, he clearly knew the Christianese "accepting Jesus/God/Christ" (#1, lines 14, 24, & 32 respectively) for describing one's conversion and claimed his own moment in line 14 but included no subsequent moves in his testimony narrative. Later in the year he acknowledged, "I mean, I believe in God and all that, but I'm not very spiritual or religious or whatever you want to call it" (#3, line 36). Even in his statement of belief, he qualified it by positioning himself away from a stronger categorization of being "spiritual or religious".

For three of the passivated God references, Eric talked about God in terms of Relationship three times in interview 3 only. The first instances concerned his own relationship with God: "I've grown closer to God, I think, a little bit" (#3, line 36). When I probed more and asked what contributed to the shift in his relationship, he mentioned the

positive environment of the university and the exposure to religious concepts but made no reference to any **atmosphere** metaphors. His second reference seemed more vague: "...if you're feeling down or whatever, you can turn to God" (#3, line 38). However, it is unclear whether this statement referred to his own state or a general comment for anyone at the university. The final reference he made in interview 3 was a description of IWU community members in the active or core groups using Wenger's (1998) community of practice levels of engagement graphic mentioned in chapter 3. I asked him how he identified the people in the active and core groups, and he responded, "They've probably just been really talkative in their lives and really *on fire* for God" (#3, line 122). Eric clearly knew the Christianese of this community and could use it appropriately, using the **passion** metaphor *on fire for God*, even if he himself did not feel "on fire for God" regarding his relationship.

In terms of metaphor usage, Eric displayed his knowledge of this community practice by employing seventeen metaphors over the four interviews. He drew from seven of the ten semantic fields discussed in chapter 6: **network** (7), **stability** (3), **agriculture** (2), **conflict** (2), **heart** (1), **atmosphere** (1), and **passion** (1) from the miscellaneous domain. He used many of these metaphors as a way to describe others' faith experiences rather than his own. For example, he stated, "I'm surrounded by people who are pretty *strong* in their faith" (#2, line 34). When he talked about the community of practice graphic mentioned in the previous paragraph, he explained, "I'd say the core group are usually the people who are the *strongest* Christians" (#3, line 106). Like the *on fire* example above, Eric used *strongest* to describe the zeal for God expressed by others in the IWU community and not himself.

The metaphors he used to describe his own faith experiences included **agriculture** and **network**, yet even with these, he only used two of each about himself. With **agriculture**, he explained how "the main way that [he had] been *growing*" was through his theology class (#1, line 146), and later in the year he stated, "I've *grown* closer to God, I think, a little bit"

(#3, line 36). In both of these instances, he distanced himself from this relationship by attributing agency of that growth to his theology class in the first interview and then adds hesitation in the third interview with “I think” and “a little bit.” He recognized the importance of *growth* in one’s relationship with God in the IWU community and admitted this to a limited degree. Regarding **network** metaphors, he referenced other people’s *connectedness* in five of the seven uses and his own *connection* to others only twice: “I’ve already started to *connect* to more people because I have more classes with them now...So I feel like I’ve *connected* a bit more” (#3, line 32). Eric mentioned his commuter status a few times over the year and expressed his desire to be a residential student in his second year at IWU. It seems appropriate then that the majority of his choice of metaphors came from the **network** domain since he equated *connection* with being active members of the IWU community (#3, line 114). In the last interview, Eric remarked on overhearing students say they wanted to transfer to a different university and gave this reason: “A lot of times it was because they felt *disconnected*. Usually it was because they had no friends or something here” (#4, line 174). Thus, having supportive friends played a key role in the feeling of belonging for Eric, a conclusion that has been noted in numerous studies (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005; Magolda & Ebben, 2006; Woodfin, 2012).

Consequently, Eric remained in the peripheral trajectory at IWU with an inward view toward the community (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). He demonstrated his basic competence with the testimony genre, talked minimally about God, and used a sampling of community-appropriate metaphors in his discourse. In this way, he participated in a limited manner in the community of practice by drawing from the linguistic repertoire of his church upbringing. However, he also positioned himself further away from these resources by not taking full advantage of them, or not using as many or using them as frequently as students in the insider and inbound trajectories did throughout the interviews. Finally, at the time of completion of

this chapter, Eric was a residential student in his third year at IWU and involved in band and Spanish club, both activities in which he participated during his first year. Thus, while Eric stayed on the periphery, he continued to demonstrate his membership in the community.

7.2.2. Carson (marginal)

In chapter 4, I located Carson in the inbound group of participants based on the rhetorical moves he used in his testimony narrative; he included Moves 1 (personal background), 3 (reflection on prior ignorance), 4 (personal appropriation), and 5 (change in behavior or attitude). Yet Carson's testimony, though it contained four of the five moves discussed in chapter 5, did not exactly follow the same time elements as the other participants' testimonies. Moreover, the manner in which Carson participated in the subsequent interviews and the lack of Christianese elements in his speech encouraged my relocation of Carson to the non-participatory marginal group in the IWU community of practice.

Carson attended a Christian school for the entirety of his education prior to studying at IWU, but he contrasted his experience with classmates in his Christian high school and students at IWU with amazement:

“The students, the kids, my friends, we never talked about [God]. We never talked about reading the Bible or doing any of that / ... All the friends I'm making [at IWU] are all willing to talk about it, all want to talk about it...” (Carson, #1, lines 52 & 64)

And that intrigued him to the point where he decided to start reading the Bible.

In the first interview, Carson mentioned an identity shift from being an introvert in high school to being an extrovert at IWU and seemed to connect this to his recent interest in his faith. At the small Christian schools he had attended, “I knew everybody, everybody knew me, and you're kind of locked into this idea of ‘you're this person’ and you can't change” (#1, line 26). He further stated, “And I guess here, it was like, ‘Oh, I can *be* that

person,’...it got to that point here in which I just became an extrovert in college” (#1, line 30, emphasis in original). He also noted, “Every person I’ve ever met here has always been willing to talk about anything – spiritual or [not]” (#1, line 166). And this seemed to encourage him to get involved in various activities, such as unit devotionals (#1, line 198), hanging out at Steak ‘n’ Shake (#1, line 210), and dinner with their sister hall (#1, line 222).

As I discussed in chapter 5, Carson mentioned God a total of nine times during the first interview: he gave God agency once and kept personal agency in the other eight instances. The activated reference to God came in the context of his retelling of an event at the beginning of the academic year. In this account, his activated God reference came from his hall chaplain, not his own sense of God actively working in the situation. Moreover, throughout the remaining interviews, he was often reticent to talk – offering brief answers to my questions and many “I don’t know” and “probably” responses.

Carson referred to God only in his first interview; the remaining three interviews had zero references to God. When examined more closely, though, he distanced himself from God in each of the God references in the first interview. Five of the nine references passivated God as a topic of conversation between a friend and him. When he relayed his testimony narrative, he passivated God in terms of His presence, saying, “I grew up hearing all the stories about how you feel God’s presence” (#1, line 16), but added that he had never felt that until his first day at IWU. Two of the references passivated God when he talked about how his RA and RD prayed to God for him at the beginning of the academic year. In this same narrative about the prayer, he activated God in terms of seeing into his darkest parts (or sin, though he did not use that term): “We were supposed to write the deepest, darkest things that we don’t want to look at, we don’t want God to look at, we don’t want anyone else to see” (#1, line 337). Then they symbolically tore up the paper and had one of the resident staff pray for them. Carson appeared to have a significant spiritual start to his first

year, but with no other references to God in the remaining interviews, it is difficult to ascertain if this spiritual awakening went further for him. In his use of language, he remained on the margins of the IWU community.

Despite Carson's lack of God references in the remaining interviews, he provided some insight regarding the connection between language, faith, and practices. In the second interview, the conversation shifted to how students open up to each other about their faith. Carson commented how there are some "people who seem to be really good at [talking about their spiritual life with others]" (#2, line 192). When I prompted for further explanation, he hinted at practices that recall the Wheaton College students' construction of the "perfect standard" (Cumings, Haworth, & O'Neill, 2001) when he added, "They just *do* all this stuff that I don't do./...Read the Bible all the time. They know all these verses. They know to talk about all this stuff, and it's easy for them" (#2, lines 196 & 198, emphasis in original). Carson implied that these practices came easily to these students, possibly naturally, and this made him "want to do it, too" (#2, line 202). Shortly after this, I asked him to tell me about a significant experience from his first semester at IWU, and he mentioned his conversion that occurred during New Student Orientation but did not want to explain it again: "I'm pretty sure I talked about this the first time" (#2, line 276), referencing the first interview. Yet the second interview ended within two minutes of that statement even though he also asserted, "I just like talking to people" (#2, line 290). His reticence to speak about his significant conversion experience that had occurred just two months prior to the second interview, along with no further God references after the first interview, revealed his lack of participation in the linguistic practices of the community. In the third and fourth interviews, he mentioned attending *unit devos*, the spiritual gatherings in residence halls where students pray or study the Bible together, but he did not connect these with other areas of his life as many of the other participants did in their interviews. Thus, he acknowledged the importance of one's

personal conversion to the community of practice, as well as one of the common phrases used to describe spiritual gatherings in the dormitories, but he demonstrated a lack of commitment to further practices.

Regarding metaphor usage, Carson again demonstrated his trajectory of looking outward from the community. He used a total of five metaphors in the four interviews. Two occurred in the first interview, and three occurred in the third interview. Yet four of these metaphor uses veered away from the typical usage by other participants. When he talked about his visit to IWU, he said, “Everyone I saw really just had a happy *glow*...they always looked like they were enjoying whatever they were doing” (#1, line 108). Here he used a **light** metaphor to illustrate the friendly nature of the IWU community, while other **light** metaphors generally referred to God in some way. Additionally, he employed the **atmosphere** metaphor *bubble* to refer to possible areas of interest: “[Graphic design] is something I’m looking into. It’s in the *bubble*” (#3, line 224) and “It’s in my *bubble* of things I’m kind of interested in” (#3, line 260). He used this metaphor three times, which demonstrates his awareness of the *bubble* metaphor; however, he did not apply it in the usual manner of indicating **atmosphere** within this community.

The last metaphor Carson used was from the **agriculture** domain when he described how a friend at another university became an accountability partner for him via texting. He said, “It was coming to this school, and I said I felt like I was *growing* spiritually” (#1, line 302). As I mentioned in chapter 6 (section 6.2), I had asked each participant in the first interview if they were actively working on their spiritual growth. He did not use any **agriculture** metaphors immediately in response to that question; he used *growing* about two minutes later in the interview when I had asked about his involvement in any small group or accountability group for his renewed interest in reading the Bible. Moreover, after this first

interview, Carson failed to include any metaphors typical to the IWU community of practice, again demonstrating his outward trajectory from the community.

Despite some evidence of awareness of linguistic practices at IWU, Carson remained difficult to interview over the year as he repeatedly demonstrated reticence to engage with my questions. Despite his decision to stay at IWU (#4, line 202), his demeanor, attitude, and responses throughout the series of interviews portrayed a conflicting perspective. He established his marginal identity of non-participation in the IWU community of practice by acknowledging awareness of certain behaviors (like prayer and Bible study) and some of the linguistic resources (like testimony and metaphors) but ultimately choosing not to draw from these resources. It was no surprise when I bumped into him on campus at the end of his second year, and after some small talk, he explained his decision to leave IWU and train in a new career outside of academia.

7.3. Discussion

Up to this point, I have analyzed specific characteristics of Christianese discourse at IWU: the genre of testimony, the patterns of attribution of agency to God, and the use of a common set of metaphors to talk about relationships. I described how the study participants used (or did not use) each characteristic in separate chapters and further explored how these characteristics played out in the language of four individuals from the study. Next, I will broaden my conclusions to discuss these discursive elements together across the full set of participants. I will demonstrate the connections between the testimony narratives and metaphor usage as well as explore the lack of overlap with agency across the data analyses. While this is a predominantly qualitative study, I decided to include the results from a Pearson correlation test to support my claims based on my qualitative analyses for two reasons: 1) I had a large quantity of items (e.g., 1,259 God references and 923 metaphors) and wanted to discover their correlation, and 2) the quantitative correlation test could

strengthen my claim of connections based off my qualitative analysis. The results of these tests will be included in the discussion below.

7.3.1. Testimony and metaphor

I began my analysis of Christianese discourse in Chapter 4 by exploring testimony narratives as a genre for two reasons. The first is that the participants all offered their testimony in the first interview when I unknowingly provided the signal for these testimonies when I asked about “how [they] became a Christian” (Drury, 2015, p. 23). This afforded a specific place to start within such a large data pool. Second, the testimonies offered an initial look at the participants’ language near the beginning of their first year at IWU. The content of their testimonies would have been driven largely by their exposure and experience with church programming and family practices prior to their arrival as first-year students (Smith & Denton, 2005; Dean, 2010; Rackley, 2014; Surdacki & Gonzalez, 2014). However, the data set revealed that using one aspect of Christianese was not enough to provide the full picture of someone’s religious language patterns. Thus, in this section, I will discuss how there is a tentative intersection between the moves in one’s testimony and the usage of metaphors, thus marking one’s identity as a member (or not) of the IWU community.

Tables 7.2, 7.3, and 7.4 list the study participants by the initial groupings I determined in Chapter 4 based on the number of moves they included in their testimonies. Table 7.2 lists the insider students, 7.3 the inbound, and 7.4 the peripheral; while I relocated Carson from the inbound group to a marginal location in section 7.2.2, I decided to maintain the original groupings from Chapter 4 for the purpose of this discussion section (7.3.1 and following).

Table 7.2 Insider participants

Name	Testimony Moves					Metaphor Usage
Abby	1	2	3	4	5	39
Charlotte	1	2	3	4	5	18
Haley	1	2	3	4	5	32
Joshua	1	2	3	4	5	53

Kris	1	2	3	4	5	76
Melissa	1	2	3	4	5	51
Michelle	1	2	a3	4	5	52

In each table, there is at least one student who included “anti-moves,” which I first discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.1). In these tables here, I prefaced these anti-moves with the lowercase “a,” as seen with Michelle, David, John, and Marci.

Table 7.3 Inbound participants

Name	Testimony Moves					Metaphor Usage
Adam	1		3	4		16
Alex	1		3	4	5	55
Carson	1		3		5	5
David	1	2		4	a5	46
Dylan	1			4		38
Heidi	1	2		4		12
Helen	1	2		4	5	51
Jared	1	2		4		44
Jeannie	1	2		4		14
Johanna	1	2		4		35
John	1	a2	a3	4		70
Josefina	1	2		4		13
Kirk	1	2		4		41
Lydia	1	2	3	4		17
Maddie	1	2		4	5	38
Mike	1	2		4		14
Shannon	1	2		4		25

Table 7.4 Peripheral participants

Name	Testimony Moves					Metaphor Usage
Adria	1	2			5	4
Astrid	1					3
Collin	1			4		27
Corbin	1	2				7
Eric	1	2				17
Marci	1		a3	4		17
Travis	1	2				24

Overall, there is a connection between the number of moves the participants included in their testimonies with the number of metaphors they used across the four interviews. The

students who included four or five moves typically used more metaphors in their interviews. For example, Michelle included all five moves and used 52 metaphors throughout the interviews. Those who included two or three moves typically used fewer metaphors. Adam illustrated this by including three moves in his testimony and only 16 metaphors over the four interviews. Of course, there were exceptions to this. For instance, Charlotte used all five moves in her testimony but only 18 metaphors throughout the interviews. Conversely, Collin included only two moves in his testimony narrative, but he used a total of 27 metaphors across the four interviews.

Despite these exceptions, a Pearson Correlation Test showed that there was a statistically significant correlation between these two variables ($p = .001 < .05$; $r = .605$). This supports the claim that students who exhibit familiarity with the testimony genre, as it works in the IWU community of practice, are more likely to be familiar with the metaphors commonly used in this community to describe relationships. The opposite is true as well, as evidenced by Astrid's extreme example: as a Catholic-turned-agnostic, she included only the first move of the testimony genre (having been raised in the Catholic church), and she used only three metaphors over the year, none of which referred to relationships.

Thus, while it is possible to identify someone's potential membership within the IWU community through the moves they employ in their testimony narratives and the number of metaphors they use in their speech, this is only a partial picture of the linguistic repertoire of the community. To offer more insight, it is important to consider the role of agency along with these other discursive characteristics.

7.3.2. Agency and metaphor

Table 7.5 lists similar information to the tables in section 7.3.1; however, I replaced the specific testimony moves with the number of moves included, and I added the number of God references, the participants' activation and passivation patterns, and the ratio of activated

to passivated God references. In order to analyze how participants attributed agency to God, I counted each reference they made to God and then determined if they activated or passivated God; this was discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

As I discussed in Chapter 5, some participants felt more comfortable talking about God and thus referenced God more frequently than others. This comfort level appeared in students across the insider/inbound/periphery categories I initially created in Chapter 4. For example, Kirk referenced God 193 times, and I initially located him in the inbound trajectory. Collin, located in the peripheral trajectory, referenced God 61 times; this was far more than the 21 references made by Charlotte, one of the students located in the insider trajectory. Moreover, Carson, who I originally located in the inbound group and later moved to a marginal status, referenced God only nine times. The point here is not to relocate all of the participants to a different trajectory status; rather, the patterns in the data offer a much less clear connection between the number of times participants referenced God and their trajectory status based on the number of moves they included in their testimony narratives. The Pearson correlation test run with these two variables resulted in no statistical correlation ($p = .191 < .05$), which supports the lack of connection between number of testimony moves and number of God references.

Table 7.5 All participants and their data counts

Name	Number of Testimony Moves	Number of God References	Activation/Passivation Patterns		Act:Pass	Metaphor Usage
Insider Participants						
Abby	5	47	A-18	P-29	.6	39
Charlotte	5	21	A-5	P-16	.3	18
Haley	5	51	A-19	P-32	.6	32
Joshua	5	61	A-22	P-39	.6	53
Kris	5	93	A-22	P-71	.3	76
Melissa	5	54	A-16	P-38	.4	51
Michelle	5	41	A-23	P-18	1.3	52
Inbound Participants						
Adam	3	13	A-6	P-7	.9	16
Alex	4	77	A-37	P-40	.9	55

Carson	3	9	A-1	P-8	.1	5
David	4	31	A-8	P-23	.3	46
Dylan	2	31	A-9	P-22	.4	38
Heidi	3	22	A-9	P-13	.7	12
Helen	4	69	A-26	P-43	.6	51
Jared	3	43	A-16	P-27	.6	44
Jeannie	3	12	A-1	P-11	.1	14
Johanna	3	108	A-58	P-50	1.2	35
John	4	49	A-21	P-28	.8	70
Josefina	3	18	A-3	P-15	.2	13
Kirk	3	193	A-109	P-84	1.3	41
Lydia	4	29	A-5	P-24	.2	17
Maddie	4	60	A-32	P-28	1.1	38
Mike	3	20	A-10	P-10	1	14
Shannon	3	20	A-5	P-15	.3	25
Peripheral Participants						
Adria	3	10	A-1	P-9	.1	4
Astrid	1	14	A-1	P-10	.1	3
Collin	2	61	A-33	P-28	1.2	27
Corbin	2	14	A-1	P-13	.1	7
Eric	2	12	A-2	P-10	.2	17
Marci	3	39	A-15	P-24	.6	17
Travis	1	33	A-22	P-11	2	24

However, there is a statistically significant correlation between the participants' number of God references and their number of metaphors ($p = .001 < .05$; $r = .572$). As the number of God references increases or decreases within the participants' usage so does their number of metaphor usage. For example, Adria referenced God just ten times and used only four metaphors; Alex referenced God 77 times and used 55 metaphors; and Abby referenced God 47 times and used 39 metaphors. Yet this still does not account for the fact that Alex, located in the inbound group, referenced God more frequently than Abby, located in the insider group, based on their testimony moves. Thus, while the testimony moves served as a helpful tool to mark the participants' alignment with the testimony genre at IWU, they do not provide a full picture of the participants' alignment with other elements of Christianese discourse, namely, how the community talks about God and the kinds of metaphors they use to discuss relationships.

Simply talking about God does not identify someone as being a member of the IWU community, but it certainly acts as an entry point to being able to further examine these practices. I included the activation and passivation patterns in Table 7.5, along with the ratios of activation to passivation in order to show the range of these patterns across the participants' usage. While the majority of references among the participants passivated God, there were several students who activated God more frequently: Michelle, Johanna, Kirk, Maddie, and Collin. (Mike was the only participant who activated and passivated God an equal amount.) The ratios of activation to passivation in Table 7.5 highlight these patterns. Despite these students' initial designation into different trajectory groups, they share some similarities in terms of their church background. Johanna, Kirk, and Maddie experienced important moments in their faith development in their involvement with charismatic denominations. Johanna attended church with her mother for many years at a Pentecostal church (#2, line 88); Kirk talked about his baptism in the Holy Spirit⁶ (#1, line 18); and Maddie mentioned the influence of some close friends who were Pentecostal (#1, line 34). It is possible that attributing agency to God is a feature of the linguistic practices of charismatic Christians (Yong, 2008; Yong, 2009).

Michelle and Collin shared the similarity of having a denomination affiliation distinct from the others in this group. Michelle's primary church background was in the United Methodist Church (#1, line 8), considered a Mainline Protestant denomination (not Evangelical), with additional experience in an Evangelical para-church organization (#1, line 84). Collin grew up in a Catholic family, participating in the practices of the Catholic church

⁶ "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" refers to the Pentecostal doctrine that believers can be charismatically empowered for Christian service through this event, often occurring after their conversion experience (Atkinson, 2012, p. 3).

until he arrived at IWU (#1, line 8); his father began attending a Bible study that piqued Collin's interest, and it is possible that they were both exposed to more Evangelical practices (#1, line 18). The reason for their higher activation counts remains unknown, but they both increased their passivated references by the fourth interview, which suggests that both Michelle and Collin were adjusting their agency patterns to align with the IWU community of practice.

7.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have identified patterns across the data set in terms of testimony moves, agency attributions to God, and metaphors used to describe relationships. The analyses revealed that there is no singular way of using language that is characteristic of these students. Moreover, constructing identity by using characteristics of Christianese is a multifaceted process. The moves people choose to include in a testimony can index a kind of identity, but they must also draw from additional linguistic resources shared and practiced by the community. In the case of first-year students at IWU, the students who constructed an identity of belonging within the community included at least three moves in their testimony narratives, frequently talked about God with a combination of agency given to God and ascribed to self, and drew from the common semantic fields of metaphors used to describe relationships. Some students positioned themselves as participating in the IWU community but remained on the edges of the community, engaging in some of the linguistic practices described in this thesis but not fully participating in these discursive patterns. Thus, there are diverse ways of using Christianese even within the community, and using Christianese to construct an identity comes with complexity and nuance.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8. Conclusion and implications

8.1. Summary

In summary, after reviewing relevant literature from the fields that intersect with the context of this study, namely, sociology of language and religion, Christians in higher education, and the language of Evangelicals, I came to two conclusions: Christianese had not yet been analyzed in a systematic exploration, and studies that examined youth in religious contexts (including Christian universities) failed to incorporate any analyses of the faith language of those communities and how that related to identity construction. In response to that clear gap in the literature, using Wenger's (1998) communities of practice (CoP) as a framework for this study, I conducted an interview study using an ethnographic approach and used discourse analytic tools to investigate if and how first-year students at a faith-based university used elements of Christianese to construct their identity of belonging within the university.

After noticing that all of the participants discussed their conversion to Christianity in similar ways during the first interview, I followed Swales' (1990) rhetorical move analysis model to conduct a genre analysis of the testimony narratives in Chapter 4. This yielded results that enabled the grouping of students according to three of Wenger's (1998) trajectories of participation in the CoP model: insider, inbound, and peripheral. Seven participants in the insider group used five moves in their testimony narratives: Move 1 – family background, Move 2 – process of conversion, Move 3 – reflection on prior ignorance, Move 4 – personal appropriation, and Move 5 – change in behavior or attitude. The remaining participants in the inbound and peripheral groups used varying combinations of these five moves, but none of them used all five like the insider participants. The seventeen students in the inbound group included predominantly Moves 1, 2, and 4, with slight

variation among five of the participants. The seven participants in the peripheral group included four with an Evangelical upbringing and three with a Catholic or Lutheran upbringing. The Evangelical students in this group included only Moves 1 and 2, while the non-Evangelical students all included Move 1. Beyond the first move, there was variation: the Catholic-turned-agnostic included an anti-Move 2 in which she rejected the faith rather than convert to it; the Lutheran included an anti-Move 3, in which she affirmed her unwavering belief over time; and the Catholic and Lutheran included a weak version of Move 4 that involved a hesitant personal appropriation.

Further analysis of these testimony narratives demonstrated the use of specific Christianese lexis occurring in Moves 2, 4, and 5, particularly within the insider and inbound testimonies. The common expressions “ask Jesus into [one’s] *heart*” and “accept Christ” commonly occurred in Move 2 with the young conversion. Metaphors, such as *walk* or *faith journey* and *pour into me*, surfaced mostly in Moves 4 and 5. However, I noted how students with an Evangelical background evidenced their understanding of this genre without including the typical Christianese associated with the moves (see the discussion in 4.4.1).

In Chapter 5, I explored agency in the patterns students used to talk about God employing van Leeuwen’s (2008) social actors network. Among the 1,259 God references in the 124 interviews, students activated God as agent 41% and passivated God as receiver 59%. Based on Dean’s (2010) description of highly devoted teenagers articulating God’s agency in their lives, I had hypothesized that participants in the insider group would reference God more often than their peers and activate God more frequently in their interviews. However, the results of this analysis showed that students’ choice of activating and passivating God greatly depended on the topic of their God reference. I identified thirteen categories and determined the activation and passivation patterns of each. Overall, participants passivated God more frequently in the categories of Relationship, Attribute, Topic, Conversion, Belief,

and Surrender. They activated God more often in the categories of Presence, Plan, Action, Blessing, and God's Opinion. Two categories contained a close split, with three occurrences more on the passivation side for Communication and three more on the activation side for Identity.

There was no clear overlap among the results for participants' activation and passivation choices with the trajectory groupings I created based on their testimony narratives in Chapter 4. This demonstrates the point that the linguistic repertoire of the IWU community of practice goes beyond one's testimony to a nuanced form of expressing personal agency for some topics and God's agency for others. This variation in agency did not diminish the students' explicit articulation of their religious commitment; instead, it illustrated a more robust inclusion of God into a variety of aspects of their lives. Furthermore, the results of the social actors analysis demonstrate a need for van Leeuwen's (2008) more encompassing sociosemantic approach to exploring how members of a Christianese-speaking community attribute agency to God.

In Chapter 6, I investigated how the participants used metaphors about relationships which constructed their identity of belonging at IWU. I identified ten semantic fields, along with a miscellaneous category, into which I grouped all 923 metaphors found in the interview data. Students used **agriculture** metaphors to talk about their personal and spiritual growth; **conflict** metaphors included anything that could hinder growth and development of relationships. They used **network** metaphors to describe establishing relationships with others. Many participants talked about working toward strong, **stable** relationships. **Deep** conversations and friendships added to the stability of those relationships. **Journey** metaphors involved movement in one's relationship primarily with God but with other elements as well, both people and situations. Students employed **construction** metaphors to discuss creating relationships, along with building a better self and others. The **heart**

metaphors explained where emotions lie, and this included thoughts or ideas that involve emotional depth. **Water** metaphors provided the image of giving oneself to another relationship or receiving that from another person. Finally, students referred to **atmosphere** metaphors to illustrate where all of the above took place.

Throughout the data, students who used these metaphors demonstrated their competency with this particular linguistic repertoire and marked their membership in the IWU community of practice, illustrating the identity constructing power afforded to them by these metaphors. Those students who used certain metaphors, but used them in reference to others and not themselves, demonstrated a level of competence with the repertoire in the community, and those students who refrained from using the metaphors also marked their place in the community: both groups could be identified as peripheral or marginal members. Ultimately, the number of metaphors used to discuss relationships highlighted the importance of this area in the lives of the participants, and the metaphors themselves used in these ways carried considerable meaning to many students in the study, thus serving as a resource that members can draw on in order to construct their identity as belonging to the community of practice.

In Chapter 7, I offered four case studies of students who acted as representatives for the four trajectories involved in Wenger's (1998) notions of participation and non-participation: Kris as insider, Johanna as inbound, Eric as peripheral, and Carson as marginal. I examined the Christianese elements from Chapters 4, 5, and 6 as they related to each student, and I used examples from their interviews to justify their placement in each of these trajectories. For example, Kris drew from the linguistic repertoire in all three areas (testimony, agency, and metaphor) to demonstrate his full participation and belonging at the university. Johanna, on the other hand, displayed a learning curve over the four interviews as she became more familiar with the linguistic practices of the community. Eric illustrated his

knowledge of the community practices multiple times over the year, but he also positioned himself as a peripheral member by occasionally drawing from the linguistic repertoire to discuss others in the community and not his own participation. Carson clearly demonstrated his marginal location in the community with repeated non-participation in the linguistic practices of the university.

Following the case studies, I broadened the discussion to include an integration of the data results from the chapters that explored testimony narratives, agency attribution, and metaphors used to describe relationships. I found that there was no singular means for determining one's identity based on the Christianese they speak. Furthermore, using characteristics of Christianese to construct one's identity involves multiple elements. There was clear overlap in terms of the number of moves participants included in their testimonies and the number of relationship metaphors they used, just as there was clear overlap between the number of God references made by the participants and the number of metaphors they used. However, there was no clear connection between the number of moves in the participants' testimonies and the number of God references they made in their interviews.

The moves included in a testimony can index a particular identity, but that does not fully determine how one engages with other features of Christianese. Members of the faith-based university community choose when to attribute agency to God or keep agency for themselves and which metaphors to use when discussing relationships; following the identified patterns of the community enables them to identify as insider or inbound members clearly belonging to the community. Conversely, peripheral or marginal members of the community can choose not to participate in these identified patterns in order to identify themselves as not belonging to the community. Thus, there are multiple ways of using Christianese within the academic community, and using Christianese to construct an identity involves complexity and nuance.

8.2. Limitations of the study

As with any study, it is not possible to cover everything in one effort, and the same goes with this investigation. Limitations with this study involved the number of participating students, the lack of diversity among the participants, the methods chosen for the study, and the lack of space for further inquiry.

While this study offered a more comprehensive linguistic analysis than previous studies (Coleman, 1980; Leiter, 2013; Notman, 2017), it focused only on first-year students in the academic community of IWU. Moreover, the number of students involved was limited to those who responded to a survey received in late summer when incoming first-year students typically do not think about research studies, as well as the handful of classes I visited to physically invite students to participate. These classes were limited to those professors either in my own department at the university or those who would support my research. I originally had 33 students in the participant pool, but two students chose to transfer to other institutions at the end of the fall semester and did not notify me of this move. Based on their first two interviews, I surmised their decisions to transfer were based on academic program choice (a desire to change majors to one not offered at IWU) and not fitting into the community (based on behavior and language choices during the interviews). By only focusing on the first-year students, I potentially missed other examples of Christianese that might have changed the focus of this study.

Additionally, the relative homogeneity among the participant pool potentially problematizes the results of this study. Some diversity existed among the participants, namely, Johanna from Southeast Asia, Charissa from the Caribbean, and Haley and Jared from missionary contexts in Asia and Europe respectively. However, Johanna and Charissa lived in Indiana for much of their older childhood, and Haley and Jared lived among other white Americans at their international boarding schools prior to arriving at IWU. Thus, even

the potentially diverse students in the study had experienced significant socialization in white American communities. Since the majority of the participants came from a white, middle-class (mostly Midwestern) demographic, it is important to consider what variety might exist among Christianese speakers from different demographics.

Another limitation with this study involves the methods choice. This study ultimately relied heavily on interviews with the students and minimally on field notes. Despite the culture at IWU of students meeting with professors outside of classes, the interviews could also have potentially skewed the data because it is possible that students talk differently with their peers than they do with professors, especially a professor they have never had teaching them in a class. One way to remedy this shortcoming would be to investigate the actual everyday interactions among students by recording students in their residence halls, during meals at the cafeteria, or during group discussions in certain classes. The next section will detail other possibilities for further research with this topic.

8.3. Further research

Based on my research about Christianese, there are a number of options for further research. First of all, I only focused on three specific aspects of Christianese: testimony, agency, and metaphor; and I had a relatively small participant group of thirty-one first year students. Other researchers could replicate this study in several ways. First, more testimonies could be analyzed using the five moves I identified in this study to test my conclusions. While working on this project, I shared some of my initial results with various members of my university; this was met with fascination and additional questions, along with introspection among the audience, all of which can encourage the further investigation into this particular genre as expressed at IWU and other CCCU institutions. Second, a similar replication study could be done regarding agency attribution and metaphor usage among the faculty and staff at IWU (or other CCCU institutions) to compare the patterns from the first-

year students in this study with the patterns of the other groups. This could also be carried out with students beyond their first year in order to see if the patterns vary as they move through their four-year undergraduate experience. Third, while metaphors are a well-researched area in terms of conceptual metaphor theory, one could explore the intertextual and interdiscursive nature of metaphors as they occur in Christianese.

In order to expand this current study, I plan to contact as many of the thirty-one participants from this project that are still at IWU and follow up with them during their final year at the university in order to explore a more longitudinal perspective in their language practices. I want to compare their attribution practices and metaphor choices at the end of their time at IWU with their usage from this study.

Finally, as mentioned in 8.2, I initially wanted to explore the significance of certain expressions uttered by members of the university, particularly, *community* and *nice*, since they were often uttered in the same breath. Using stance analysis to investigate how speakers position themselves with regard to these concepts could broaden the description of the language practices within the IWU community and possibly other CCCU institutions (Power, 2010; Woodfin, 2012, p. 94).

8.4. Conclusion

In closing, this study provides answers to the questions I posed in Chapter 1, namely to discern some of the characteristics of Christianese discourse and to explore if and how first-year students at IWU used these characteristics to construct an identity of belonging within the community. Due to the variety of Christianese characteristics, I used a variety of discourse analytic tools to conduct my linguistic investigation into the practices of the students. First, the rhetorical move analysis model created by Swales (1990) had typically been applied to genre analyses with written discourse. However, like a similar study (Dumanig et al., 2011), I applied this analytical framework to spoken discourse with the

participants' testimony narratives. Second, van Leeuwen's (2008) social actors network had primarily been used in analyses of political or educational texts (pp. 25-28; Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhard, 2009). While I previously used this framework in an exploration on "Scripture" as a social actor in codes of conduct (Bruehler, 2015), this study is the first to analyze God as a social actor using van Leeuwen's sociosemantic framework. Third, as noted multiple times in this thesis, numerous scholars have researched metaphors in terms of their conceptual nature; however, examining the usage of certain metaphors in terms of identity construction is a new approach for the ongoing research of metaphors in the Evangelical context.

Finally, this study merged the exploration of language, religion, identity, and community to describe some of the features of Christianese in an Evangelical university and to provide a greater understanding of how members of the religious academic community construct their identities as belonging (or not) to the community by engaging in the linguistic repertoire (or not) of that community. Identity construction in this way carries complexity and nuance because I found that students constructed their identities of belonging using various elements of Christianese at different times. No single aspect or characteristic of Christianese was the defining element; rather, students demonstrated complex competency in Christianese to mark different levels of belonging in the community of practice of Indiana Wesleyan University.

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doi:1080/14746700902796742

Appendix A

Ethics Approval from Indiana Wesleyan University



Institutional Review Board
4201 South Washington Street
Marion, IN 46953

Tel: 765-677-2090
Fax: 765-677-2099

NOTIFICATION OF APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR: Anne Bruehler

TITLE OF INVESTIGATION: The Use of Language in Identity Construction of First-Year Students at a Faith-Based University

IRB ID NUMBER: 761.14

The Institutional Review Board of Indiana Wesleyan University reviewed your proposal and has reached the following decision.

The proposal has been:

 X **APPROVED**
If the project extends beyond the one year period, a new proposal must be submitted to the IRB for review.

 APPROVED PENDING SUBMISSION OF REVISIONS
(See below)
ALL REVISIONS MADE MUST BE HIGHLIGHTED UPON RESUBMISSION

 NOT APPROVED (See below)

Comments/modifications required:

Signature: Ph.D. Date: August 21, 2014
Chair, Institutional Review Board

Reviewed by:

Expedited

Appendix B

Ethics Approval from Lancaster University

Ethics application approved

Ethics (RSO) Enquiries

Fri 5/8/2015, 11:22 AM

Dear Anne

Thank you for submitting your completed stage 1 self assessment form and additional information for **The use of language in the identity construction of first-year students at a faith-based university**. The Part B information has been reviewed by a member of the University Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm that approval has been granted for this project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress) to the Research Ethics Officer;
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Debbie Knight (ethics@lancaster.ac.uk 01542 592605) if you have any queries or require further information.

Kind regards,

Debbie

Debbie Knight | Research Ethics Officer | Email: ethics@lancaster.ac.uk | Phone (01524) 592605 | Research Support Office, B58 Bowland Main, Lancaster University, LA1 4YT
Web: Ethical Research at Lancaster: <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/depts/research/ethics.html>



www.lancaster.ac.uk/50

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Appendix C

Questionnaire to Garner Participant Interest

Intro email:

Hello, students!

My name is Anne Bruehler, and I am a professor of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) here at Indiana Wesleyan University. That means I teach courses like linguistics, English grammar, and teaching methods. I'm also very interested in how people use language to adjust to or fit in to different places.

I'm currently working on a research project that investigates how IWU students use "Christian" language at our campus. As an incoming first year student, would you be interested in participating? If you choose to participate, your responses will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. The survey should take about 5 minutes of your time.

Thanks very much for considering this and welcome to IWU!

Peace,

Prof Bruehler

Intro page for survey:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research! Let me tell you a little more about it. My study will look at issues surrounding faith-based education, identity, socialization, and Christian language patterns among college students. The research will begin with this very short survey – it's just 3 questions. Then, if you're still interested, I will contact you about meeting me for an interview or a small group discussion later in the semester.

Any and all of the responses, including conversations, will be kept confidential and anonymized (this means I won't use your real name when I write up the results of the research). If you have any questions about my study or your involvement in it, please feel free to contact me by email ([REDACTED]) or phone ([REDACTED]).

Questions for Survey Monkey:

1. Do you recognize any of the following terms? (Please check all that apply.)

Saved

Traveling mercies

Daily devos

Dig into the Word

Pour into someone

2. Do you use any of the following terms? (Please check all that apply.)

Saved

Traveling mercies

Daily devos

Dig into the Word

Pour into someone

3. Would you be interested in participating in a research project about language and the IWU community?

Yes

No

Conclusion page:

You're finished! Thanks so much for your participation in this survey. I look forward to meeting you in September if you're interested in continuing to participate in this project, and I wish you all the best with your studies at IWU.

Peace,

Prof. Anne Bruehler

Appendix D

Consent Form for Participants



RESEARCH PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The Use of Language in Identity Construction of First-Year Students at a Faith-Based University

Principal Investigator's Name: Prof. Anne Bruehler

Research Advisor's Name: Dr. Karin Tusting

Academic Division/Department: Dept. of Linguistics and English Language

Lancaster University

Purpose of Research

As part of my doctoral studies in Lancaster University's Department of Linguistics and English Language, I am carrying out a study in which I explore the use of language within the university community at Indiana Wesleyan University. This study brings together issues related to faith-based education, identity, socialization, and Christian language patterns. It will explore how first-year undergraduate students are socialized into the language community of Indiana Wesleyan University and how they construct their identity using the discourse practices of the IWU community. This research will identify the particular discourse patterns common to this community, as well as offer insight into how first-year students integrate into IWU's community of practice.

Specific Procedures to be Used

My study will involve interviewing roughly 15 community members one-on-one about language and practices used to express their faith. I will also organize 4 focus group discussions about similar topics. I will record these interviews and discussions and then transcribe portions in order to look for particular features that appear in the speech that was recorded.

You are agreeing to either: (check the appropriate box)

- ☐ participate in a series of up to 4 interviews
or
☐ participate in a focus group discussion

Duration of Participation

Each interview should not exceed 30 minutes, and you are consenting to participate in no more than 4 interviews over the course of the fall and spring semesters. These interviews will take place in the library room of the MLL Division suite in Elder Hall.

The focus group discussions will include 4-6 participants (either all students or all faculty/staff) and will take place in the Communication Division conference room in Elder Hall. Your group will be given a task to complete or topics to discuss. This should not exceed 45 minutes.

Initials: _____

Date: _____

All of the interviews and focus group discussions will be audio recorded and transcribed (with participants being anonymized) for further analysis. I would be delighted to share the relevant transcriptions with you anytime through May of the academic year in which you participate.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during the academic year in which you participate (September through April). If you withdraw while the study takes place or until 1 month after the data collection finishes, I will not use any of the information that you provided. If you withdraw later, the information you shared with me will be used as part of the study, but I will not approach you to collect further data. At every stage, your name will remain confidential. The data will be kept securely, in encrypted files accessed by me alone, and will be used for academic purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. Unless you instruct me to do otherwise, in my thesis and other publications I will not use your real name.

Risks to the Individual

Because this study seeks to identify the language associated with religious beliefs and practices, some of the questions and topics may be personal and make you feel uncomfortable.

Interview participants:

You may decline to answer any specific question during the interview if it makes you feel uncomfortable or uneasy.

Focus group participants:

You may ask to leave the group at any time during the focus group activity.

Participation or refusal to participate in no way affects the student's standing or academic progress; the same applies to faculty and staff—there is no penalty for declining to participate.

Benefits to the Individual or Others

Participating in this study will help increase your awareness of how you understand your faith in relation to your identity and how you communicate your faith to others. From a wider perspective, this study will begin to describe how Christian discourse practices enable first-year students to integrate into the Christian community at IWU.

Compensation

N/A

Extra Costs to Participate

There is no cost to the participant.

Injury or Illness

There is no medical risk involved in this study. However, should any participant require medical attention, University procedures will be followed.

Confidentiality

At every stage, your name will remain confidential. The data will be kept securely, in encrypted files accessed by me alone, and will be used for academic purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. Unless you instruct me to do otherwise, in my thesis and other publications I will not use your real name.

All participants are reminded of the confidential nature of this study. Just as I will take steps to keep your information confidential, I ask that focus group participants in particular respect their group member's confidentiality. [Focus group member only initial here: _____]

Initials: _____

Date: _____

Voluntary Nature of Participation

I do not have to participate in this research project. If I agree to participate I can withdraw my participation at any time during the time frame explicitly stated above (See "Duration of Participation") without penalty. You must contact me directly (anne.bruehler@indwes.edu) to withdraw from the study.

Cooperation and Release

I will cooperate freely in this research project and release any claim to the collected data, research results, publication of or commercial use of such information or products resulting from the collected information.

Contact Information:

If I have any questions about this research project, I can contact:

Prof. Anne Bruehler: anne.bruehler@indwes.edu; office phone: 765-677-2647

Dr. Karin Tusting: k.tusting@lancaster.ac.uk

If I have concerns about the treatment of research participants, I can contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Indiana Wesleyan University, 4201 South Washington Street, Marion, IN 46953. (765) 677-2090.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

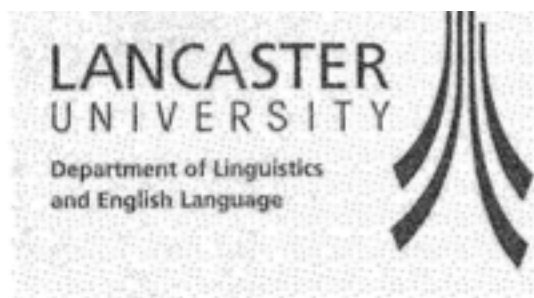
Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Name

Investigator's Signature

Date



Date:

INFORMATION SHEET

As part of my doctoral studies in the Department of Linguistics and English Language, I am carrying out a study in which I explore the use of language within the university community at Indiana Wesleyan University. My study will involve interviewing community members about specific words and phrases used to express their faith. I will also organize focus group discussions about similar topics. I will record some of these interviews and discussions and then transcribe portions in order to look for particular features that appear in the speech that was recorded.

I have approached you because you are a valued member of the Indiana Wesleyan University community, either as a student, staff or faculty member. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in my study.

If you decided to take part, this would involve the following: I will contact you to schedule either an individual interview or a focus group discussion.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during the 2015-2016 academic year. If you withdraw while the study takes place or until 1 month after the data collection finishes, I will not use any of the information that you provided. If you withdraw later, the information you shared with me will be used as part of the study, but I will not approach you to collect further data. At every stage, your name will remain confidential. The data will be kept securely, in encrypted files accessed by me alone, and will be used for academic purposes only. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles. Unless you instruct me to do otherwise, in my thesis and other publications I will not use your real name.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact myself or my course supervisor, Dr. Karin Tusting, who can be contacted by email at k.tusting@lancaster.ac.uk. You may also contact the Head of Department, Prof. Elena Semino, at e.semino@lancaster.ac.uk.

Signed,

Anne Bruehler
anne.bruehler@indwes.edu
a.bruehler@lancaster.ac.uk

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 Fax: +44 (0)1524 843085
<http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk>

UNIVERSITY OF LANCASTER

Department of Linguistics and English Language

Consent Form

Project title: The Use of Language in Identity Construction of First-Year Students at a Faith-Based University

1. I have read and had explained to me by Anne Bruehler the Information Sheet relating to this project.
2. I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation.
3. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, but no longer than 1 month after the data collection. If I withdraw after this period, the information I have provided will be used for the project.
4. I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet.

Name:

Signed:

Date:

Appendix E

Interview Schedule

First Interview

1. What is your denominational background?
2. Do you mind sharing how you became a Christian?
3. Why did you choose to study at IWU?
4. Do you have any favorite aspects of IWU life? Least favorite?
5. Describe what spiritual growth looks like to you. Can you think of someone who embodies that? What characteristics do they possess?
6. Are you actively working on your own spiritual growth?
7. How do you think you fit into the IWU community?
8. Do you have any particular goals for this semester? Any that involve university activities or otherwise?

Second Interview

1. How is the semester going for you? Classes ok? Extracurricular activities?
2. How do you like chapel? Has it affected you in any way, like in decisions about what you do or whom you're friends with?
3. What are you involved in outside of class? Are you active in any local church, for example?
4. How does your faith inform your decisions? Like in your daily routine?
5. Has your impression of the IWU community changed at all?
6. Have you noticed any activities at IWU that don't seem to fit your initial impression of the IWU community?
7. What were some of the most important experiences you had this semester? Most significant events or individuals?
8. Do you have any new goals for the rest of the year?

Third Interview

1. Did you notice anything different about being home after a semester at IWU?
2. Was there anything about IWU that you missed over break?
3. Do you feel like your spiritual life has changed from the beginning of the school year to now? How so? If not, why not?
4. How can you tell if someone is a member of the IWU community? What makes them distinctly IWU? Or a Christian college student?
5. Pull out CoP graphic. Who fits in each of these levels of participation within the community? Where do you place yourself in this graphic?
6. What are you looking forward to this semester? Do you have any new goals?

Fourth Interview

1. How has spring semester been different for you than fall semester?
2. Do you feel stronger in your faith now versus when you first started the school year? What has made the difference?
3. Have you struggled with anything that has affected your walk?
4. People talk about identity a lot at IWU, e.g. finding our identity in Christ. Can you explain how you would describe your identity before coming to IWU and how you would describe it now after being a student here for almost a year?

5. A lot of students have described the IWU community as “nice.” How do you understand being “nice” as part of your commitment to Christ?
6. Have you noticed the way people talk at IWU? What have you noticed? Have you changed the way you talk at all? (e.g., when you’re doing a group Bible study or something like that)
7. For example, listen to these words and phrases. Have you heard these on campus? Do you use any? Has this change surprised you at all?
 - a. God has a plan for my life.
 - b. I need to be more intentional about...(e.g. my prayer life, spending time with the Lord, spending time with friends)
 - c. Jesus time
 - d. This dorm has great community.
 - e. I accepted Jesus when I was ...[age].
 - f. What are you struggling with? Or Give your struggles over to God.
 - g. I want to be able to pour into others.
 - h. I love doing life/community with these people!
 - i. I am so blessed to be here.
 - j. What’s on your heart?

Appendix G

Information about Students' Church Backgrounds, CoP Graphic Self-Categorization, and Data Counts

Name	Church Denomination	CoP Self-categorization	Number of Testimony Moves	Number of God References	Activation/Passivation Patterns	Act:Pass	Metaphor Usage	
Insider Participants								
Abby	Wesleyan	Active	5	47	A-18	P-29	.6	39
Charlotte	Non-denominational	Occasional/Active	5	21	A-5	P-16	.3	18
Haley	Wesleyan	Occasional/Active	5	51	A-19	P-32	.6	32
Joshua	Wesleyan	Active	5	61	A-22	P-39	.6	53
Kris	Evangelical Free	Active	5	93	A-22	P-71	.3	76
Melissa	Wesleyan	Active	5	54	A-16	P-38	.4	51
Michelle	United Methodist	Active	5	41	A-23	P-18	1.3	52
Inbound Participants								
Adam	Non-denominational	Occasional	3	13	A-6	P-7	.9	16
Alex	Wesleyan/Non-denominational	Active	4	77	A-37	P-40	.9	55
Carson	Evangelical Free	Occasional/Active	3	9	A-1	P-8	.1	5
David	Evangelical Free	Active	4	31	A-8	P-23	.3	46
Dylan	Non-denominational	Occasional	2	31	A-9	P-22	.4	38
Heidi	Non-denominational	Occasional	3	22	A-9	P-13	.7	12
Helen	Evangelical Free	Core	4	69	A-26	P-43	.6	51
Jared	Christian Missionary Alliance	Active	3	43	A-16	P-27	.6	44
Jeannie	Evangelical Free	Active	3	12	A-1	P-11	.1	14
Johanna	Apostolic	Active	3	108	A-58	P-50	1.2	35
John	Baptist/Wesleyan	Active	4	49	A-21	P-28	.8	70
Josefina	Wesleyan	Occasional/Active	3	18	A-3	P-15	.2	13
Kirk	Charismatic non-denominational	Occasional	3	193	A-109	P-84	1.3	41
Lydia	Presbyterian	Occasional	4	29	A-5	P-24	.2	17
Maddie	Baptist/Pentecostal	Core	4	60	A-32	P-28	1.1	38
Mike	Non-denominational	Active	3	20	A-10	P-10	1	14
Shannon	Non-denominational	Occasional	3	20	A-5	P-15	.3	25
Peripheral Participants								
Adria	United Methodist	Occasional/Active	3	10	A-1	P-9	.1	4
Astrid	Catholic/Agnostic	Occasional	1	14	A-1	P-10	.1	3
Collin	Catholic	Peripheral	2	61	A-33	P-28	1.2	27
Corbin	Non-denominational	Occasional/Active	2	14	A-1	P-13	.1	7
Eric	Wesleyan	Occasional	2	12	A-2	P-10	.2	17
Marci	Lutheran	Core	3	39	A-15	P-24	.6	17
Travis	Wesleyan	Active	1	33	A-22	P-11	2	24

Appendix H

Initial List of Christianese Words and Phrases

“road to Damascus” type story =	Go deeper [in friendships]
testimony	Go deeper in the water with Him [God]
[Certain practices are] growing me in my faith	God doesn’t speak any less in chapel
[Someone] embodied the fruits of the Spirit	God has a plan for my life
Accepted Jesus/Christ	God has done a work [in my life/in my church]
Accountability	God has it in His hands
Actively growing myself and others	God has prepared me to be a leader
Asked Him [Jesus] to be my savior	God has shown Himself as real, caring, loving
Asked Jesus into my heart	God provided a cool opportunity
Baptized in the Holy Spirit	God turned my life around
Be Christ to people	God was calling me
Be intentional about	God was moving through my study of Scripture
Build relationships	God was speaking directly to me
Building each other up	God was telling me to go to IWU
Christ followers	God working in our lives
Christ-centered or Christ-centeredness	God-appointed
Christ-seeking person	God-aware
Christlike manner	God-connection
Come along side with [other people]	God’s hand was working through my life
Communion with God [relational reference – not Eucharist]	God’s path
Connect -ed/-ing/-tions	Going through the motions
Dedicated my life	Grow deeper relationships
Deep connection to Christ	Growing into Christ
Deeper level	Hall accountability groups
Delve into what His word means	Hall devos
Devo	Have the Holy Spirit have dominion over decisions
Devotional time	He [God] has called me into the ministry
Devotionals	How Christ defines them
Digging into the [Bible] stories and trying to understand them	I am a child of God
Doing church	I felt God fill me back up
Extending grace	I felt God saying
Faith walk	I felt like God trying to talk to me
Fellowshipping	I gave me live [to Christ/Jesus]
Felt Him [God] calling me	I knew in my heart who God was
Felt His [God’s] love	I was saved
Finding community	Identify with myself in Christ
Focusing my life more towards Christ	In the plateau of Christianity
Follow Christ’s heart	Invest in me
Gifts of the Spirit	Journey
Give you heart to God	Lean on each other
Go after a deeper relationship with Him	Let God do all the work
Go deeper	Life groups

Living by the Spirit
 Making time for the Lord more
 Ministering to other people
 My growth in the walk of faith
 My walk
 Nonbelievers
 On fire for God
 Personal relationship
 Plugged in
 Pour into us/my life/me
 Prayed the prayer
 Pursue a relationship with God
 Pursuing faith
 Pursuing the Lord
 Put all my trust in Christ
 Quiet time
 Read the Word
 Reaffirmed my faith
 Recommittals of faith
 Rededicate my life
 Relationship with Christ/Jesus/God
 Said the prayer
 Scripture

Scripture coming alive to me
 Seek out God's will for our lives
 Seeking to be more like Christ
 Sense of community
 Sharing our stories and our testimonies
 Solid friendships
 Spiritual giant
 Spiritual gifts
 Spiritual high
 Spiritual longing
 Spiritual rush
 Spiritually attacked
 Stagnant [in terms of spiritual growth]
 Super after God
 Take a little bit of the burden
 The Holy Spirit's role
 The Lord refilled me
 The ministry
 The Spirit doing the growing work in us
 The Spirit is so present [during worship]
 To learn to grow deep
 Unit devotionals
 What God has done in your life