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IDENTITY FORMATION IN DIVERSE CHURCHES

By

IRWYN L. INCE, JR.

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

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**Abstract**

Identity formation is a group project. People's convictions about themselves certainly contribute to their formation. However, groups furnish people with an identity. One of those groups that plays a significant role in identity formation is the local church. The church provides people with some of the strongest bonds of human connection.

The Bible indicates that God intends for his church to represent humanity's diversity. This representation is not expected simply in a global sense, but also as the church gathers in local diverse communities. This diversity benefits the church. Yet, American churches are overwhelmingly mono-ethnic. Since the church is so influential in forming its members' identities, is the lack of diversity within most American churches detrimental to full identity formation in Christ? What are the benefits to identity formation when the church is healthy in diversity?

The purpose of this study was to explore how people who experience belonging in a diverse church assess the impact the church has on their identity formation. The assumption of this study was that healthy, diverse churches have a substantive and beneficial impact on its members' identity and self-awareness.

This study focused on twenty members of six ethnically diverse Protestant churches. Each of the participants belonged to their church for at least two years, and possessed an awareness of the church's impact on them. The study utilized a qualitative design to understand these church members' point of view and experience of belonging. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary source of data gathering. The research identified three main areas of focus central to how members of diverse churches

assess how their church helps form their identity. These include the areas of vulnerability and belonging, identity forming, and imaging God.

The responses of participants revealed that belonging in diverse churches was experienced through educating one another, as people are valued, as deep friendships develop, as ethnic minorities had others of their ethnic group in the congregation, and as the church demonstrated a commitment to God's word as the as the rule for faith and life. Secondly, the meaningful things that can be observed about people and their background brought awareness of ethnic identity to the surface. What also emerged from the findings is that in diverse churches identities are formed through the experience of dissonance. People's awareness of themselves began to change as they realized and, in some respects, embraced the discomfort of their diverse context. Lastly, the benefits of identity formation for people who experience belonging in a diverse church are a sharpened sense of their identity in Christ, denying of self, and loving and valuing others.

The study concluded that the impact of the diverse church on the identity formation of its members develops in at least three ways: as people embrace their identity as part of a new group (a new "we"), as the church helps them locate their identity in Christ by revealing that their ethnic identity is not absolute, and as the worship experience communicates to people that room is being made for them.

Based on an analysis of the literature studied and the interview data, the study offered three recommendations for pursuing healthy identity formation in a diverse church. These recommendations are: (1) Embrace the theology of unity in diversity as a gospel imperative, (2) Develop an ongoing awareness of the unseen cultural values within the church, and (3) Affirm the full humanity of the church's members.

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Without question, every glory goes to our triune God. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit! My prayer is that is dissertation would be a blessing to his church as more image-bearers are brought to embrace the loving unity in diversity that reflects his inner life.

**Chapter One**

**Introduction**

"And you're…you're Black." I couldn't help but laugh. I tried not to let
him see me laughing at that. And I wondered why is it is so awkward for
him to say something to me that is so obvious?…There are various reasons
why this happens. And it happens all the time. And I think on one hand, he
was unsure of whether that was an insulting thing to say. And on the other
hand, maybe he was unsure as to whether that was how I see myself.[1]

Journalist Afua Hirsch describes identity as a crucial aspect of humanity with

which people grapple. In her TEDxTottenham talk, she relays the personal encounter

with a former colleague, quoted above. The gentleman, although attempting to flatter her

with compliments on her qualifications, felt the need to nervously point out in a

whispering tone, "you're Black." Questions arise from encounters like this, "Who am I?

How do other people see me? How do I see myself?" Whether people ask those direct

questions or not, they demand attention because people's differences are implicitly or

explicitly evident.

These differences are no accident. Even if people may prefer sameness, "God

apparently loves difference; he created so much of it,"[2] says Duane Elmer, G. W. Aldeen

Chair of International Studies and director of the Ph.D. program in educational studies at

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He continues, "Comfort in another culture only

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[1] Afua Hirsch, "Our Identity," TEDxTottenham, last modified January 6, 2015, accessed March 11, 2015,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzhCpv9ynrM.

[2] Duane Elmer, *Cross Cultural Connections: Stepping Out and Fitting In Around the World* (Downers
Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 64.

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occurs when you understand difference."[3] These abundant human differences become a source of difficulty because people must navigate their differences in the context of relationships with others.

Immediately after describing her interaction with her former colleague, Hirsch illustrates how the contrasting ways people perceive their differences causes identity challenges. This time, Hirsch, her boyfriend, and his young nephew were dining at a restaurant. In the context of a playful joke, her boyfriend pointed out that they are the only three Black people in the restaurant. The nephew responds, "There're not three Black people! There're two Black people. She's White!"[4] Hirsch did not fit the image the young boy had in his mind of a Black person. The same woman is, in one setting, identified as Black, and in another setting, identified as White.

If identity was independent of external influences, and simply a matter of personal conviction about oneself, this conundrum may not be worth discussion. However, as Stanley Grenz, formerly Pioneer McDonald Professor of Theology, Carey Theological College, notes, "Personhood is bound up with relationality."[5] Dr. Brené Brown similarly summarizes her bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies in social work, saying, "Connection is why we're here. We are hardwired to connect with others, it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives, and without it there is suffering."[6] To put it another

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Hirsch, "Our Identity."

[5] Richard Lints, Michael Scott Horton, and Mark R. Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), Location 1032, Kindle.

[6] C. Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Gotham Books, 2012), Location 153, Kindle.

way, "we are born out of, in, and for community, and we cannot for a moment exist apart from it."[7] In, *Social Identity and the Psychology of Groups,* Claremont Graduate University Professor of Social Psychology, Dr. Michael Hogg is clear that, "Groups furnish us with an identity, a way of locating ourselves in relation to other people."[8] People's understanding of who they are is intimately tied to their relationships with others.

Yet, the reality of identity formation through social relationships, social interaction, and group membership means that people's identity can change as these relationships, interactions, and memberships change. The focal point of Hirsh's identity changed when her social dynamic changed. In their essay, *Self, Self-Concept, and Identity,* University of Southern California Professor of Psychology, Daphna Oyserman, along with Ph.D. candidates Kristen Elmore, and George Smith describe identity's fluidity, saying,

> Identities can be focused on the past—what used to be true of one, the present—what is true of one now, or the future—the person one expects or wishes to become, the person one feels obligated to try to become, or the person one fears one may become…Identities are not the fixed markers people assume them to be but are instead dynamically constructed in the moment.[9]

Questions of desire, obligation, and fear make the fluid construction of identity challenging. David Livermore, President of the Cultural Intelligence Center, uses the

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[7] Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 4:276.

[8] Michael A. Hogg, "Social Identity and the Psychology of Groups," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, ed. Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 502.

[9] Daphna Oyserman, Kristen Elmore, and George Smith, "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, ed. Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 69.

phrase "contextualizing ourselves," instead of "identity" in addressing this challenge. He asks, "What does it look like to contextualize ourselves to the various cultures where we find ourselves in any given week?"[10] Some form of adaptation must take place. However, Livermore continues, "Adapting our message, our curriculum, and our programs is one thing. But adapting ourselves is the far greater challenge."[11]Additionally, individuals may not be cognizant of the way they are adapting to their context. In his article, "Self-Awareness," University of Miami Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Charles Carver, defines public (meaning social) self-consciousness as the tendency to be cognizant of the self as a social object. He posits that this cognizance depends upon how noticeable or important the group values are.[12] Further, psychiatrist and medical director, Dr. Curt Thompson, points out that, "As humans, we need both deep connection and autonomy. Each is reinforced and energized by the other."[13] This creates a tension between independence and connection in identity formation.

*The Church*

There are multiple, varied groups where people's hardwired need for connection, as well as the need for autonomy manifest themselves. These include families, schools, sports teams, community organizations, professional organizations, et cetera. The list

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[10] David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, Youth, Family, and Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 15.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Charles S. Carver, "Self-Awareness," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, ed. Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 58-59.

[13] Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: SaltRiver, 2010), 237.

could continue almost indefinitely. Dutch theologian, Herman Bavinck, argues that the strongest bonds of human connection are found in religion, saying,

> The family, society, the state, associations of various kinds, and for various purposes, bind people together and cause us to live and act in concert with one another. Even stronger than all these institutions and corporations, however, is the bond that unites people in religion. There exists in religion a powerful social element. The reason for this is not hard to find: religion is more deeply rooted in the human heart than anything else.[14]

For Bavinck, people's central and foundational relationship with God outflows into relationships with other human beings. Bavinck speaks of religion in general, not Christianity in particular. However, in Christianity, Jesus claims that allegiance to him is central and foundational. Jesus says, for example, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."[15] Then, using the language of family, Jesus promises that allegiance to him brings about human connection that leads to life, saying,

> Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.[16]

Jesus promised to form those who gave allegiance to him into a connected community—the church. Indeed, theology professor and author, John Frame, notes that an important image for the church is the family of God. This image reflects the intimacy

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[14] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics,* 276.

[15] Matthew 10:37.

[16] Mark 10:29-30.

of life in the church.[17] It is very significant that Jesus authorizes his followers to call on God as their Father.[18] If his followers all have the right to call on God as their Father, it means that they are all brothers and sisters. To be a Christian is to belong to an eternal family created by God himself. This family, as implied by Jesus' words quoted above, is not theoretical or only future oriented. It exists "now in this time." Reflecting on the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:14-16,[19] Steven Guthrie marvels that, "In the church Paul sees nothing less than the completion of God's purpose in creating humanity."[20] The intimacy of life in the church is possible because God sets aside all social barriers that divide humanity. Literally, Jesus puts those barriers to death. Thus, in Jesus Christ, the restoration of humanity includes the restoration of community.

*The Diverse Church*

Jesus promised to bring about the church as an intimate community, and the Apostle Paul sees the church as the completion of God's purpose in creating humanity. Yet, American churches are overwhelmingly mono-ethnic. The Pew Research Center reports that Protestant churches—whether in the mainline tradition, the evangelical tradition, or in the historically black tradition—are not ethnically diverse in any substantive way. Their 2007 survey indicates that eighty-one percent of Evangelical

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[17] John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 101.

[18] Ibid., 102.

[19] For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. Ephesians 2:14-16.

[20] Steven R. Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 75, Kindle.

Protestant church members are White, ninety-one percent of Mainline Protestant church members are White, and ninety-two percent of historically Black Protestant church members are Black.[21]

The 2014 LifeWay Research survey, *American Views on Church Segregation,* found that sixty-six percent of Americans have never regularly attended a place of worship where they were an ethnic minority.[22] In an article about this survey, Bob Smietana notes that churchgoers are lukewarm about diversity.[23] Dr. Korie Edwards, in her work on interracial churches notes that, "Churches are most successful within the American context (where 'success' is measured by the number of attendees) when they appeal to one group."[24] This leads her to assert that religious racial integration is a dubious enterprise.[25] The research reveals that the church in America does not substantively reflect the reality that Jesus Christ has set aside the ethnic barriers that divide humanity.

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[21] The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *U.S.Religious Landscape Survey,* www.pewforum.org, 75, accessed March 26, 2015, http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf: 2008.

[22] LifeWay Research, *American Views on Church Segregation*, www.lifewayresearch.com, 4, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.lifewayresearch.com/files/2015/01/American-Views-on-Church-Segregation.pdf.

[23] Bob Smietana, "Sunday Morning Segregation: Most Worshippers Feel Their Church Has Enough Diversity," *Christianity Today*, January 15, 2015, accessed March 23, 2015, http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/january/sunday-morning-segregation-most-worshipers-church-diversity.html.

[24] Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Location 72, Kindle.

[25] Ibid., Location 59.

## Problem and Purpose Statements

Human beings are hardwired to connect with others.[26] This connection within groups furnishes them with an identity. The church provides people with some of the strongest bonds of human connection. Since the church is so influential in forming its members' identities, is the lack of diversity within most American churches detrimental to full identity formation in Christ?[27]

In Ephesians 2:14-16, the "completion of God's purpose in creating humanity," is communicated in terms of unity in diversity. The Apostle Paul says that Jesus Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Jesus has created one new man from the two. In Paul's earlier letter to the Galatian Christians, he said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."[28] Commenting on this verse, John Stott says, "When we say that Christ has abolished these distinctions, we mean not that they do not exist, but that they do not matter. They are still there, but they no longer create any barriers to fellowship. We recognize each other as equals, brothers and sisters in Christ."[29] Thus, unity in diversity also means embracing one another as equally valuable.

The Bible indicates that God intends for his church to represent humanity's diversity. This diversity benefits the church. What are the benefits to identity formation when the church is healthy in diversity? How does the diverse church impact the identity

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[26] Bible passages like Genesis 1:26-27, John 13:34, Colossians 3:13-14, and James 5:16 make this clear.

[27] Ephesians 4:13.

[28] Galatians 3:28.

[29] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way,* The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 100.

formation of its members? Although scholars have studied and written about the church's

need to better reflect the diversity of their neighborhood,[30] this diversity remains a

dubious enterprise in actuality. Although many scholars have written on identity

formation, few have researched identity formation within diverse churches or addressed

how identity is formed and challenged in a diverse church. The following study addresses

this gap.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore how people who experience

belonging in a diverse church assess the impact the church has on their identity

formation. To that end, the following research questions guided the qualitative research.

## Research Questions

1. What are the ways people experience belonging in a diverse church?

2. How do people gain awareness of their identity in experiencing belonging in a diverse church?

3. How do people's identities form as they experience belonging in a diverse church?

4. What are the benefits of identity formation for people who experience belonging in a diverse church?

## Significance of the Study

This study has significance for all Christians who currently participate or who

desire to participate in a diverse church. Additionally, it has significance for churches that

are actively seeking to reflect the diversity of their local neighborhoods, as well as

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[30] Some of these helpful works along these lines are Randy Woodley's *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Ethnic Diversity*, Soong-Chan Rah's *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Curtiss Paul DeYoung and Michael O. Emerson's *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation As an Answer to the Problem of Race.*

denominations that are embracing the reality of the "non-White majority America" that is approaching in the coming decades.

*Christians*

Christians who join diverse congregations do so for a variety of reasons. Due to the overwhelming mono-ethnicity of American congregations, these individuals are "minorities" with regard to their church commitment. While there are certainly differences among individuals in a mono-ethnic church, the cultural commonality allows for certain aspects of identity to go unaddressed. For example, the question of maintaining one's cultural and ethnic identity is assumed in a mono-ethnic church. Additionally, a mono-ethnic context does not naturally afford the opportunity to assess the impact culture has on people. This study will help to address the impact that committing to a local congregation comprised of multiple ethnicities and cultures has on the individual's maintenance, development of, and challenge to ethnic identity. Currently, there is little literature available to aid individuals who want to understand this impact.

*Churches*

Author and Professor of Church Growth and Evangelism, Soong-Chan Rah writes, "All over the United States, many churches are taking more seriously the biblical call to build and participate in multiethnic churches and communities."[31] He continues, "The idealism and optimism of developing multiethnic congregations, however, is being replaced by frustration and pessimism as the difficult reality of multiethnic ministry

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[31] Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), Location 87, Kindle.

becomes more and more apparent."[32] Thus, as churches pursue the biblical ideal of a more diverse congregation, challenges will meet them. As multiple cultures and ethnicities integrate, the need for cultural intelligence increases. Understanding and embracing different people will challenge church members.

Wondering whether he, as Croatian, could embrace a 'četnik' (Serbian fighter)—the ultimate enemy—Miroslav Volf asks, "What would it do to my identity as a human being and as a Croat?"[33] Volf, founding director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, believes that Christians ought to embrace their enemies as God has embraced them in Jesus Christ. Yet, when it came to the thought of embracing a četnik, he admits, "No, I cannot—but as a follower of Christ I think I should be able to."[34]

Volf's struggle may represent an extreme situation. While most church members will not view different ethnicities as enemies, nonetheless, frustrations will arise over questions of identity, control, and preference. How do churches navigate through these frustrations? In what ways do the frustrations threaten or change congregational life? This study has significance for churches and their leadership who want to understand how the challenges of pursuing ethnic diversity impact their members and congregations.

### *Denominations*

The Cooperative Ministries Committee (CMC) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) prepared a strategic plan for the denomination in 2010. The plan sought

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[32] Ibid., Location 89.

[33] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9.

[34] Ibid.

to address the realities of slowed growth along with a desire to maintain the denomination's "values while honestly facing challenges that could lead to long term decline."[35] It was written to help "the PCA identify its challenges, address them with strategies that are consistent with our biblical values, and build denominational support for implementing these strategies."[36] The report lists the transition from Anglo-majority culture in the United States as an external challenge. Two of the denomination's internal challenges, according to the report, are "maintaining biblical worship with cultural diversity,"[37] and "ethnic homogeneity both in general membership and denominational leadership."[38]

Writing on the topic of faith and culture for the Religion News Service in 2014, Jonathan Merritt asked whether the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) could thrive in the twenty-first century. He interviewed Dr. David Dockery, president of Trinity International University and author of, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal*. In the article Dr. Dockery gave thanks to God for progress in the SBC in the area of racial reconciliation, but added,

> [W]e still have a long way to go in our efforts to live out the kingdom aspirations of diversity and racial reconciliation made known to us in Revelation 7. Thus we need to continue to give much attention to these matters. We need not only focus on what it means to become faithful

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[35] Presbyterian Church in America Cooperative Ministries Committee, "PCA Strategic Plan," in *Minutes of the Thirty-Eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Nashville, TN: Presbyterian Church in America), 440, accessed August 17, 2015, http://pcahistory.org/ga/38th_pcaga_2010.pdf.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 13.

[38] Ibid., 14.

Great Commission followers of Christ, but also Great Commandment followers of Christ who are called to love those around us.[39]

As majority Anglo denominations see the changing ethnic landscape in the United States, they are beginning to understand that their current ethnic homogeneity is a hindrance to future growth and sustainability. They are wrestling over how to become more ethnically and culturally diverse as a whole, attempting to discover what it looks like to love those around them. David Livermore explains this challenge when he says, "We have to learn to *be* the people who become culturally accessible, living messages of Jesus and his love. Embodying Jesus cross-culturally is a messy, complicated process. This is what often splits churches, divides families, and erodes Christian fellowship."[40] This study has significance for denominations that want to reject ethnic homogeneity and learn how to love those who have not historically been members of their churches.

Specifically, then, this study seeks to assist church members, churches, and denominations who have embraced a biblical vision for diversity by identifying the ways in which these churches shape and form the identities of their congregants.

**Definition of Terms**

In the context of this study, the terms are defined as follows:

Belonging – an individual's community experience of being at home among friends as a co-owner and creator of that community.[41] It includes an individual's sense of being rightly placed in a specific community and includes feeling welcomed, valued, comfortable, or safe.

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[39] Jonathan Merritt, "Southern Baptist Convention: Can It Thrive in the 21st Century," *Religion News Service*, June 9, 2014, accessed August 17, 2015, http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/06/09/southern-baptist-convention-acing-thrive-21st-century/.

[40] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, 34.

[41] Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), xii.

Blame – an action where one person attributes fault, responsibility, or error for a wrong committed. The person attributing blame often does so as a means of discharging their own pain and discomfort.[42]

Connection – a relationship where people are linked with one another, particularly where that link is strengthened or energized as people are seen, heard, and valued.[43]

Community – a group or organization, with shared practices and commitments, where grace, fidelity, and truth provides the safety needed for people to take the risks that are necessary for growth and transformation.[44]

Church – the whole body of Christians (the people of God) all over the world and in all ages.[45]

Culture – what human beings make of the world: the artifacts they make from nature's raw material and the meaning they make in rituals.[46] Making culture includes behaviors that are learned, ideas that reinforce beliefs and values, and products that reinforce beliefs.[47]

Diverse Church – a local church whose membership reflects the ethnic or cultural diversity of its neighborhood.

Ethnicity – a group of people with claims to a shared culture, history, or descent;[48] who may also share language, social boundaries, and geographic location.[49]

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[42] C. Brené Brown, "Brene Brown: The Power of Vulnerability," TED, accessed March 30, 2015. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzlF7o.

[43] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 145.

[44] Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), Location 58, Kindle.

[45] Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief,* 1019.

[46] Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 17, Kindle.

[47] Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Location 240.

[48] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches,* Location 130.

[49] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 65, Kindle.

Identity – a person's understanding of who he or she is based on socially constructed,[50] meaningful categories that people use to describe themselves.[51]

Image of God – that likeness to God reflected in an individual human being, but most particularly reflected in humanity in its entirety―as one complete organism, summed up under a single head, Christ, spread out over the whole earth.[52]

Local Church – a portion of the Church that gathers together in a particular neighborhood to worship the Lord Jesus Christ and lives committed to him.

Neighborhood – the geographic area within a region, city, or town where one lives.

Power – the ability to act in a particular way or to influence for a particular purpose as one participates in culture—learning behaviors, reinforcing beliefs, making products.[53]

Race – a social system that hierarchically organizes people in a society based upon physical characteristics.[54]

Shame – a painful feeling of humiliation or distress often brought about by the fear of being disconnected or unwelcomed in community.[55]

Vulnerability – the willingness to be susceptible to physical or emotional attack or harm; living "all in;" engaging the risk of pain for the sake of connection with another or others.[56]

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[50] "Socially constructed" does not mean that identity is a human creation absent divine influence or declaration. It means, as stated above, that identity is furnished within the context of connection with a group.

[51] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches,* Location 1039.

[52] Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* ed. John Bolt, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 2:577.

[53] Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power,* 16.

[54] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches,* Location 126.

[55] Brown, "Brene Brown: The Power of Vulnerability."

[56] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 1-2.

**Chapter Two**

**Literature Review**

The purpose of this study was to research how people who experience belonging in a diverse church assess the impact the church has on their identity formation. In their journal article, "Linking Identity Status to Strength of Sense of Self: Theory and Validation," Ickes, Park, and Johnson note, "The achievement of a relatively stable and well-defined identity is often regarded as an essential part of human development."[57] Identity, as a meaningful category that people use to describe themselves, is influenced by group dynamics. Groups "influence the type of people we are, the things we do, the attitudes and values we hold, and the way we perceive and react to the people around us," says Hogg.[58]

This effect is no different when it comes to the church. As a body of people who worship the Lord Jesus Christ and strive to live lives that reflect that commitment, the church's practices can engender healthy identity formation. Church practices, likewise, have the ability to be detrimental to healthy identity formation. Speaking to the community practices of promise-keeping, truthfulness, hospitality, and gratitude, Christine Pohl says, "Practices are most powerful when they are not noticed, when they

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[57] William Ickes, Anna Park, and Amanda Johnson, "Linking Identity Status to Strength of Sense of Self: Theory and Validation," *Self & Identity* 11, no. 4 (2012): 531, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2011.625646.

[58] Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney, *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 502.

are simply an expression of who we are and what we do, a way of being in the world and relating to one another that seems 'natural.'"[59] As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, those practices are implicitly related to healthy identity formation.

The expression of who a person is in community gets easier when that individual feels the sense of belonging to that community. Peter Block relates the intimate connection of community and belonging when he says, "We experience community every time we find a place where we belong."[60] While belonging is not the only key to community, its connection to community is indispensable because belonging includes an individual's sense of being rightly placed in a specific community and includes feeling welcomed, valued, comfortable, or safe.[61] The relatively stable and well-defined identity that Ickes, Park and Johnson spoke of is cultivated in community through what Brown calls wholehearted living.[62] Wholehearted living is about engaging with the world from a place of worthiness. Thus, wholehearted people believe that they are worthy of love and belonging.[63] Brown further explains that vulnerability is at the core of wholehearted living.[64] Thus, the experience of belonging depends on the willingness to embrace vulnerability. Additionally, Nonna Verna Harrison would say that the worthiness wholehearted people believe themselves to have is intimately tied to the fact that human

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[59] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 78.

[60] Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, xii.

[61] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 174-175.

[62] Ibid., 9-10.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid., 11-12.

beings are image bearers of God. Describing the word "dominion" in Genesis 1:26[65] in terms of royalty, Harrison says, "Royalty involves (1) dignity and splendor, and (2) a legitimate sovereignty rooted in one's very being."[66] Human beings have a royal dignity inherent in being creatures made in the image of God.

The areas of identity formation, vulnerability and belonging, and imaging God emerged as the most pertinent literary subject matter for the qualitative research. Thus, the literature review begins with a particular focus on examining identity formation in community. Then, the literature was reviewed in the area of connection through vulnerability and belonging. Lastly, a focused study on the biblical-theological framework of imaging God as a reconciled community was conducted.

## Identity Formation in Community

### *Self-Identification*

Central to the issue of identity is how individuals view themselves. Do they view themselves positively or negatively? Authors equate a positive self-identification with the notion of dignity. Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self,* speaks to this question as he describes three axes of moral thinking for people: one's sense of respect for and obligations to others, one's understanding of what makes a full life, and the range of notions concerned with dignity. With respect to dignity, Taylor determines what an

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[65] Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

[66] Verna E. F. Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 90, Kindle.

individual's dignity consists of, including, among other things, a sense of power, a sense of dominating public space, any invulnerability to power, and any self-sufficiency.[67]

Harrison presses the need for people to self-identify as having royal dignity.[68] The emphasis on royalty is the most substantive aspect of human dignity because it comes from the fact that people are made in the image of God.[69] While Taylor says that people can understand their dignity consisting in their power, Harrison nuances this perspective. She claims that royal dignity involves a legitimate sovereignty rooted in one's very being.[70] Though people should identify with this sovereignty, for Harrison, it is not selfish or self-centered but rather denotes the exercise of royal power in relation to the natural world in order to bring God's blessing into the world.[71] This royal power is the God given ability to relate to the world in love, not to exploit or destroy, but to bring well-being and peace.[72] Agreeing with her, Lints says that dignity resides in the very act of being created by God. Instead of royalty, he infers the word nobility when he says, "There is something ennobling about being in relationship to the God whose glory extends throughout the earth and above heaven itself."[73] For him, humanity reflects the

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[67] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 15.

[68] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation*, 90.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid., 144.

[72] Ibid., 123.

[73] Lints, Horton, and Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, Location 14.

goodness and greatness of God. So, from various perspectives, positive self-identification is connected to the notion of dignity.

Additionally, dignity or self-worth is evident in behavior. Taylor says, "The very way we walk, move, gesture, speak is shaped from the earliest moments by our awareness that we appear before others, that we stand in public space, and that this space is potentially one of respect or contempt, of pride or shame."[74] The absence of a self-identification that includes dignity can be catastrophic because it undermines one's sense of self-worth.[75] According to Ickes, Park, and Johnson, people who have difficulty in establishing a strong and well-defined identity are those who have a weak and nebulous sense of self.[76] One's self-awareness, or self-esteem, is negative, according to University of Miami Psychology professor, Dr. Charles S. Carver, if one's behavior does not agree with one's pretensions or aspirations.[77] According to Richard Pratt, those pretentions or aspirations are not always straight forward. One person says, "I am nothing." Another says, "I am God."[78] People thus may find themselves on one end of the spectrum or the other, either having a sense of worthlessness or an over-inflated sense of self-importance.[79]

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[74] Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 15.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ickes, Park, and Johnson, "Linking Identity Status to Strength of Sense of Self: Theory and Validation," 531.

[77] Carver, "Self-Awareness," 51.

[78] Richard L. Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 2.

[79] Ibid.

Sociology professors Sheldon Stryker, emeritus, Indiana University, and Peter Burke, emeritus, University of California, Riverside, connect identity to behavior when they observe, "Identity is internal, consisting of internal meanings and expectations associated with a role."[80] Stryker and Burke note that identity theory asserts a strong link between the centrality, or salience, of people's identity and behaviors tied to roles underlying those identities; theorists argue that expectations attached to roles were internalized and acted out.[81] Richard Lints implies that those roles are internalized and acted out because of the way expectations exercise influence over what people see and hear.[82] Role is external. People see roles linked to social positions within the social structure.[83] Thus, the centrality of a person's identity reflects person's commitment to the role relationships requiring that identity. Stryker and Burke cite research demonstrating this connection from a variety of roles; religious identity, donor identity, motherhood, and student identity.[84]

The expectations for these roles do not appear out of thin air. As Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith say, "People do not create themselves from air; rather…what is important…come(s)…from what matters to others."[85] The expectations are the result of

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[80] Sheldon Stryker and Peter J. Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of Identity Theory," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2000): 289, accessed February 27, 2013, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2695840

[81] Ibid., 287.

[82] Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 19.

[83] Stryker and Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of Identity Theory," 289.

[84] Ibid., 287.

[85] Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith, "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity," 76.

cultural values, described by David Livermore as unconscious assumptions, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, and feelings.[86] He pictures an individual's levels of mental conditioning as an iceberg. The values are the aspects of culture represented by the portion of the iceberg below the surface of the water. These messages come from the groups to which people belong. They are underneath the surface and provide information about the things that are meaningful and important. Also underneath the surface is interaction between the cultural messages and the individual personality as an individual seeks to develop her personal identity.[87]

Where Ickes, Park, and Johnson associate a nebulous sense of self with difficulty in establishing a well-defined identity, and Carver associates negative self-awareness with behavior that does not agree with one's aspirations, Livermore links internal dissonance and conflict in people's self-identification to the "nexus of self with the various cultures of which an individual is a part."[88] Stryker and Burke note that identity theory supports the concept of the nexus of self described by Livermore, asserting that persons have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles.[89] This diversity of influence upon self-awareness and identity is not new according to Lints. He refers to it as competing accounts of reality. He says that humans have always lived with this. Yet, in his opinion, "There can be little doubt that the amount of competition among altering visions has reached epic proportions

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[86] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, 85.

[87] Ibid., 88.

[88] Ibid., 89.

[89] Stryker and Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of Identity Theory," 286.

in our time."[90] While change to this world has come through undreamt of technological advancements like the Internet, "greater change has occurred in how we relate to the world," and, "what we think about ourselves."[91] He implies that this is because the competition among altering visions carries with it a rise in conflict between perceptions. Like Livermore's interplay between cultural messages and individual personality, Lints' conflict between perceptions both shapes and is shaped by people's self-identity.[92]

What is necessary for a self-identity that accords with human dignity and worth given the variety of influences on one's identity and the conflicts that arise from the behavioral expectations those influences bring? Carver believes that if one's behavior does correspond to pretensions and aspirations surrounding a committed role, "The result should be pride and satisfaction,"[93] a high self-esteem. However, in the opinion of University of Texas at Austin professor Dr. Kristin Neff, the solution to a weak and nebulous sense of self is not increasing one's self-esteem. Nor is it aligning one's behaviors to expected roles. Taking her cues from Buddhist scholars, she finds the self-identity solution in self-compassion. A self-compassionate frame of mind is developed by the interaction of self-kindness—being caring and understanding with oneself rather than being harshly critical or judgmental; common humanity—recognizing that all humans are imperfect, fail, and make mistakes; and mindfulness—being aware of one's present moment experience in a clear and balanced manner so that one neither ignores nor

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[90] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, 18.

[91] Ibid., 18-19.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Carver, "Self-Awareness," 51.

ruminates on disliked aspects of oneself or one's life.[94] Brené Brown approaches the

solution from the vantage point of worthiness where she says that "Wholehearted living

is about engaging our lives from a place of worthiness."[95] She too intimates self-

compassion as she continues,

> It means cultivating the courage, compassion, and connection to wake up
> in the morning and think, "No matter what gets done and how much is left
> undone, I am enough." It's going to bed at night thinking, "Yes I am
> imperfect and vulnerable and sometimes afraid, but that doesn't change
> the truth that I am also brave and worthy of love and belonging."[96]

Other authors nuance the emphasis on self-compassion and self-love by linking

human self-understanding from the perspective of God and his story. For example, Pratt

asserts that without knowing of God, people are unable to know themselves. Thus, a lack

of knowledge of God results in people being confused about who they are.[97] This

confusion has a cost. A failure to realize the unique role that God has given people in his

kingdom brings a vacillation between self-degradation and self-importance.[98] Pastor and

theologian R. C. Sproul, seeking to clarify personal identity from a Christian perspective,

explains that annihilation of personal identity or loss of self is not the goal. Sproul says,

"The goal is a heightened understanding of the self as it relates to God. It is the

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[94] Kristin D. Neff, "The Role of Self-Compassion in Development: A Healthier Way to Relate to Oneself," *Human Development* 52, no. 4 (2009): 212, http://dx.doi.org/10.1159/000215071.

[95] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 10.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be*, 3.

[98] Ibid., 21.

redemption of the personal identity, not the destruction of it."[99] Guthrie asks, "How do we know our identity or that of others around us?...I understand who I am by recounting a particular story to myself—a history that gathers together and plots all the disparate events of my experience."[100] This story, for him, is written by the Spirit of God. Theologian and Covenant College professor Kelly Kapic agrees that one cannot understand the self apart from God. He describes the Christian view of the self as creational and eschatological. The Christian view of the self looks back to the goodness of God's original designs, and looks forward to the renewal of all things in Christ.[101] Thus, woven into self-identification is God-given dignity, allowing for a self-compassionate, wholehearted living, where people place their story rightly into God's story.

*Identity Formation in Community*

While self-identification has to do with self-perception and self-awareness, it is not formed in isolation. Much of the literature cited in the previous section expressed the social dimension of identity formation. Self and identity are foundational and central in the discipline of sociology,[102] and the social construction of identity is a well-accepted and well defined axiom in this discipline. University of Notre Dame Professor of Sociology, Christian Smith, explains that a great deal of human social existence is not

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[99] R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 3:63.

[100] Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human,* 166.

[101] Kelly M. Kapic, Tim Morris, and Matthew S Vos, "Where Does Authority Come From? A Conversation with a Theologian, a Biologist, and a Sociologist," *Modern Reformation* 24 no. 5, (Sept./Oct., 2015): 1.

[102] Michael A. Hogg, "Social Identity and the Psychology of Groups," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, ed. Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 502.

directly determined by genetics or instinctual behaviors. Rather, human persons are free to use their capacity for, among other things, identity formation "to shape the meanings and structures of their social existence together."[103] Sociologists have theorized this human capacity for social creativity by the framing device of social constructionism.[104]

Dr. Michael Hogg explains, "Groups furnish us with an identity, a way of locating ourselves in relation to other people."[105] In the article "Where Does Authority Come From?" Covenant College Professor of Sociology Dr. Matthew Vos makes the compelling assertion that, "Outside of relationship, we cannot locate the self. The self is both conceived in relationship and sustained in relationship…Accordingly, I know only myself and I have a sense of self only because there are others who form and sustain me."[106] Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith define personal identity in terms of social relations and memberships when they say, "Identities are the traits and characteristics, social relations, roles, and social group memberships that define who one is."[107] One's own biography, for sociologist Peter Berger, must be understood as an episode within the history of society, which both precedes and survives it. What is more, he says, it is within society, and as a result of social processes, that the individual becomes a person, that he attains and holds onto an identity, and that he carries out the various projects that

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[103] Christian Smith, *What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 119.

[104] Ibid., 119-120.

[105] Hogg, "Social Identity and the Psychology of Groups," 502.

[106] Kapic, Morris, and Vos, "Where Does Authority Come From? A Conversation with a Theologian, a Biologist, and a Sociologist," 2-3.

[107] Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith, "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity," 69.

constitute his life.[108] Thus, for many sociologists, it is not possible for people to develop their identity without social relationships within a group.

As with sociologists, theologians are interested in examining the self and what it means to be human, and many assert that identity is socially constructed. Theologian Stanley J. Grenz certainly sounds like the sociologists quoted above when he says, "Personhood is bound up with relationality."[109] Likewise, Guthrie makes the connection between personhood, identity, and relationships. He does so by first pointing out that people are not just spirits in a material world. Rather, a people's humanity includes their physical body. Therefore, "My human identity includes my body, as does yours. But this is not all. Our humanity is also bound up with communities and relationships, with traditions and social practices."[110] Kapic, along with biologist Tim Morris, and Vos explain that the question "Who am I?" is deceptively simple. Reflection on this question reveals that people need a tremendous amount of help to understand themselves. They claim that the need people have for one another is not just for the well functioning of communities. People need one another in order to make sense of their existence, their calling and their very being.[111]

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[108] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 3.

[109] Stanley J. Grenz, ed. *The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the Imago Dei in Postmodern Culture*, Personal Identity in Theological Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), Location 1032, Kindle.

[110] Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human,* 72.

[111] Kapic, Morris, and Vos, "Where Does Authority Come From? A Conversation with a Theologian, a Biologist, and a Sociologist," 1.

Theologian-in-residence at St. Thomas Church, NY, Reverend Victor Lee Austin, argues that as rational beings, humans possess a special way of being in a group. This special way of being is not like a mechanical construction, where parts get put together to make the whole in the way an automobile is built. He asserts that for rational beings the whole grouping has to be there first. It preexists the part. Therefore the group is what gives individuals the symbols necessary to represent themselves.[112] Lints reinforces this idea when he says, "The social dimension of our identities and perceptions points at the fact that our relationships, visual, virtual, personal, and communal, profoundly influence our identities."[113] Human beings are creatures made inside a social dynamic.[114]

This profound influence of the social and group dynamics upon identity formation necessitates an examination of the ways, pertinent to this research, that groups influence and form identity. Some of those ways are beneficial, and some are harmful. Harvard University Professor Robert Putnam warns that the product of social capital may be directed toward malevolent, antisocial purposes. Such experiences would have a negative impact on identity formation. He explains the positive consequences of social capital as mutual support, cooperation, trust, and institutional effectiveness. The negative manifestations are sectarianism, ethnocentrism, and corruption. He encourages maximization of the positive and minimization of the negative.[115] However, as Dr. Aaron

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[112] Victor Lee Austin, *Up with Authority: Why We Need Authority to Flourish as Human Beings* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 103.

[113] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, 20.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 22.

Kuecker from LeTourneau University explains, there is a particular challenge when it comes to the group dynamic of ethnicity, commonly referred to as ethnocentrism. He expresses this challenge as an irony of the postmodern world. In spite of the "thoroughgoing rhetoric of individual liberty and freedom for self-determination, the social phenomenon of ethnic identity remains pervasive, powerful, and ambiguous."[116] The group dynamic of ethnic identity and ethnocentrism provides a way for people to know themselves in a world of dizzying and complex diversity. Yet, like Putman, he cautions against the negative manifestation of the social phenomenon of ethnic identity. The negative manifestation of ethnic identity is in the formation of social barriers that lead to stultifying prejudices, social and political injustices, and horrific violence.[117]

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*Culture*

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Cultural influence is a significant aspect in the social construction of identity. Forming an understanding of culture's impact on the individual is a means of examining various ways groups influence and form identity. In fact, the terms "identity" and "culture" are almost synonymous. When Stryker and Burke consider identity within sociology and social psychology, they admit "some use *identity* to refer essentially to the culture of a people; indeed they draw no distinction between identity and, for example, ethnicity."[118] Rah declares that culture is foundational in social life.[119] It shapes and forms individuals. Christianity Today Executive Director, Andy Crouch notes that

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[116] Aaron Kuecker, ed. *Ethnicity and Social Identity*, Handbook to Social Identity in the New Testament (London, UK; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), Location 1557, Kindle.

[117] Ibid., Location 1572.

[118] Stryker and Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of Identity Theory," 284.

[119] Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Location 238.

without culture, "We simply do not become anything at all."[120] People often talk about culture from the opposite perspective. That is, from the perspective of engaging, impacting, or transforming it. However, those who most carefully study culture tend to stress instead how much individuals are transformed by it.[121]

This shaping and transforming effect that culture has includes learned behaviors, ideas that reinforce beliefs and values, and products that reinforce beliefs.[122] In similar fashion, as stated earlier, Livermore asserts that the groups to which people belong, give them information about what is meaningful. He speaks of "contextualizing ourselves" as if he is asserting, like Stryker and Burke, that people have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles. He asks, "What does it look like to contextualize ourselves to the various cultures where we find ourselves in any given week?"[123] Some form of adaptation must take place. This is no easy task. When it comes to cultural adaptation Livermore implies that it is relatively easy to adapt messages, curriculum, or programs. It is a far greater challenge for people to adapt themselves.[124]

Livermore is claiming that people ought to develop cultural intelligence (CQ). That is, people ought to become multicultural people in order to better express love cross-

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[120] Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 18, Kindle.

[121] Ibid., 10.

[122] Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Location 238-41.

[123] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your Cq to Engage Our Multicultural World*, 15.

[124] Ibid.

culturally.[125] However, writers implicitly express the challenge to being cross-cultural

people by demonstrating the seeming preference people have for sameness in groups.

One influence of culture upon identity formation is in providing a means to differentiate

between one group and another, and a corresponding desire to maintain group sameness.

This sameness preference may be cultural, ethnic, or socioeconomic, among other things.

Putnam claims that, when it comes to social capital, "Individuals form connections that

benefit our own interests."[126] The preference is, in fact, both contemporary and ancient.

In November 2013, *The Washington Post* published an article on the rise of super

zip codes in America. Super Zips are the zip codes raking highest on income and college

education. The largest collection of Super Zips, according to the article, is around

Washington, D.C., with the affluent becoming more isolated from the working class and

the poor. Demonstrating the preference for sameness, the authors state that, "Many

Washington neighborhoods are becoming more economically homogenous as longtime

homeowners move out and increasing housing prices prevent the less affluent from

moving in."[127] This statement agrees with Putnam who writes, "More and more families

live either in uniformly affluent neighborhoods or in uniformly poor

neighborhoods…While race-based segregation has been slowly declining, class-based

segregation has been increasing."[128] Putnam laments the social stratification of his

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[125] Ibid., 12.

[126] Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 20.

[127] Ted Mellnik and Carol Morello, "Washington, a World Apart," *The Washington Post,* November 09, 2013, accessed November 13, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/local/2013/11/09/washington-a-world-apart/.

[128] Robert D. Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 38.

childhood city, Port Clinton, Ohio. The distribution of income in that city was once among the most egalitarian in the country.[129] Now, the Lake Erie shore in Port Clinton is lined with elaborate mansions and gated communities "almost uninterruptedly for 20 miles on either side of town…and it is possible to walk in less than ten minutes from wealthy estates on the shoreline to impoverished trailer parks inland."[130] Thus, in the contemporary America, the preference for sameness is very real.

Even in the ancient world, the preference for group sameness is expressed. Kuecker, in describing the language of social differentiation, says that ethnicity both in the ancient and modern context "is a powerful expression of the apparently pervasive human impulse toward social categorization and differentiation."[131] He continues by looking at the way Israel saw itself during the New Testament period. "While Israel saw itself as oJ lao/ß, all non-Israelites populated the outgroup e¡qnh…The e¡qnh[132] constituted the 'them' against which Israelite identity could be forged."[133] Kruecker explains that those deemed Gentiles did not self-identify that way.

In 1954 psychologist Gordon Allport, often called a founding father of personality psychology, described this phenomenon with the term in-group. Members of an in-group "all use the term *we* with the same essential significance."[134] The preference for sameness

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[129] Ibid., 22.

[130] Ibid.

[131] Kuecker, *Ethnicity and Social Identity*, Location 1627.

[132] *Ho Laos* means "the people," and *ethneae* means "Gentile."

[133] Kuecker, *Ethnicity and Social Identity*, Location 1627.

[134] Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, unabridged, 25th anniversary ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979), 31.

is also positive. He argues that in-group memberships are vitally important to individual survival. When in-group members encounter an outsider with different customs, such as Gentiles, as Kuecker refers to, they realize that the outsider has different habits. These different habits are received by the in-group as habit-breaking. Because the familiar is preferred, habit-breaking is unpleasant.[135]

This preference for in-group sameness is often unconscious. In their research, Christian Smith, along with Rice University Professor of Sociology, Dr. Michael O. Emerson, demonstrate the unconscious nature of this preference. Their research on racialization in America showed that highly educated Whites are less likely to say that they are uncomfortable with Black neighbors when compared to less well-educated Whites. The research also showed that in spite of what these highly educated Whites say, they are in actuality more segregated from Black Americans than are Whites with less education. Their children are thus more likely to attend racially homogenous schools.[136] Their lives demonstrated an unconscious preference for sameness that contradicted their words.

Another way of saying that culture helps to create a preference for sameness is to say that it helps create differentiation between groups. Andy Crouch takes this approach by looking at the family. He see family as culture at its smallest—and most powerful.[137] He is making a particular point about the typically smaller scale of culture, saying, "It is easy to talk as if the culture that matters is culture whose public encompasses millions of

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[135] Ibid., 46.

[136] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 10, Kindle.

[137] Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling,* 45.

people."[138] Culture at a smaller scale is what matters because it allows people to have a sense of personal ownership. When the sense of culture encompasses millions of people, it is everyone's property, but is in no one's grasp.[139] Allport refers to this sense of ownership as security. He says, "Each individual tends to see in his in-group the precise pattern of security that he himself requires."[140] So the sense of security that in-groups provide helps create differentiation, since a group's culture becomes one's personal property.

Related to the way culture influences a preference for sameness by becoming the personal property of a group is the way culture forms an individual's view of those outside of their group. However, cultures are not static. Neither are traditions and social practices. Because of such constant change, identity formation in community is not static. Arthur Aron and Natalie Nardone, in *Self and Close Relationships,* say, "What we are and what we see ourselves as being seems to be constantly under construction and reconstruction, with the architects and remodeling contractors largely being those with whom we have close interactions."[141] According to Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith an assumption of stability is part of feeling like one knows oneself. However, due to the dynamic construction of the self in the moment, the assumption of stability is contradicted. Identities are not the fixed markers people assume them to be.[142] Identity

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[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid., 46.

[140] Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 36.

[141] Arthur Aron and Natalie Nardone, "Self and Close Relationships," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, ed. Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 521.

[142] Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith, "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity," 69-70.

and culture are connected even in this. Berger contends that culture must be continuously produced and reproduced. This makes cultural structures "inherently precarious and predestined to change. The cultural imperative of stability and the inherent character of culture as *un*stable together posit the fundamental problem of man's world-building activity."[143] The malleability of the self may be due to the constant changing of culture.

In spite of this constant construction and reconstruction, Kuecker recognizes the distinction between the fluidity of ethnic identity and the feeling that it is fixed. He says, "The socially constructed nature of ethnic identity is only apparent at an etic level of observation. To those embedded within social systems, and thus having an emic perspective, ethnic identity *feels* primordial."[144] That is, ethnicity feels inherent to one's identity. It feels as if it is absolute. Sociologists Brad Christenson, Korie Edwards, and Michael Emerson found this to be the case in their qualitative research of racial integration in religious organizations. They describe religiously empowered ethnocentrism that provides an emic perspective when it comes to understanding cultural differences. In religious organizations, because "members interpret most of life through a religiously informed grid, differences in culture are often talked about in absolute terms."[145] Differences in preference get framed in absolute terms. Volf says that both parishioners and clergy are often "trapped within the claims of their own ethnic or

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[143] Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 6.

[144] Kuecker, *Ethnicity and Social Identity*, Location 1725.

[145] Brad Christerson, Korie L. Edwards, and Michael O. Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 33-34.

cultural community."[146] These authors have implied that the trap of ethnic claims, or preferences, is due to one's ethnic identity feeling absolute.

In addition to feeling as though one's identity is fixed, in spite of its fluidity, Lints asserts that it is naïve to suppose that there is nothing enduring about human identity and that all of what it means to be human is fluid.[147] Thus, it may be said that culture influences identity formation by providing a seemingly fixed understanding of the self, even though in reality, identity is fluid.

This forming and reforming influence that culture has on identity makes it necessary for communities to pay close attention to its practices. Christine Pohl asserts that practices are at the heart of human communities. She says, "Good communities and life-giving congregations emerge at the intersection of divine grace and steady human effort."[148] The next section delves into the way connection and community are created, along with the practices that help create life-giving communities.

### Connection through Vulnerability and Belonging

The groups or communities to which one belongs shape and form one's identity. How does connection happen such that one feels at home in a community? For Peter Block, in order to be in community one must experience belonging. He describes this experience as the opposite of "thinking that wherever I am, I would be better off somewhere else."[149] This kind of connection is why human beings exist, according to

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[146] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 37.

[147] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, 19.

[148] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Locations 43-44.

[149] Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, xii.

Brown. Connecting with others, or belonging, gives purpose and meaning to people's lives.[150] This is not to say that all people need is connection. Psychiatrist Dr. Curt Thompson asserts that people need both deep connection and autonomy. Although people long to live relationally, there is a "rhythmic hunger and thirst for intimacy on one hand and solitude on the other."[151] Yet, one cannot find belonging through solitude. Further, according to Brown, if one does not find the connection through belonging that people are hardwired for, there is suffering as a result.[152]

These assertions are not only theoretical. They have been borne out in research. Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson interviewed several members and former members of a predominately Filipino church. This church became ethnically diverse because the founding pastor had an ethnically diverse network of friends. They found that in spite of the efforts of the church "to be warm and embracing, the biggest obstacle in its five-year history seems to have been that many of its members feel socially isolated at the church."[153] This resulted in several members leaving the congregation. The vast majority of the non-Filipino members cited a lack of connection as their reason for leaving. Although the lack of connection that the non-Filipino members expressed was not visible

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[150] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 8.

[151] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 237.

[152] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 8.

[153] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*, 16.

on the surface, the majority of them seemed to experience a lack of belonging.[154] All of

the organizations they examined were striving to be culturally and/or socio-economically

diverse. In each case they found that the ability of members to find belonging through

friendship networks was a central problem. The importance of people experiencing

belonging, and the struggle for it to substantively take place in interracial religious

organizations led them to conclude that interracial religious organizations are inherently

unstable.[155]

      In order for an individual to intimately connect in community, quenching the

thirst for intimacy, a willingness to be seen is necessary.[156] The willingness to be seen is

what Brown calls vulnerability. The opposite of being seen is hiding, or covering oneself.

Although, claims Thompson, to be human is to be vulnerable, people wear clothes and

live in houses to protect them from the fact that they are vulnerable at all times.[157] When,

in her research, Brown asked participants how vulnerability felt, the answer that appeared

over and over again was, "Naked."[158]

      People may not want to embrace vulnerability as a means of connection, but

professor, author, and pastor, Chuck DeGroat declares that even the God of the Bible has

embraced vulnerability. God vulnerably enters into the pain and sin of humanity. He says,

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[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., 151-52.

[156] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 2.

[157] Curt Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 120.

[158] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 39.

"From Genesis 3, God acts in grace, knitting clothing for his ashamed children. Time and again he breaks through the barrier, vulnerably pledging faithfulness against all odds, amidst a people who continually break trust."[159] Other pastors and theologians express a similar understanding of the biblical message about God. Commenting on the narrative of Jesus' birth, Wheaton College President, Philip Ryken compares the type of welcome that Jesus deserved to the one he received. He says, "Jesus deserved to have every person from every nation come and worship him…He is God the Son, and anything less than absolute acknowledgement of his royal person is an insult to his divine dignity…In short, everything we know about the birth of Jesus points to obscurity, indignity, pain, and rejection."[160] R. Kent Hughes, Senior Pastor Emeritus of College Church in Wheaton, IL remarks, "The Son of God was born into the world not as a prince but as a pauper. We must never forget that this is where Christianity began, and where it always begins—with a sense of need, a graced sense ones insufficiency."[161] People told Brown that vulnerability feels like being naked. Yet, as these authors point out, God has paved the way for human beings to embrace vulnerability by embracing it himself.

Even though vulnerability may be at the heart and center of meaningful human experiences,[162] vulnerability as a means of connection is not necessarily simple to

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[159] Chuck DeGroat, "What the Church Needs Is Men without Fear," *The New Exodus*, September 6, 2012, 2012, accessed December 18, 2015, 2015, http://chuckdegroat.net/2012/09/06/what-the-church-needs-is-men-without-fear/.

[160] Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, R*eformed Expository Commentary Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 1:69, 71.

[161] R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 84.

[162] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 12.

embrace or pursue. Both Brown and Thompson tie the meaning of vulnerability to uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.[163] Vulnerability can be terrifying for people because it means putting oneself at the mercy of those whose intentions cannot be guaranteed.[164] Thompson explains that this fear has the neurological impact of "the prefrontal cortex telling us we are not enough and the specter of our being left as a result."[165] Thus, people may resist being vulnerable for fear of abandonment.

Whether or not individuals will embrace their vulnerability as a means of connection is dependent on several factors. Edward Teyber and Faith Holmes McLure, in writing to help therapists recognize the familial and developmental antecedents of their clients' problems, describe four categories of adult attachment styles. Their application of attachment as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings corresponds with the understanding of connection in the present work. The four categories are created by two measured dimensions, anxiety and avoidance. Anxiety expresses how much worry or concern a person has about the availability and willingness of their significant others to meet their attachment needs. Avoidance refers to discomfort with intimacy and avoidance of vulnerability or distress, as well as emotional engagement. The categories assess how well or poorly an individual will likely experience connection.

Secure people, like the self-compassionate individuals described by Kristin Neff, have an internalized sense of themselves as being worthy of care and efficacious. They value relationships and are low on avoidance and low on anxiety. Dismissive individuals

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[163] Ibid., 34.

[164] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves*, 119.

[165] Ibid.

exhibit high avoidance, but low anxiety. They do not trust that emotional or social

support will be available when they need it. Therefore, for them, showing vulnerability

and need is unacceptable. Preoccupied people are consumed with the fear of losing

relationships. The threat of abandonment disrupts these individuals who have low

avoidance and high anxiety. The fourth attachment style is fearful individuals. They have

both high avoidance and high anxiety. These individuals avoid their own emotional needs

and will communicate their profound shame only in therapy.[166]

While these attachment styles provide insight into how well or poorly individuals

may experience connection in relationships, George Fox University Professor of

Psychology Mark McMinn provides a subtle distinction. He implies that the goal is not

just to enable close relationships. He emphasizes healing relationships. Relationships,

outside of peoples' relationship with God, "sometimes disappoint and devastate and

evoke our self-sufficiency and sinfulness in ways that are far from healthy. Many close

relationships do more damage than good."[167] He explains that it is necessary to consider

the interaction between self, brokenness, and healing relationships for a comprehensive

perspective on psychological and spiritual health. Similar to Teyber and McLure's secure

people, there are individuals who have an accurate understanding and acceptance of

themselves. He is not, however, claiming that people should love themselves more. He

suggests that people should understand themselves accurately enough to enable them to

cease worrying about whether they are bad or good. For him, in order for people to be

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[166] Edward Teyber and Faith H. McClure, *Interpersonal Process in Therapy: An Integrative Model*, 6th ed. (Australia: Brooks/Cole Cengage Learning, 2011), 233-39.

[167] Mark R. McMinn and American Association of Christian Counselors., *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*, Rev. and updated ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2011), 48.

healthy, they need to move beyond a preoccupation with self.[168] He implies the need for

vulnerability when he posits that peoples' spiritual and psychological health requires a

confident, but not inflated, sense of self along with human need and limitations. In

addition, people require confiding interpersonal relationships with God and others.[169]

To have confiding interpersonal relationships suggests that there is some level of

security within the relationship. Even though attachment styles vary among individuals,

according to Thompson, a basic building block for all secure relationships is trust. Thus,

all relationships must begin there.[170] Trust, like vulnerability, involves risk. The two are

connected in that being vulnerable, as Brown says, is an integral aspect of the trust-

building process.[171] Putnam calls social trust a valuable community asset. Trust benefits

the individuals within a community by fostering cooperation and honest

communication.[172] At the same time, he is not suggesting that people ought to be gullible.

For trust to be fostered, trustworthiness must also be present.[173] As Thompson says, the

risk involved with trust is the possibility of rupture.[174] He notes that rupture refers to any

instance of relational disharmony between any two minds or groups. Betrayal, the

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[168] Ibid., 50-52.

[169] Ibid., 64.

[170] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 248.

[171] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 45.

[172] Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 134-35.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 218.

breaking of trust, brings distress, which leads to rupture. The disconnection caused by rupture may be hardly noticed or severely disruptive.[175] In either case, rupture works against security within relationships.

Another significant hindrance to the trust-building process, and hence connection through vulnerability and belonging, is shame. For Thompson, vulnerability and shame seem to be two sides of the human coin. On one hand, as stated above, he claims that to be human is to be vulnerable. On the other hand, he says that to be human is to be infected with the phenomenon called shame. Brown defines shame as the fear of being worthy of real connection.[176] For Thompson, it is the lowest common denominator in human relationships.[177] If shame is operational in all human relationships, he does not believe it should be ignored. This is because shame "merely gets our attention—if we are alert."[178] Additionally, Catholic priest Father Richard John Neuhaus, suggests that the more one hides from his shame, the more one proclaims his shame.[179] And once shame is identified, says counselor Ed Welch, it can be found everywhere in one's life.[180] Thompson, on one hand, wonders how the biblical story would have unfolded differently in the Garden had Eve and Adam, instead of hiding, been more attentive to their fear,

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[175] Ibid., 186.

[176] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 8.

[177] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves*, 21.

[178] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 230.

[179] Richard John Neuhaus, *Death on a Friday Afternoon: Meditations on the Last Words of Jesus from the Cross,* 1st ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2000), Location 269, Kindle.

[180] Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012), 3, Kindle.

more willing to turn toward their own shame.[181] Yet, on the other hand he declares that shame is "not just a consequence of something our first parents did in the Garden of Eden."[182] Shame is a primary means to prevent people from using the gifts they have been given.[183] Those gifts, he says, allow people to flourish as a light-bearing community. Thus, shame works to destroy community by preventing people from flourishing.

Brown agrees when she says, "Shame resilience is key to embracing our vulnerability."[184] If vulnerability enables flourishing as a light-giving community, shame enables people to remain in fear and darkness. So, if people want to be fully engaged, to be connected, they have to be vulnerable. In order to be vulnerable, they need to develop resistance to shame.[185] Just as embracing vulnerability is not easy to pursue, neither is resisting shame.

Sometimes a culture itself is shame-based. This may not be easily recognizable for individual members because the most significant aspects of culture are below the surface and unseen.[186] In this context, according to Rah shame "deals with one's core identity and sense of duty to fulfill moral obligations arising from the social context."[187]

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[181] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 229.

[182] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves*, 13.

[183] Ibid.

[184] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 61.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, 83.

[187] Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Location 1174.

In this sense, Welch believes that shame is far worse than embarrassment because embarrassment does not afflict the core of the person's soul, but shame becomes a person's identity.[188] With shame as an emotional core of a person's identity in a shame-based culture, it functions as a reaction to other people's criticism.

Rah and Welch provide language that helps differentiate a shame-based culture from a guilt-based culture. Rah explains that shame arises out of a group-oriented consciousness, while guilt emerges from a sense of individualism.[189] Welch uses a courtroom metaphor to provide a similar comparison of corporate or individual emphasis with shame and guilt. He says, "Guilt lives in the courtroom where you stand alone before the judge…Shame lives in community, though the community can feel like a courtroom."[190] For Rah, the comparison between shame-based and guilt-based cultures is for the purpose of understanding the way different cultures relate to God. Guilt says, "You made a mistake." Shame says, "You are a mistake."[191] For this reason spirituality in a guilt-based culture gravitates toward individualistic spirituality, while spirituality in a shame-based culture gravitates toward a group orientation.[192]

Author and screenplay writer, Jon Ronson, also writes about shame, but not to make a case regarding spirituality at all. While one might expect the Western world to be a predominately guilt-based culture, he is assessing contemporary Western culture and

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[188] Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection,* 12.

[189] Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Location 1187.

[190] Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection,* 11.

[191] Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Location 1196.

[192] Ibid.

coming to a different conclusion. Reflecting on instances of social media shaming he claims, "We are at the start of a great renaissance of public shaming. After a lull of almost 180 years (public punishments were phased out in 1837 in the United Kingdom and in 1839 in the United States), it was back in a big way."[193] This kind of shaming is "coercive, borderless, and increasing in speed and influence."[194] His is implying that the proliferation of social media is recreating a public culture of shame in the Western world. Not in the sense that an individual has a sense of duty to fulfill moral obligations. Rather, in the sense that others offer public criticism in order to impose shame as punishment upon an individual for breaking moral codes.

Brown sees contemporary culture delivering the message that an ordinary life is meaningless. This message is delivered by a steady diet of reality television, celebrity culture, and social media. Her claim is that social media is encouraging a culture of narcissism. She asks, "Have we turned into a culture of self-absorbed, grandiose people who are only interested in power, success, beauty, and being special?...If you're like me, your probably wincing a bit and thinking, *Yes. This is exactly the problem*."[195] Among the messages it sends is, "I am only as good as the number of 'likes' I get on Facebook or Instagram."[196] She says, however, that underpinning this narcissism is shame. She calls it a shame-based fear of being ordinary.[197] While people live in an expanded public space,

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[193] Jon Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2015), 11.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 20.

[196] Ibid., 23.

[197] Ibid., 22.

Ronson says, "We all have ticking away within us something we fear will badly harm our reputation if it got out…Maybe nobody would even consider it a big deal if it was exposed. But we can't take that risk. So we keep it buried…I think that even in these days of significant oversharing we keep this particular terror concealed."[198] Thus, even in what might be considered a guilt-based culture, shame is still difficult to resist.

The terror Ronson brings up can be explained by what Brown calls scarcity. Contemporary American culture, after 9/11 in particular, is shame-prone, and the feeling of scarcity thrives in shame-prone cultures that are deeply steeped in comparison and fractured by disengagement.[199] A culture steeped in comparison and fractured by disengagement creates opportunity for shame to flourish because, as Thompson explains, there is rarely anything a person does that is not either influencing or being influenced by other minds. This constant interaction between minds is a current constantly flowing between people in which shame has no trouble swimming in.[200]

Hence the conundrum: the individual must embrace vulnerability to experience belonging, but shame works to prevent vulnerability from flourishing. This dilemma calls for an examination of the community practices that encourage vulnerability and enable the resistance of shame. In other words, the practices that make for healthy community.

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[198] Ronson, *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, 31.

[199] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 27.

[200] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves*, 44.

*Community Practices*

This section examines the practices that make for healthy community. Putnam posits the benefit for healthy practices in community when he says, "A well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society. And even a poorly connected individual may derive some spillover benefits from living in a well-connected community."[201] The literature has revealed several practices that help to create a well-connected community. What follows is not an exhaustive list, but it is a detailed one.

For Christine Pohl, the practices that make for good community are gratitude, promise-making and keeping, living truthfully, and hospitality.[202] These practices, among other things, make living in community good, and sometimes beautiful. They help to create a safe place for truth and reflection.[203] Other practices are: creating structural expressions of inclusion, confession and forgiveness, and the proper exercise of power.

**Gratitude**

Pohl says that gratitude operates at "several different levels: thanksgiving and praise to God, gratitude as a posture for life, and gratitude as a response to others for who they are or for what they have given to us."[204] She notes that as important as it is to the well-being of individuals, its importance as a practice for community life has mostly been

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[201] Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 20.

[202] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 80.

[203] Ibid., Location 133.

[204] Ibid., Location 198.

overlooked. It is "vital to sustaining communities that are holy and good."[205] German

pastor, theologian, and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer also links the necessity of gratitude to

the sustaining of fellowship. He writes particularly about Christian community in the

context of Nazi Germany as he strove to maintain faithful fellowship under pressure for

the church to compromise with the government. He exhorts,

> If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we
> have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no
> discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on
> the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry
> and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting
> our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches that are there for
> us all in Jesus Christ.[206]

The essence of his claim is that gratitude builds community while ingratitude

destroys community. Thus, one's thankfulness or gratitude for the community is

connected to one's commitment to the community, case even if the community is not

extraordinary. Reformed Theological Seminary professor John Frame likewise links

gratitude with allegiance. He says that they are inseparable. He is, like Bonhoeffer,

speaking particularly about thankfulness to God. However, to say that, "thankfulness, like

loyalty, is not only a feeling, but a disposition toward actions that express that

thankfulness,"[207] conveys the understanding that there are positive, healthy actions that

people will take as an outworking of their gratitude.

In addition to Bonhoeffer's emphasis on complaint as a form of ingratitude, Pohl

adds other forms; envy, presumption, and dissatisfaction. These forms of ingratitude are

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[205] Ibid., Location 202.

[206] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1954), 29.

[207] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 335.

both dangerous and deadly to community in that they kill community by chipping away at it until participants long to be just about anywhere else.[208] Recall that Block defined belonging negatively claiming that it was the "opposite of thinking that wherever I am, I would be better off somewhere else."[209] Thus, where ingratitude is widespread, it should be expected that the experience of belonging will be minimal.

Brown also links gratitude with healthy relationships. For her, practicing gratitude is the opposite of scarcity. If scarcity is the "never enough" problem[210]—never having or being enough—gratitude is "how we acknowledge that there's enough and that we're enough."[211] Like Bonhoeffer, Frame, and Pohl, Brown found that practicing gratitude included being grateful for what people have. She asked people who had survived tragedy how one could cultivate and show more compassion for people who are suffering. She found that the answer was always the same, "When you honor what you have, you're honoring what I've lost."[212] Even those who had tragic loss understood the necessity of gratitude, celebrating what one has and sharing their gratitude with others.

**Promise-Making and Keeping**

Pohl claims that promises provide the internal framework for every relationship and every community. When it comes to promises she says that people do not "generally

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[208] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 204-08.

[209] Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, xii.

[210] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 24.

[211] Ibid., 124.

[212] Ibid., 205.

notice or call attention to them when they are providing structure to our relationships, though we certainly notice when they collapse."[213] Similarly to Thompson calling trust the basic building block for all secure relationships, Pohl connects trust to promise-keeping when she says that tested and proven commitments and promises are at the root of the ability for people to trust each other.[214]

Block also sees promise-making as a key component to healthy community. He pairs commitment and accountability as inseparable and warns that when barter is present in community, commitment is not. Promising, conversely, is not giving in order to get. Rather, commitment is the willingness to make a promise with no expectation of return. What community requires is a promise devoid of barter and not conditional on another's actions.[215] Likewise, with respect to commitment, Pohl calls promise-making and promise-keeping central dimensions of fidelity. While it is a difficult aspiration to attain, fidelity aspires to be unconditional.[216]

Professor of Political Science at Redeemer University College, David T. Koyzis, writes about promise as an instrument of power in the context of exercising authority. He is careful to say that the focus on instruments of power "does not create *community* as such."[217] Those in authority will often exercise power by extending promises. Yet, even if those promises are kept, this type of promise-making is more akin to Block's notion of

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[213] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 747.

[214] Ibid., Location 751.

[215] Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 71.

[216] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 787.

[217] David Theodore Koyzis, *We Answer to Another: Authority, Office, and the Image of God* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 41.

barter. It does not create or sustain community. A promise made as an instrument of

power leads to people obeying authority, not because it is right to do so, but in order to

obtain advantages for themselves in their private lives.[218] So promise as an instrument of

power within community can work against health if it does not aspire to be unconditional.

In order for promise-making and promise-keeping to be unconditional Pohl says,

"Our promises need to be fitted into the larger commitments of our covenant God."[219]

Her statement is particularly focused on Christian communities who have been formed as

a people of promise by their covenant-making, promise-keeping God.[220]

Recalling that Crouch, when he wanted to explain the communal aspect of culture

referenced the family as culture at its smallest—and most powerful,[221] the family is also a

reference point in the practice of promise-making. Promise-making is what allows for the

formation of families, and, by extension for healthy community.[222] This kind of promise-

making is not the more contractual arrangement implied in Koyzis' example of promise

as an exercise of authority. Rather, it embraces vulnerability through the essence of the

familial relationship, love. Clinical psychologist Dr. Sue Johnson connects love to the

need for promise-making commitment when she says, "Love is our bulwark, designed to

provide emotional protection so we can cope with the ups and downs of existence…We

need emotional attachments with a few irreplaceable others to be physically and mentally

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[218] Ibid.

[219] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 805.

[220] Ibid., Location 807.

[221] Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling,* 45.

[222] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us*, Location 841.

healthy—to survive."[223] Thus, the promise-making that builds healthy community is not in essence about making and keeping contracts. It is centered around love.

## Living Truthfully

The fear of vulnerability and the presence of shame work against living truthfully. Brown directly links vulnerability and truth saying, "Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage."[224] The opposite of living truthfully is deception and lying. From the beginning, says Pohl, deception and lying endanger communities and undermine people's best efforts. Whether large or small, they break communities apart, distort people's relationship with God, and separate people from one another.[225] Thompson implicates shame as working against living truthfully by encouraging people to hide.[226] Similarly to Brown's description of scarcity, Pohl says that people want to appear to be good. Yet, they compare themselves to others and often come up short in the comparison. While she does not use the word shame in her description, she demonstrates that such iniquities work against truthfulness. In the close connections of community life, the pressure can be significant to keep up appearances, enhance one's spiritual image, and cover up one's failures or perversions.[227]

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[223] Susan M. Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, 1st ed. (New York: Little, 2008), 6.

[224] Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead,* 37.

[225] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 1354.

[226] Thompson, *The Soul of Shame: Retelling the Stories We Believe About Ourselves*, 29.

[227] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 1357.

For Pohl and Guthrie, living truthfully is a particularly Christian and Trinitarian proposition. According to Pohl, "We live truthfully as we fully embrace the purposes of God, experience the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth guiding us into truth, and as we know Jesus, who is full of grace and truth."[228] Guthrie makes a similar claim, emphasizing that the Spirit's work is to call forth response from people, to give them speech, and to make them participants in truth.[229] He adds the Father and the Son when he explains that the truth of the world has its origin in the love of God. And, the truth of the world, including humanity, is Jesus Christ.[230]

When it comes to Christians, Dr. Steven Garber, principal of The Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation, and Culture, explains that commitment to community is not optional. He declares that a Christian's decision to become part of the lives of others is a moral imperative. That decision comes with both pleasure and pain. The connection to living truthfully as a practice within healthy community is that the moral imperative "is situated within a worldview founded on coherence and truth and learned in relationship to those whose own commitments are embedded in that worldview."[231] A commitment to truth-telling becomes the context for the growth of convictions and character as beliefs about life and the world are lived out, thereby making those beliefs plausible.[232] Pohl warns, "A community that is truthful will not necessarily be tidy. There will be loose

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[228] Ibid., Location 1374.

[229] Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human,* 19.

[230] Ibid., 176.

[231] Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior*, Expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2007), 173.

[232] Ibid., 159-60.

threads and rough edges because members are unwilling to hide their problems or to cover up their wounds lightly, saying 'peace, peace, when there is no peace.'"[233] Like promise-making, then, living truthfully is a component of one's commitment to community.

**Hospitality**

Volf questions whether the exclusionary polarities[234] that seem to permeate the social world are irresistible. "In all wars," he says, "whether carried out on battlefields, city streets, living rooms, or faculty lounges, we come across the same basic exclusionary polarity: 'us against them,' 'their gain—our loss,' 'either us or them.'"[235] Seeking a way of life designated by embrace in the midst of conflict, he answers in the affirmative. People with clashing perspectives and differing cultures can avoid sliding into the cycle of escalating violence and instead maintain bonds, even make their life together flourish.[236] Embrace is the language of hospitality or welcome. Volf even connects living truthfully to hospitality when he says, "There can be no truth between people without the will to embrace the other…Inversely, the will to embrace cannot be sustained and will not result in actual embrace if truth does not reign."[237] A will to embrace, however, does not prevent challenges to hospitality in the form of conflict.

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[233] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 1386.

[234] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 99.

[235] Ibid.

[236] Ibid., 99-100.

[237] Ibid., 258.

Allport's contact theory hypothesizes that conflict in the form of prejudice between groups may be reduced by equal status contact between groups pursuing common goals. In spite of this verified hypothesis,[238] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson found in their research that in cross-cultural contact even if people feel personally warm toward one another, social factors larger than individual relationships appear to cancel out these cross-racial ties.[239] Because ethnic identity feels primordial to those embedded within a given culture,[240] the intersection of multiple cultures proves challenging.

Edwards, in her research, came across Volf's "us against them" dilemma in an interracial church. The church was hosting a seminar on racial diversity and Christianity. An African American woman attending the seminar admitted that she struggled with feelings of "us versus them" when it came to Black/White relations. She further shared, "Whites don't understand our struggles. How can I have spiritual unity with someone who doesn't know what I have gone through?"[241] This, again, presents a challenge to hospitality and embrace.

Rah expresses the challenge to hospitality particularly in a cross-cultural context. "A newcomer to a church might ask, 'Do I belong here? Is there a place for me?' If the spectrum of experience is limited to one particular frame of cultural reference, the newcomer does not feel welcomed because his or her frame of reference is outside the

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[238] Thomas F. Pettigrew, "Intergroup Contact Theory," *Annual Review of Psychology* 49 (1998): 65, accessed November 18, 2015, http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.49.1.65.

[239] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*, 156.

[240] Kuecker, *Ethnicity and Social Identity*, Location 1725.

[241] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches,* Location 621.

cultural norms and boundaries of that church."[242] He asks, "What type of hospitality does your church extend toward those who are coming from different cultural contexts so they feel welcomed and part of the proceedings?"[243] These questions are important because, as Pohl points out, communities in which hospitality is a vibrant practice tap into deep human longings to belong and be valued. Hospitable communities recognize that they are incomplete without other people, and they believe that others have a treasure to share with their community.[244]

Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson found this to be the case in their research of interracial religious organizations. The racial diversity of the organizations they studied often complicated the ability of members to find belonging within them. They found that turnover rates within religious organizations are higher for numerical minority groups than for majority groups.[245] They differentiated core members from edge members in each organization. Edge members are those people who are atypical of the organization. Core members are those people who belong to the largest group, the group having the most influence and power and sharing a visceral connection with the identity and mission of the organization.[246] While edge people will experience a continual pull to leave the organization, hospitality and welcome practiced in the form of structural changes, which

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[242] Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Location 1136.

[243] Ibid., Location 2278.

[244] Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us,* Location 1913.

[245] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*, 151-152.

[246] Ibid., 154.

will be discussed below, drew edge people in toward the core.[247] In Volf's view, making space for others and inviting them in—even enemies—is an imperative for those who have been embraced by God.[248]

**Structural Inclusion**

An aspect of hospitality that makes for healthy community, particularly in diverse ethnic and cultural settings, is intentional structural inclusion. Although this structural inclusion has a diversity of aspects, the most common aspect included by the authors surveyed was worship music. Perhaps it is because, as Guthrie intimates, the experience of community is profoundly connected to the act of music-making. Music-making becomes structurally inclusive because it manifests the community.[249]

Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson found that structural inclusion was one of the ways to move people away from the edge and toward the core of an interracial religious organization. In one case efforts were instituted to draw edge people in toward the core, but not in terms of assimilation. Instead the effort focused on influence, social ties, and structural changes.[250] Noting that people in the out-group, the edge members, pay the greatest cost to belong in an interracial organization, their representation within the organization can be increased through changes like incorporating music from the out-

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[247] Ibid.

[248] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 129.

[249] Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human,* 91.

[250] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*, 154.

group's culture, increasing diversity in the staff, accommodating different attitudes and understandings of time, and instituting children's programs.[251]

Bethel University Professor of Reconciliation, Curtis Paul DeYoung, along with Emerson, Duquesne University Professor of Philosophy, George Yancy, and Karen Chai Kim created three categories to describe the degree of racial integration in multiracial congregations: the assimilated multiracial congregation; the pluralist multiracial congregation; and the integrated multiracial congregation. They describe the integrated multiracial congregation as the theological ideal, requiring a transformation of congregational culture. The "us" and "them" polarity that Volf described is changed into "us" as a congregation.[252] For the organization to become integrated, they also advise structural inclusion. Among their suggested avenues for structural inclusion are worship, especially music, expressiveness, décor, homily style, racially inclusive leadership, intentionality, e.g., creating structures for people to get to know one another across racial groups, and adaptability, especially developing the flexibility to adapt to new groups and cultures.[253]

Other authors encourage the practice of structural inclusion as well. While Proskuneo Ministries founder Josh Davis, and Bridgeway Community Church worship ministry director Nikki Lerner, encourage patience when instituting the type of worship changes needed to develop a truly integrated interracial congregation, they nevertheless

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[251] Ibid., 158.

[252] Curtiss Paul DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 159-63, Kindle.

[253] Ibid., 170-73.

impress upon their readers the need to embrace structural inclusion.[254] Fuller Theological

Seminary professor Mark Lau Branson, with Juan F. Martínez, Fuller Theological

Seminary associate professor of Hispanic studies, call for the need of a liturgy and

worship spaces that reflect the diversity of the congregation. This form of structural

inclusion is for the purpose of moving from hospitality to shalom.[255]

**Confession and Forgiveness**

Thompson describes disconnection, both intrapersonal and interpersonal with the

word "rupture." He says the maneuver of repairing the rupture of disconnection is

confession and repentance. Repentance is the act of turning around, going in the opposite

direction as one rejects mindlessness. Simultaneously, one embraces a deeper, richer, and

more integrated life, intra- and interpersonally.[256] Shame may play a destructive role in

community here as well because the fear of feeling fear and shame causes people to avoid

the discipline of confession.[257] As Volf says, the liberation that comes through confession

is among the most painful of all liberations. However, making the first difficult step of

repentance takes one a good distance on the road to reconciliation.[258]

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[254] Josh Davis and Nikki Lerner, *Worship Together in Your Church as in Heaven* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 101-109.

[255] Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martínez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 241.

[256] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 226.

[257] Ibid.

[258] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 120.

Priest, author and professor Henri Nouwen also implies there is a liberation that takes place in confession. He calls confession a discipline by which true incarnation may be lived. Confession brings the dark powers out of their carnal isolation into the light, and makes them visible to the community.[259] Thus, confession brings to light the things that cause rupture in community and enables them to be handled. Confession makes possible the forgiveness that repairs ruptures. Through forgiveness the dark powers are disarmed and dispelled, and a new integration between body and spirit is made possible.[260] Thompson says, "We are to be people who are as fully known by each other as possible. This is accomplished in the freedom and power of confession and forgiveness. This practice efficaciously repairs ruptures."[261] Those practices help to create communities that are flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable.[262]

Just as confession is a painful liberation, Volf communicates that forgiveness is not any easier. Because injurious deeds cannot be undone, the urge for vengeance seems irrepressible. Thus, the only way out of the predicament of irreversibility is through forgiveness.[263] Speaking to the need for couples to forgive injuries, Johnson does not speak to the issue of vengeance. However, she reminds her readers that unresolved traumas do not heal. They engender an almost indelible helplessness and fear, setting off

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[259] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 68.

[260] Ibid.

[261] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 249.

[262] Ibid., 233.

[263] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, 120-121.

people's survival instincts.[264] The first goal of the healing process is forgiveness.[265] Thus, confession and forgiveness become a key practice for healthy community.

**Power**

The last practice examined in the literature to create and sustain a well-connected community is the proper exercise of power. Andy Crouch asks whether the deepest truth about the world is a struggle for mastery and domination, or collaboration, cooperation, and ultimately love. He makes the point that what seems more realistic is that the world is a pitched battle for dominance.[266] Koyzis claims that people confuse power and authority because of a general tendency to assume that power manifests itself primarily as coercive force.[267] In this sense power at its worst is "the unmaker of humanity."[268] It destroys community. But power at its best, or in its proper use is for flourishing.[269]

Nouwen also expresses the relationship between power and dominance in contrast to love. Love, he claims, is harder than power, asking, then answering, "What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. It seems to be easier to be God than to love God, easier to control people than to love people, easier to own life than to love life."[270] Yet,

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[264] Johnson, *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*, 169.

[265] Ibid., 171.

[266] Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power,* Location 664.

[267] Koyzis, *We Answer to Another: Authority, Office, and the Image of God*, 20-21.

[268] Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power,* Location 322.

[269] Ibid., Location 450.

[270] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*, 77.

Crouch claims that love and power do not have to be at odds with each other. He says that love transfigures power, and absolute love transfigures absolute power. This power transfigured by love is the power that both made and saves the world.[271]

The proper use of power in a well-connected community assumes that people are authorized to exercise power transfigured by love. In fact, Austin claims that authority is built into what it means to be human, and human beings will never escape needing authority if they are to flourishing.[272] Koyzis agrees that authority is something intrinsic to human life because it is resident in an office given to humanity at the creation as creatures made in the image of God. This authority of office is manifested in a variety of settings, both individual and communal, within a differentiated society.[273] To succeed at being human, for Austin, is to be able to live together with others. And to live together with others in any sort of society requires that authority be there.[274] He says that authority is sharing, an aspect of communion.[275]

While Austin says authority is held by those who lead others to a fuller exercise of their freedom to accomplish tasks,[276] and Crouch declares that power creates and shapes an environment where creatures can flourish,[277] the realization of this freedom and flourishing is difficult. Edwards expresses this challenge in interracial churches

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[271] Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power,* Location 620.

[272] Austin, *Up with Authority: Why We Need Authority to Flourish as Human Beings*, 2.

[273] Koyzis, *We Answer to Another: Authority, Office, and the Image of God*, 21.

[274] Austin, *Up with Authority: Why We Need Authority to Flourish as Human Beings*, 93.

[275] Ibid., 120.

[276] Ibid., 21.

[277] Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power,* 35.

discovering that, "In interracial churches, those who wield power affirm white privilege and culture…Consequently, African Americans will bear the greater burden of maintaining a racially mixed worship experience."[278] She is not claiming that this is the result of malicious intent. Rather, it is an implication of the way cultural values operate beneath the surface, as discussed previously.

In spite of the challenges to exercising authority in community, Koyzis is clear that "The image of God, in which we are all created and which is renewed in us in Christ, entails a grant of authority."[279] Thus, attention is now turned to the biblical-theological framework of imaging God. The theological underpinning for human dignity will be reviewed. Then, the theological basis for unity in community will be examined.

## Imaging God—Dignity and Community

### *The Image and Dignity*

The first thing the Bible declares about human beings is that they are made in the image of God. God speaks in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Richard Pratt is clear that this verse establishes humanity's unique place in God's kingdom. God has given the human race the unique title of image-bearer.[280] However, he warns that though the title is astounding, it also discloses one's humanity. People are images of God, but that's all they are―images.[281] Koyzis agrees, explaining that to be images of God does not mean that human beings are themselves gods. Neither

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[278] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches,* Location 485.

[279] Koyzis, *We Answer to Another: Authority, Office, and the Image of God*, 225.

[280] Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be*, 7.

[281] Ibid.

do they have "bits" of God within them, like a batch of cookie dough with chocolate chips scattered throughout.[282]

However, individual human beings possess inherent dignity and worth, since each of them has been created in the image of God. As mentioned in Chapter One, Harrison uses the phrase "royal dignity" to describe the facet of the divine image in every human person.[283] Pratt approaches this sense when he says God determined to make people creatures of incomparable value and dignity.[284] Herman Bavinck reinforces this high position of human beings when he highlights, "in accordance with Scripture and the Reformed confession, the idea that a human being does not *bear* or *have* the image of God but that he or she *is* the image of God."[285] For Bavinck man is truly and essentially human only because he is the image of God. For him, all other creatures display vestiges of God, only a human being is the image of God.[286] Pratt goes so far as to ask his readers to put down his book, go find another person and shake his or her hand, saying in sincerity, "Hello, your Majesty!"[287]

John Frame explains that human dignity is part of the grounds for God's prohibiting the creation of images or idols for the purpose of worship. Exodus 20:4-6 states,

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[282] Koyzis, *We Answer to Another: Authority, Office, and the Image of God*, 21.

[283] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Imag: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* 89.

[284] Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be*, 14.

[285] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* 554.

[286] Ibid.

[287] Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be*, 17.

> You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Included in the grounds for this second commandment, says Frame, is respect for God's true image. The fact that, in Genesis 1, the image of God is man himself suggests that the commandment intends, not only to guard the dignity of God, but also the dignity of God's true image, mankind. Therefore, Frame says, for man to bow down to an idol is to worship something less than himself. It is an affront to God's dignity and also an affront to man's.[288] Westminster Theological Seminary Professor of New Testament and biblical theology, Gregory K. Beale, makes a similar point in reference to the language of imagery and idolatry in the book of Isaiah. He notes that the prophet Isaiah makes an intentional contrast between the nation of Israel as the work of God's hands and idols they make as the work of men's hands. God has set up humans as the only legitimate images of God.[289] Worshipping idols is an affront to human dignity in that it prevents people from reflecting God's glory. Since people are made by divine hands, to function as legitimate living images, they are to reflect the glory of the image of the living God.[290]

Thus, the second commandment is of particular relevance to the issue of human dignity. Theological College of Kampen Professor emeritus, Dr. Jochem Douma also relates the second commandment to the image of God language in Genesis 1:26-28. He

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[288] Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 461.

[289] G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 276.

[290] Ibid.

explains that in the biblical context in an image of a deity, the deity is represented. The image does not simply reflect a good likeness, it represents the presence of the power of the deity.[291] Of decisive significance, then, for Douma is that God desires to dwell within man and wants his power to radiate into this world through man.[292] This dignity is ascribed to no other creature.

Connecting the notion of idols to desires, Lints speaks to the great danger for Israel that the second commandment articulated. This danger was that Israel would be led astray by their own desires, and they would be remade in the image of those desires. Their identity would mirror those images instead of God. So, "In essence the second commandment was intended to protect their identity as image-bearers of the divine Creator, secure in his covenant love for them and his promise to be with them always."[293] The warning and danger was not just for Old Testament Israel but applies even today. As Pratt says, all idols eventually will abuse. This abuse can take the form of, among other things, greed that devours, intellectual pursuits that lead to arrogance, lovers who disappoint, national leaders who fail. The difference with God is that he will never abuse those who serve him. In his mercy, he will lift his faithful images to glory.[294] People are to know, says Lints, that their security and significance are rooted in the God they image.[295]

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[291] Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1996), 50.

[292] Ibid., 51.

[293] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, 87.

[294] Pratt, *Designed for Dignit : What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be*, 107.

[295] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, 87.

So, in addition to dignity, authors have used words like glory, significance, value, power, majesty, and unique to describe humanity as imaging God. Noteworthy to this study was the implication of these grand descriptions of image-bearing in the area of race and ethnicity. For Harrison, the fact that everyone is made in the image of God, and because this image defines what it means to be human, people are fundamentally equal, regardless of the differences in wealth, education, and social status.[296] Woodley adds that God did not only create humanity male and female, but ethnicity is also part of how God made people. It is a gift to be celebrated, not a handicap to be hidden.[297] Thus, being the image of God militates against social ills like racism because it divides human community by elevating one race as the standard by which all other races should be judged, thereby placing the dominant race in the position of God.[298]

Humanity's most important common feature is their capacity to be in relationship with God, according to Harrison. When Christians look at the human experience from God's perspective, the differences between men and women, or owners and slaves, look small compared to issues all people face, such as divine judgment and salvation.[299] Yet, one lesson Rah has learned regarding the state of race relations in the evangelical church is that the church still has a very long way to go.[300]

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[296] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* 91.

[297] Randy Woodley, *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Diversity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books, 2001), 67.

[298] Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity,* 82.

[299] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* 99.

[300] Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity,* 65.

Taking note of the racialized way that church often views the Bible, Ouachita Baptist University Professor J. Daniel Hays explains that when it comes to Adam and Eve, "It is incorrect for the White Church to view them as White or for the Black Church to view them as Black. Their race is not identifiable; they are neither Negroid nor Caucasian, nor even Semitic…They represent all people, not some people."[301] He is emphasizing that the Bible does not begin with the creation of a special race of people. In a way similar to Frame describing breaking the second commandment as an affront to the dignity of God and of man, Hays adds racism to the affront. He compares race and racial attitudes to the socio-economic sinful disparities in Scripture. For example, Proverbs 14:31 and 17:5 connect the implications of God's creation of people with one's ethical behavior toward other people. These verses are pointing out that the superior attitude taken by one in a wealthy socio-economic setting toward another in a poor setting is an affront to the God who created them both. This same principle applies to race and racial attitudes.[302]

This type of comparison for the purpose of assessing race and racism from the biblical text is necessary because the category of race was created by an American society in an attempt to justify and regulate the social injustice of slavery.[303] Race, claims Edwards, is central to the structure of American life and the everyday lives of Americans. Indeed, whiteness is the cornerstone of the racial system in the United States.[304] Her

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[301] J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 47-48.

[302] Ibid., 50-51.

[303] Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Releasing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity,* 66.

[304] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches*, Location 83-91.

description of race validates Hays' comparison of racial inequalities to the socio-economic inequalities addressed in Scripture. She describes races as the basis of social systems that distribute rewards. People placed in the dominant stratum establish the racial classifications and have greater access to and possession of society's valuable resources and more power to reserve them for their group.[305]

While the existence of racism works against the recognition of the dignity each individual possesses as an image bearer, Harrison charges that it is the church's responsibility to find ways to affirm the full humanity—the royal dignity—of all people, especially those whom others are inclined to despise.[306] Thus, attention is now turned toward imaging God as reconciled community.

### *The Community as Image*

> The image of God is much too rich to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be…Only humanity in its entirety – as one complete organism, summed up under a single head, spread out over the whole earth, as a prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler controlling the earth and the whole of creation – only it is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God.[307]

Bavinck here captures the blessing of Genesis 1:28-30.[308] Human beings imaging God do so not simply individually but most strikingly as a collective. The commands of

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[305] Ibid., Location 127.

[306] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* 106.

[307] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* 577.

[308] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

Genesis 1:28-30 for Bavinck are tied to how humanity images God. To multiply and fill the earth and to exercise dominion are all impossible to carry out as individuals. In creation, human destiny is in community. This connection is so because humanity images the Triune God who lives in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Harrison points this truth out when she says, "The unity of humankind is an important facet of the image of God, who is one. Humankind is a multiplicity of persons who are united in one body, just as God is three persons united in one essence."[309] Thus, when humanity is united in loving community it is a reflection of the inner life of the Triune God.

Frame notes that the Scripture reveals God in three ways, by declaring his acts, by giving authoritative declarations of him, and by providing a glimpse of his inner, triune life. The testimony of Scripture from beginning to end is that God is one. Yet, without contradiction, it also presents three persons who are God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[310] Although, as systematic theology professor Robert Letham says, there are no analogies in the surrounding world that adequately convey the Christian doctrine of the Trinity,[311] it is important to examine God's inner life and the relationship of that life to the communal life of his people. The confession of the Trinity is the heartbeat of the Christian religion.[312]

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[309] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* 173.

[310] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship,* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 619-21.

[311] Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 6.

[312] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* 258.

Frame notes that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity teaches both God's threeness and his oneness.[313] Passages like the shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 declare the oneness of God. Therefore, to say that God is numerically one is to say that there is only one being with his unique nature.[314] Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies, Wayne Grudem, puts it this way, "There is only one God…God is unique, and there is no one like him and there can be no one like him."[315] Pastor and professor Dr. Clarence H. Benson sees the purpose in Israel being called out by God as a chosen and separate people in the Old Testament was to witness the unity of God. He claims that no other truth receives more prominence in the Old Testament. More than fifty passages teach that God is one, that there is no other, and that He has no equal.[316] Indeed, all of God's attributes imply his unity. He is the only being who can be the standard of perfection, goodness, love, knowledge, and truth.[317]

This oneness and unity of God exists in a diversity of persons. The triune nature of God is progressively revealed in Scripture. Although Trinitarian revelation begins in the Old Testament, this revelation is not yet complete.[318] While this revelation is not complete in the Old Testament, several authors indicate that it is implicit. Letham notes that in creation God forms the earth in a threefold manner. First he issues direct fiats, in

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[313] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 622.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 238.

[316] Clarence Herbert Benson, *The One True God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,* Biblical Essentials Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 11.

[317] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 624-25.

[318] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* 261.

Genesis 1:3, 6, 9. Secondly, he works, in Genesis 1:4, 7, 16, 17. Third, he uses the activity of the creatures themselves to continue forming and filling, in Genesis 1:11-12, 14-16, 24. God's order is varied—it is threefold but one. His work shows diversity in unity, and unity in its diversity. The triadic manner of earth's formation reflects the nature of its Creator.[319] Frame sees the revelation of divine persons in the Old Testament in a number of passages. Of Genesis 1:2 he demonstrates that the Old Testament makes a distinction between God and the Spirit. Of Genesis 16:6-13 and 21:17-20 he relates that the angel speaks as God. Then, the Messiah is seen to be a human deliverer, a son of David, but also God in passages like Psalm 110:1.[320] Bavinck observes that in the Old Testament the work of creation and providence is established by the word of God, the wisdom of God, and his Spirit. Thus, according to the Old Testament, it is evident in creation that all things owe their existence and preservation to a threefold cause.[321]

However, what is implicit in the Old Testament is explicit in the New Testament. Bavinck notes that in the New Testament Trinitarian revelation comes to the foreground much more clearly, through God's self-revelation in appearance, word, and deed.[322] Frame explains that in the New Testament, the church naturally came to praise, thank and worship the Father, Son, and Spirit. Everything in the New Testament is about the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. In the birth narratives in the New Testament books Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit. At his baptism, the three persons

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[319] Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 18-19.

[320] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 633-34.

[321] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* 261-62.

[322] Ibid., 269.

are present.[323] So, the three persons are distinct even though they are not three individuals alongside each other and separated from each other but a threefold self-differentiation within the divine being.[324] The Apostle Peter alludes to the distinction of the three persons, as well as their mutual work when he writes,

> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.[325]

Frame understands Peter in this text as not describing a precise division of labor among the persons of the Trinity. Rather, "all these events require the concurrence of all three persons."[326] That is, the unity of the Trinity is profoundly expressed in their concurrence and mutuality. The Trinity lives without internal conflict. The three persons are perfectly agreed on what they should do and how their plan should be executed. They support one another, assist one another, and promote one another's purposes. One may call this "mutual glorification."[327]

God's triune nature, his unity in diversity as one who exists in mutual glorifying community is instructive for how he designed humanity to image him. Grudem says that it ought not be surprising that unity and diversity are reflected in the human relationships that God has established because God in himself has both unity and diversity. Therefore,

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[323] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 639.

[324] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* 303.

[325] 1 Peter 1:1-2.

[326] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 694.

[327] Ibid.

in the church there are many members yet one body.[328] Vos says, "Fellowship is not just

something nice to have over coffee after church. It is, in fact, the basis for identity itself.

To be made in the image of God is to be made in relationship."[329] The unity of the Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit in diversity is seen in the created unity in diversity of humanity. For

Woodley, the reflection in human beings of both unity and diversity is part of what it

means for people to be created in the image of God.[330] And just as the Trinity is an

unfathomable mystery, says Harrison, the mysterious and irreducible uniqueness of each

person joined together in human diversity serves as the image of God.[331] Frame says it

even more directly, "The concept of mutual glorification suggests an important way in

which Christians can be like members of the Trinity: we, too, are called to defer to one

another in this way, to glorify one another, to be disposable to one another's purposes—

that is, to love one another as God loved us."[332]

The practical implication of what it means for humanity in community to image

God is expressed in Chapter 26 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Of the

Communion of Saints.[333] Most of the authors reviewed, including one of the Westminster

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[328] Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine,* 256-57.

[329] Kapic, Morris, and Vos, "Where Does Authority Come From? A Conversation with a Theologian, a Biologist, and a Sociologist," 3.

[330] Woodley, *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Diversity,* 37.

[331] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* 175.

[332] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 696.

[333] WCF 26.1. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

Divines, William Perkins, did not indicate that this chapter of the Confession was written from the vantage point of the communion of saints being grounded in humanity imaging God. They more explicitly connect it with the doctrine of union with Christ. However, the correlation between the mutuality of the Trinity and what is stated in the Confession are undeniable. Letham agrees, saying that the communion that the saints enjoy with each other does not erode or destroy the integrity of the individual. This communion is an outflow of the doctrine of the Trinity. There is unity and union, but in diversity.[334]

Like the mutuality in the Trinity, the first paragraph of Chapter 26 expresses mutuality for Christian community. It claims that Christians are united to one another in love, have communion in one another's gifts and graces, and are therefore obligated to pursue their mutual good. Professor and author Chad Van Dixhoorn, commenting on the Confession's statement, remarks, "Ultimately this love for each other cannot be restricted to what we have; it needs to encompass who we are."[335] Van Dixhoorn is calling for a Christian identity of mutual love in community. Sproul implies agreement, reflecting on the Confession and saying that the ingredient which makes the communion of the saints

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WCF 26.2. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offers opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

WCF 26.3. This communion which the saints have with Christ, does not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of His Godhead; or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous. Nor does their communion one with another, as saints, take away, or infringe the title or propriety which each man has in his goods and possessions.

[334] Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context*, *The Westminster Assembly and the Reformed Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2009), 323.

[335] Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 352.

cohesive is love.[336] William Perkins, one of the Westminster Divines, centuries before the

other men referenced here, likewise explains that Christian community shares mutual

love expressed in mutual obligation. "We must here be admonished not to seek our own

things, but to refer the labours [sic] of our callings to the common good…Lastly,

considering we are all knit into one mystical body…our duty is to redress the faults of our

brethren, and to cover them…Love covers the multitude of sins."[337] Princeton Seminary

Professor George S. Hendry explained this love as not being based on mutual attraction.

Rather, it is a love that overcomes division and reconciles contraries, bringing into

communion those who have nothing in common except the fact that Christ gave himself

for them.[338] The difference, then, between the inner life of the Triune God, and the inner

life of the community that images him, is the presence of sin.

That reality brings attention back to the challenge of living out mutual love as

image-bearers in diverse community. Livermore believes, "Few things are as sacred and

worthy of our connection with other human beings than our shared identity as image

bearers of the Holy Other."[339] An implication of this for Woodley is that our local

churches need to look better in the eyes of the world and reflect the multicultural heart of

the Father.[340] Crouch encourages this desire as well. At the climax of creation in Genesis,

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[336] Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, 72.

[337] William Perkins et al., *The Vvorkes of That Famous and Vvorthy Minister of Christ in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: Printed by Iohn Legatt ... 1616), 312.

[338] George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1960), 219.

[339] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, 86.

[340] Woodley, *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Diversity,* 66.

God introduces his own image-bearers within the context of community. Thus, humanity's own creative vision does not reach its full potential apart from others being brought into the process.[341]

### Summary of Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore how people who have experienced belonging in a diverse church assess the impact the church has had on their identity formation. This literature review began with an examination of identity formation and self-concept in community. Then the second theme focused on connection in community through vulnerability and belonging. Lastly, a biblical-theological framework was presented for imaging God as an individual and as a community.

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[341] Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power,* 34.

**Chapter Three**

**Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to explore how people who belong to diverse churches assess the impact the church has on their identity formation. The assumption that healthy, diverse churches have a substantive and beneficial impact on its members' identity and self-awareness guided this study. Therefore, the researcher designed a qualitative study to understand these church members point of view and experience of belonging. In order to address this purpose, the research identified three main areas of focus central to how members of diverse churches assess how their church helps form their identity. These include the areas of vulnerability and belonging, identity forming, and imaging God. To examine these areas more closely, the following questions served as the intended focus of the qualitative research:

1. What are the ways people experience belonging in a diverse church?

2. How do people gain awareness of their identity in experiencing belonging in a diverse church?

3. How do people's identity form when they experience belonging a diverse church?

4. What are the benefits of identity formation for people who experience belonging in a diverse church?

**Design of the Study**

Sharan B. Merriam, in her book *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, defines a qualitative case study as an "intensive, holistic

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description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit."[342] She

identifies four of its characteristics. First, qualitative research focuses on process,

understanding, and meaning. The researcher desires to achieve an understanding of how

people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process of meaning making, and

describing how people interpret what they experience. Second, the researcher is the

primary instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research. Third, the

process is inductive, allowing the researcher to gather data to build a concept or theory.

Fourth, qualitative research develops a richly descriptive product, using words and

pictures rather than numbers to convey what the researcher learned.[343]

This study employed a general qualitative research design, and the researcher

conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. This

qualitative method discovered the most comprehensive and descriptive data from

participants' perspective about belonging in a diverse church.

## Participant Sample Selection

This research required participants who experience belonging in a diverse church

and can articulate the sense of identity that belonging provides. The researcher, therefore,

purposefully chose a sampling strategy in order to discover, understand, and gain insight

from the participants.[344] In order to qualify for the study sample, participants must have

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[342] Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 27.

[343] Ibid., 14-17.

[344] Ibid., 77.

been members of an ethnically diverse church, have experienced belonging in that church, and possess an awareness of the church's impact on them.

The researcher considered his network of pastoral relationships in order to find potential participants from among their members. The researcher emailed pastors of ethnically and socio-economically diverse churches, explaining the nature of the research project and requesting recommendations for participants from their membership. The researcher contacted the recommended potential participants through email, and received confirmation ensuring the individual's willingness to participate in the research and interview. All of the participants are members of churches in metropolitan areas. The churches are all evangelical in the Reformed tradition, with some affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and others with no denominational affiliation.

Participants were purposefully chosen for variation in ethnicity, socio-economic status, and age. This variation provides a focused spectrum of diversity for the study. The researcher also chose the participants who intentionally contemplated and articulated the themes of identity, belonging, and imaging God. The researcher asked participants questions around these themes to help determine their suitability for the study.

The final study was conducted through personal interviews with twenty members of evangelical, diverse churches, where they also experienced belonging. They were all conducted in person. Eight of those interviews were in-depth and provided the primary data for this study. Each participant has been a member of their church for at least two years, and attends Sunday worship service at least seventy-five percent of Sundays in a given year. Additionally, the participants all self-assessed their church placement, concluding that in their specific church, they felt welcomed, valued, comfortable, or safe.

The researcher invited the sampling to participate via an introductory letter or email, followed by a personal phone call. All expressed interest and gave written, informed consent for the research.[345] Before the interview, each participant completed a one-page demographic questionnaire,[346] giving information concerning the selection criteria outlined above.

## Data Collection

This study utilized semi-structured, open-ended interviews for data collection. Open-ended interview questions allow the researcher to build upon participant responses about complex issues, exploring answers more thoroughly. Because qualitative researchers "assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways…This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic."[347] The methodology allows for common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting views to arise across the variation of participants as they expressed their perspective on the topic.[348]

Initial interview protocol categories were derived from the literature, and a pilot test was performed to help evaluate the questions for clarity and usefulness in eliciting relevant data. The researcher also utilized the constant comparison method, evaluating interview questions during the interview process. The researcher, thus, adjusted the interview questions around the participants' explanations and descriptions. Coding and

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[345] See Appendix A.

[346] See Appendix B.

[347] Ibid., 90.

[348] Ibid., 107.

categorizing the data during the process of interviewing allowed for new source data to emerge from the interviews.[349]

The researcher traveled to each city to conduct participant interviews in person. Fourteen church members were interviewed for one to one and a half hours each. Prior to the interview, the church members each received a letter of the interview schedule, addressing time, date, and place. In order to accommodate participant schedules, the researcher met each participant in the most convenient and accommodating location for an uninterrupted interview. The researcher audio recorded the interviews with a digital recorder. By conducting an average of two interviews in a week, the researcher completed the data gathering in the course of seven weeks. After each interview, field notes with descriptive and reflective observations were written.

## Data Analysis

As soon as possible and always within one week of each meeting, the researcher transcribed each interview. Two interviews were personally transcribed using computer software to play the digital recording on a computer while typing each transcript. The others were transcribed through hired professional transcribers. Whether the transcription was personally done, or through a transcription service, the researcher personally revised, clarified, and evaluated the resultant data categories. As Merriam states, "data often seem to beg for continued analysis past the formation of categories."[350] This study utilized the constant comparison method, routinely analyzing the data throughout the interview process by color-coding the data categories. The interviews and observation notes were

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[349] Ibid., 178.

[350] Ibid., 189.

fully transcribed into computer files, printed, coded, and analyzed. The analysis focused

on discovering and identifying common themes, patterns, concerns, and contrasting

views across the variation of participants as well as congruence or discrepancy between

the different groups of participants.

The purpose of this study was to explore how people who have experienced

belonging in a diverse church assess the impact that church has had on their identity

formation. Seeking to achieve this goal, the interview protocol contained the following

questions.

1. Describe a recent time you found yourself in a group setting at church and realized that you were an outsider or different. What were your emotional and physical reactions?

2. What kinds of labels were you attaching to yourself or others?

3. If you eventually became comfortable in that situation, how did it happen?

4. If you did not become comfortable, what prevented it?

5. Describe a recent time at church when you really felt like, "I belong here," or, "I am home here." As you think about that experience, describe what led to that sense of being home.

6. What about your current church influenced your decision to become a member?

7. What does it feel like to be "your ethnicity" at your church? How often do you think about your ethnicity at church? In what ways has that changed since you began attending this church?

8. Tell me about an occasion or interaction at church that indicates to you the way the church has helped shape how you think about yourself.

9. What have you learned about yourself during your membership at your church?

10. How would you compare your self-awareness as a "Black/White/etc" person before you joined the church to after being a member?

11. Describe someone you turn to at church? What makes you turn to this person?

12. What makes you feel safe at church?

13. What do you get at a diverse church that you think you would not get a non-diverse church?

14. Describe the impact your church community has had on you as an individual.

## Researcher Position

One limitation in qualitative research studies is the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator. Merriam notes, "The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis."[351] Given this important aspect, some challenge the trustworthiness of a qualitative research, raising questions of the validity and reliability of the instrument since researchers bring their own biases, assumptions, and worldviews into their analyses. In order to address this concern and enhance the internal validity of research, Merriam suggests that the researcher's "assumptions, experiences, worldview, and theoretical orientation" should be clarified on the outset of the study.[352]

The researcher, as an African American pastor in the PCA, is aware that his bias, backgrounds, and viewpoint are just a few of the factors contributing to the filter through which he values and interprets his research data. Only slightly more than one percent of the pastors in the PCA are African American. As such, the researcher was biased towards the desire to raise awareness of what will be necessary if majority Anglo churches and denominations pursue diversity. Additionally, the researcher has a particular passion for and conviction that the local church should reflect the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of its neighborhood/region. Therefore, he believes that churches fitting this description have a beneficial impact on the lives of its members.

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[351] Ibid., 55.

[352] Ibid., 219.

The researcher's bias could minimize or ignore the benefits to individuals who remain in non-diverse churches. Additionally, it could give the impression that a non-diverse church cannot be a healthy church. However, the researcher aims to help individuals, congregations, and denominations that are committed to becoming or remaining diverse in church life. This aim has led to greater detail and honesty about the prevalent issues that must be addressed in forming and maintaining diverse churches.

## Study Limitations

Participants interviewed for this study were limited to those who are members of diverse churches. Although the participants reflect a diversity of age, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, there are several other categories of diversity that would fit within the purpose of this research. Therefore, this is not an exhaustive research into the topic. Additionally, the churches are all in the United States of America. Therefore, the findings are particularly applicable within the USA. As with all qualitative studies, readers bear the responsibility to determine what can be appropriately applied to their context. The results of this study may also have implications for the church in other parts of the world.

**Chapter Four**

**Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore how people who belong to diverse churches assess the impact the church has on their identity formation. The assumption that healthy, diverse churches have a substantive and beneficial impact on its members' identity and self-awareness guided this study. The researcher sought to discover information that may assist church members, churches, and denominations who have embraced a biblical vision for diversity by identifying the ways in which these churches shape and form the identities of their congregants.

To that end, the following research questions guided the qualitative research.

1. What are the ways people experience belonging in a diverse church?

2. How do people gain awareness of their identity in experiencing belonging in a diverse church?

3. How do people's identities form as they experience belonging in a diverse church?

4. What are the benefits of identity formation for people who experience belonging in a diverse church?

In depth interviews were conducted with eight members of diverse churches, providing the primary research data for this study. Those participants are referred to in this section as primary participants. In order to expand the age and ethnic diversity additional interviews were conducted with twelve other members of diverse churches.

The twenty participants were selected from six churches. These churches varied in congregational size and denominational affiliation. Two of the churches are in the mid-West, two are in the mid-Atlantic, and two are in the South. The research participants varied in ethnicity, gender, and age. In order to protect their privacy, the research participants' names and the church names are replaced in this study by pseudonyms. The ethnicity, gender and age range of each research participant is as follows. The eight primary participants are indicated by bold text.

| Name | Ethnicity | Gender | Age Range |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dinesh** | **Asian** | **Male** | **41-55** |
| **Eun** | **Asian** | **Female** | **26-40** |
| **Andrea** | **Black** | **Female** | **41-55** |
| **Darryl** | **Black** | **Male** | **26-40** |
| David | Black | Male | 26-40 |
| **Joyce** | **Black** | **Female** | **26-40** |
| Margaret | Black | Female | 56+ |
| **Melvin** | **Black** | **Male** | **26-40** |
| **Steven** | **Black** | **Male** | **41-55** |
| Trevor | Black | Male | 20-25 |
| Yvonne | Black | Female | 56+ |
| Alea | Hispanic | Female | 26-40 |
| Carlos | Hispanic | Male | 26-40 |
| Isabella | Hispanic | Female | 41-55 |

| Andrew | White | Male | 26-40 |
|--------|-------|------|-------|
| Ben | White | Male | 26-40 |
| Courtney | White | Female | 41-55 |
| **Jake** | **White** | **Male** | **26-40** |
| Sarah | White | Female | 26-40 |
| Susan | White | Female | 56+ |

The findings from these interviews are detailed below. They are categorized underneath each research question according to the major themes that surfaced in response to the interview questions.

**What are the ways people experience belonging in a diverse church?**

The first research question addressed the ways the research participants experienced belonging in their diverse churches. The experience of belonging is the experience of feeling at home in a group or community. Five themes surfaced among the research participants, providing insight to both the experience of belonging and the hindering of belonging. These themes are as follows: A Mission Mindset ("Let Me School You"), Making Room ("Put My Name In The Hat"), Authentic Friendship ("Be As Real As Possible"), Similarity ("Now that You're Here"), and the Gospel Message.

*A Mission Mindset: "Let Me School You"*

In a diverse church, uncomfortable cultural and ethnic differences confront members often. This discomfort is experienced in different ways. Six of the primary participants spoke to this theme. "I'm going to have to get used to this gospel music because it's not really my thing," said Jake. Even though Living Hope had a Black pastor,

when the church began 80 percent or more of the congregants were White, like Jake. The church was committed to growing as a multi-ethnic congregation, and this meant a commitment to more traditionally Black gospel music in the worship service.

Melvin brought up the discomfort and difficulty in relating to others as a Black man in one of Resurrection Church's small group Bible studies. He said, "Mostly their jokes are going over my head. It doesn't give you a good foundation for camaraderie and for fellowship." He was left feeling like an outsider.

Joyce grew up in a predominately White neighborhood, so she was used to being in a community where she is an ethnic minority. Even still she initially felt she couldn't connect deeply with the non-Black members of All Saints Church. Although she was asked to serve on a ministry board shortly after joining the church, she said, "I felt for a while that they see me as somewhat of a token." The culture of her church, in her experience, revered education and credentialing. She believed that people saw her as fitting their need for an educated Black woman to serve, thus causing discomfort.

Several participants worked to turn their discomfort into an experience of belonging. They did not put the full expectation of their belonging on what others did or did not do, and they embraced a mission mindset. They began to see their membership at their church as God calling them to help educate other church members who have not developed any substantive relationships with people from their ethnic group.

Eun realized that people have all kinds of preconceived notions about Korean American culture. She said that discussions about food are typically pleasant until someone asks an insensitive question such as, "Do Korean people actually eat dog?" For her, getting upset and angry only perpetuates ignorance. Instead, her attitude is, "It's

really annoying, but let me just school you, let me just educate you." Indeed, she said she loves how God is using her to spread the knowledge of Korean people to her church.

When Melvin's ethnicity stood out to him in his small group, and he was having difficulty connecting with others, he did not leave the group. He believed that they ought to be like family. So, if this was going to be the case, they would have to look at culture and understand difference. He decided to invite others into his whole world, not just his church world, so he invited them to his birthday celebration at a club he described as a "Black-dominated, upper class sort of place." Everyone enjoyed themselves, he said, "but they wouldn't have done that if I had not been in their lives at all." When it comes to his diverse church experience, he is clear, "Part of what I see myself as is missional. It's a missional work…If I was at a Black church, I wasn't going to be on mission [in this way]." These relationships were fostered, and belonging was facilitated by striving to help people have meaningful experiences with someone they would not normally know. Belonging to a cross-cultural church, for him, is more than exposing others to new ways of thinking or doing. It is leading others to participate in those ways with him.

Likewise, Joyce has embraced the educational aspect in her experience of belonging. Although she struggled with feeling like a token, she realized that people looked to her, and other Blacks in the congregation, as a gauge for how to interact with other people of color. Thus, she said, "You're almost like an image, or you're like a display to educate people." If this feeling of being on display to educate people were taking place on her job, she would not embrace it. She embraces the missional mindset as a way of experiencing belonging because she is among her brothers and sisters in Christ, with whom she sees herself growing.

A missional mindset, or an educational aspect, is particularly present among the ethnic minorities interviewed. Andrea, a Black female member of Living Hope, has embraced her role as an ethnic minority to "raise the consciousness of the group." "It's very unique," she said. "It gives you a way to introduce aspects of your culture and what you've come from to folks who without this relationship, might not engage in that fully." Jake, a White man, indicated an educational aspect to his experience of belonging at Living Hope as well. However, it was not through his educating others about his ethnicity. He experienced belonging as he was exposed to the different views and experiences of a Black male member of Living Hope who has become a close friend.

At the same time, for ethnic minorities, the missional mindset can run its course and begin to work against the experience of belonging. Participants also expressed the experience of "minority fatigue" as a result of pursuing this mindset. Eun became weary of always having to explain Korean food to the non-Koreans in her church. Therefore, it is not enough for people to attempt to facilitate their own experience of belonging simply by schooling others.

<center>*Making Room: "Put My Name In the Hat"*</center>

A second theme that arose among seven participants in the experience of belonging is the sense that the diverse church is valuing people by making room for them in fellowship and worship. Melvin was surprised to hear that he came to mind, even when he was not around those in his church. A Bible study group at Resurrection was playing a trivia game. The game is played by writing down the names of famous people and putting those names in a hat. Someone reaches into the hat to select a name, and then has to impersonate the individual while the others guess who is being portrayed. He heard about

the game the following day at church. Someone told him that his name had been put in the hat. Melvin joyfully said, "Somebody put my name in the hat!" He continued, "You know, that's freaking cool. It was really funny, but it was also like, 'Wow,' I'm ingrained in these people's minds." Other participants also expressed the experience of belonging through being valued by being heard or thought of—having their name put in the hat.

One repeated way this came to the fore was through conversations around race. The deaths of unarmed Black men at the hands of police in 2014 and 2015—typified by the deaths of Michael Brown in St. Louis, MO, Eric Garner in Staten Island, NY, and Freddie Gray in Baltimore, MD—have helped put the issue of race on the discussion table for many of the diverse churches participating in this study.

Three of the six churches held internal forums on race. Two additional churches held conferences on the subject of race. These forums and conferences provided a space for several participants to experience vulnerability in themselves and others. Eun described an occasion at church when, during a Q&A, a Black woman stood up to speak. The woman did not have a question to ask. Rather, she rose to apologize for thinking a certain way about race. This shocked Eun. She said, "For her to feel so comfortable and safe to talk about herself that way, I was just shocked. I was like, 'This [church] is different.'" Joyce was grateful that her church was willing to bring up the issues of race and invite open dialogue. She related an important moment in the race conversation for her. Something shared by a woman from another ethnic group of color was received well by the people of color in the room, but received poorly by the Whites in the room. She called it a teaching and learning moment that opened up other areas of the conversation "that were probably hidden before that, and that no one would have ever really

discussed." The openness in the race dialogue also facilitated belonging for Darryl. He was pleased to see people from different backgrounds unexpectedly communicating openly on issues of race. In Dinesh's experience, his belonging was enhanced, and he felt able to offer valued opinion in his church's race conversation. He had facilitated his own belonging by mentoring Black young men in the church's neighborhood. This ministry enabled him to contribute to the conversation both from the perspective of many Blacks in the community and his own.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that in this same context, belonging can be hindered. Melvin expressed that he was hurt when no one at his church asked him how the shooting death of Michael Brown in Ferguson affected him. "I was so devastated," he said. He wondered that they might not know him very well after all. He thought to himself, "You don't know my history and my background; how I think about the police. You're just making assumptions." In his case, however, he pressed the issue by inserting himself and his opinion into the conversation anyway.

Worship at diverse churches also communicates to people whether or not room is being made for them. Where Jake struggled, but came to love gospel music over time, Eun has always loved it. She is a trained singer, and serves on her church's praise and worship team. However, her training is not in gospel music. While she believes that gospel music is the freest when it comes to expression, the different vocal chords required make it difficult for her. One Sunday after church service a Black woman came up to her and said, "I knew you could sing, but girl you sang that song!" That feedback amazed her, and caused her to praise God for being valued in this way. Additionally, the church allowing people to be themselves in worship helps her to feel that she belongs.

The lack of this freedom may hinder belonging. In response to the question, "What does it feel like to be Black in All Saints church?" Darryl said, "I can't really be Black in All Saints." He was talking particularly as someone who serves in the music ministry. He said, "The things I would do if I was in a more Black setting, I can't do that. I often suppress it." What he suppresses is his desire to be expressive in worship; to worship with his whole being. This was a hindrance to belonging for him until he decided to change his perspective in order to experience belonging. "I used to get upset that I would have to suppress [my blackness], but over time I see [worship] from their perspective." In order for him to have an experience of belonging through worship, he had to change. He had to assimilate. For her part, Joyce struggled with the idea of assimilation. It was a hindrance for her. Also a musician at All Saints, she claimed that the message being communicated to her was, "Not only are you Black, but you can easily assimilate into our culture." She felt as though they were not willing to change to accommodate her, she was valuable because she's willing to change and become like them. Darryl and Joyce had different responses to the lack of room being made for them in the worship context, but the church's worship culture did not make the experience of belonging easy for either of them.

Andrea's sense of belonging was also threatened in the context of worship. She had a vulnerable emotional response to a worship song, and her response was misunderstood by a White woman, who was a fellow choir member, expressing concern and trying to console her. Another Black woman in the choir understood what was happening and shielded her from the well-meaning White woman. This Black woman,

Andrea said, "was also attending to me, but in a different way; with an understanding of where that response [to the song] came from."

So, belonging may be facilitated in a diverse church in the context of worship by not forcing or expecting people to respond to truth (in song or preached) in one particular way. This freedom may actually create an awkwardness, but in Steven's view awkwardness is the new normal in his diverse church. Ultimately people need to believe that their presence is valued.

*Authentic Friendship: "Be As Real As Possible"*

Every participant expressed that friendship was a key factor in their experience of belonging in diverse churches. For Eun the experience of belonging grew when she believed that they were genuinely listening and "trying to be as real as possible." She described this authenticity as knowing that "People are not being nice for the sake of being nice 'cause you're a Christian.'" The lack of perceived authenticity at All Saints hindered Joyce from experiencing belonging in her first three years at the church. As mentioned above, she was asked to serve on a ministry board shortly after joining the church. This request hindered her experience of belonging because she felt it was not authentic. She had just gotten to the church. They did not know much about her, and it caused her to say "There's not a lot of authenticity happening" at her church.

The perception that people were inauthentic at the church began to change for Joyce three years into her membership, at a women's retreat. Prior to the retreat she did not feel as though she could connect with the women in the room. She attended the retreat feeling depressed and disappointed about personal issues that she described as having nothing to do with the people in the room. Some non-Black women, who she

particularly felt were inauthentic, opened up to her. She said that their vulnerability caused the guards and barriers in her heart to come down. She experienced these women as sisters in Christ and began to feel a real sense of connection. Following this experience, she began to believe that people in the church who invited her family over for dinner were not just doing it out of a sense of Christian duty. They were being authentic. She said, "It became more real." Deep friendships were able to develop.

The importance of authentic friendship developed through a willingness to be vulnerable was evident with Dinesh as well. Some cultural differences at Christ the King church manifested themselves in communication challenges between people. Even so, he found that belonging was facilitated with people who were not afraid to be vulnerable and with whom he felt he could be vulnerable. He said that he has these close relationships across ethnic lines in the church and has been willing to initiate this vulnerability. "I can share my thoughts before them; my struggles before them." He has learned to be someone who is willing to take the risk of sharing his deep struggles. Embracing vulnerability and developing authentic friendships has developed for him even as he's wondered whether he should stay at the church. "In the midst of this struggle," he said, "I find that I belong there. That's the work of the Spirit."

Andrea said that part of the blessing in being a member of a diverse church is being pushed out of cultural comforts and being "on the hook" to engage in relationship with others who are different and have different perspectives. She explained,

> What happens over time is you don't feel like you're the only one having to engage. It starts to be reciprocated. You get challenged on a couple of things, but you've created a relationship enough that you know that person. You trust their motive, and you work on that together. That takes time. It takes, I think, humility, and it takes really resting on Christ to do that.

Vulnerability, then, emerged as a key to authentic relationships in diverse churches. A few years into his membership at Living Hope, Jake realized that the church congregation was diverse when they gathered for worship or Bible study, but outside of that people went back to their homogenous lives. A turning point came for him when deep cross-cultural friendships developed through a monthly gathering of five men. He said, "We call it the fire pit. We just sit around the fire pit. We talk about life. How's marriage? How's fatherhood? How's your job?" These stories show that just having diversity in the church does not naturally facilitate belonging unless, relationships across cultural and ethnic lines begin to go below the surface.

*Similarity: "Now That You're Here"*

The fourth major theme to emerge in the way people experience belonging in a diverse church is the need for ethnic and cultural similarity to be present. People need to see themselves represented either in the congregation or some aspect of leadership. This was particularly so for the ethnic minority participants. If similarity is not present, the differences can become too overwhelming to bear.

Melvin related an experience that helped him get through his minority fatigue. For the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, members of the church gather at the pastor's house to read aloud King's *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. Another Black person, a new member, was in attendance last year. They connected like long lost friends, talking about their lives outside of the church. So much so that a White woman asked him later, "Where do you know her from?" He said, "I just met her." The woman replied, "Oh, the way you guys were talking I thought you knew each other." He realized at that moment his need to have someone he connected with culturally. He said he was not going to leave the church

prior to this person's coming, but his thought about her was, "Now that you're here it makes it easier."

For a long time, Dinesh and his wife were the only people from his country at Christ the King. Just the addition of one person from his homeland made a significant impact on him. He said, "We bring something unique to this church from our backgrounds and experiences, where we grew up, and what we learned as Christian disciples elsewhere." He feels as though this enriches his church and his own experience at the church.

Experiencing similarity in leadership is also significant. Eun grew up in a Korean church, and was not looking for a church pastored by a Korean, and yet the fact that hers and her pastor's stories were very similar, and that the pastor was willing to be open about his story, facilitated her sense of belonging. She said that when he shared his testimony with the church, it shocked her because culturally, "Koreans don't share like that." She said that she's always felt like the loner and that no one understood her background and experience as a Christian or Korean. But when her pastor shared his testimony, she said, "I was like, 'Oh my gosh, he's speaking about me!'" She experienced more belonging because the similarity of their stories, in growing up in a Korean American context, helped her realize that she was not a loner.

*The Gospel Message*

The last theme that was prevalent throughout the research is the church's commitment to the biblical gospel in word and deed. The other themes had aspects that threatened or hindered belonging. However, because each church was committed to the Bible as the central authority in the church, the participants were willing to overlook or

work through many hindrances to belonging. For Andrea, her family's desire was for the Word of God. That desire was a key draw to her church. Steven expressed that belonging was also facilitated through the church's love for God's Word as expressed in Reformed theology. Dinesh said about his church, "The great thing I see is the gospel working. The power of the gospel working in me and in other people." Eun was not necessarily seeking out a diverse church to join. The issue for her centered around the church's message. In her search, she asked the question, "Is the pastor preaching the gospel, and am I going to get fed?" In spite of her struggles at All Saints, Joyce realized that if she chose to go to a different church it would only be due to preferences "not because of things that are truly essential, like the teaching of God's Word." Alea did not initially feel an overwhelming sense of welcome at Cross Community Church. When asked why she continued to make the over one-hour drive to church each week she said, "I had never really heard truth the way it was shared here." Were it not for each church's commitment to God's Word, and what the participants considered doctrinal soundness, none of the participants would have experienced belonging.

Thus, a mission mindset, making room, authentic friendship, similarity, and the gospel message emerged as five ways that people experience belonging in a diverse church.

## How do people gain awareness of their identity in experiencing belonging in a diverse church?

The data revealed that in diverse churches cultural artifacts play a particular role in the way people gain awareness of their individual and ethnic identity. Cultural artifacts are things that are meaningful and important to a group of people. They include food, habits, gestures, dress, music, worship practices and so on. The artifacts are informed by

values and beliefs that are unobservable.[353] In diverse churches people become much more aware of their own artifacts and the artifacts of others, a fact that highlights an awareness of their own identity. The experience may be positive or negative. The artifacts that emerged from the data were food, worship service, and socio-political perceptions and expectations.

*Food*

Five participants brought up food as an important aspect in the way awareness of identity was facilitated in their church. Cross Community Church helped to bring out people's awareness of their identity through a multicultural potluck. Isabella decided to spearhead the event after experiencing some cultural discomfort at a Vietnamese restaurant. Her lack of familiarity with Vietnamese food made her feel lost. However, her discomfort at the restaurant spurred her to consider the cultural diversity at church and do something to highlight it. People were asked to bring an original dish from their home country. There were four categories: American, Asian, Caribbean, and European. Flags identified their different nationalities. She described the experience as beautiful. People were able to express their ethnicity and have it celebrated, rather than suppressed.

Eun found that talking to people about the foods associated with their ethnicity opens up conversation about their background. She admits always struggling with her identity as a Korean American. She said the older she got the more she thought of herself as a novelty. However, talking to others about Korean food is a way that she positively expresses awareness of her ethnic identity.

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[353] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, 81-83.

*Worship Service*

The worship experience in the church was a second artifact, expressed by each participant, that brought identity awareness to the surface. As noted previously, Darryl noted that in the context of worship at All Saints, he cannot be Black. He cannot express himself freely. The cultural difference in the worship service makes his blackness more apparent to himself. This awareness is particularly palpable to him as a musician. Although the church uses a Hammond B organ, he says, "I'm not going to play it the way you would hear it in a Black church." He added, "I think that the only time where I feel like I'm really thinking about being Black is when the music comes." He even took the step of writing a letter to the church pastors providing a biblical defense for expressive and celebratory worship. A similar awareness exists for Joyce as she feels the pressure and frustration of always having to assimilate to a non-Black style of worship. This causes her to feel as though, in these contexts, Blacks are the ones who are expected to find ways to reconcile the situation.

Where Darryl and Joyce expressed awareness of their identity through the pressure to assimilate into a worship experience that does not speak to them culturally, Eun's awareness arose somewhat differently. Darryl would like to shout, "Amen!" at All Saints from time to time, but does not feel comfortable doing so. Eun is glad that people feel free to say, "Amen!" at Resurrection. However, she said it's different from her experience growing up in Korean churches. She said, "In Korean churches you don't talk a lot, you don't voice your opinions, you would never say 'Amen.'" The stark difference from her ethnic background actually draws her back to the church.

Steven had a one-on-one conversation with a White member of Living Hope following a song Steven selected for the choir to sing. The man had concerns that the

song was too focused on what people do (i.e., "Praise is what I do") instead of what God

does. He said that the song would have been common in a Black church context. Adding,

"I wouldn't have ever had a question like that, so I knew then I was in a multi-ethnic

context." In her women's ministry work, Andrea found herself having to make sure that

in their worship experience the ministry took into consideration the range of women and

experiences from their ethnicity.

Sarah also had an awareness of her identity as a White woman in the context of

worship service at All Saints, but it had nothing to do with music. The shooting death of

an unarmed Black young man by a police officer was a prevalent news story. She related,

> I remember in church that Sunday, there was an overly loving White
> couple that did the congregational prayer. And the woman broke down
> crying in the prayer, and basically ended up apologizing for all of White
> people for what happened.

Sarah could relate to what the woman was experiencing and how she was

processing the impact of the shooting death in the context of her prayer. She has felt this

same sense of carrying the burden for all White people herself. Worship, then, in a

diverse church seems to provide opportunity for a positive or negative experience of

identity awareness.

*Socio-Political Perceptions and Expectations*

The third cultural artifact to emerge in how people gain awareness of their

identity in diverse churches is the socio-political perceptions and expectations that people

hold. This artifact was mentioned out by five participants.

Andrew became keenly aware of how things were different for him as a White

young man. Cross Community church had conversations as a church around issues of

discrimination, social justice, and police brutality. He said he tried to listen to his brothers

and sisters in Christ and put himself in their shoes. The opportunity for empathy took

place following a basketball game that he and some of the other young men had played.

Here's how he described the experience of one of the Black men in the group,

> We were playing basketball, then we were going over to a restaurant. On the way…I looked over and he was pulled over. The police were searching his car. I realized that afterwards. I wondered, "Should I turn around? Should I try to get in the middle of that?" So I was just praying for him. He got to the restaurant eventually and he was just distraught. He was just depressed about it. Like, "I can't believe they treated me like that. I can't believe they were saying some of those things to me and accusing me of stuff I wasn't doing."

He compared this experience to times in his life as a teenager when he did some

things for which he should have been arrested, but the police let him go. Here was a

brother in Christ who had not done anything wrong yet was harassed because he was

Black. Andrew did not feel ashamed or guilty about his White identity. Rather, he grew

in love and appreciation for his brother, all the while realizing that his ethnic identity

plays a significant role in the experiences he has had with law enforcement.

Jake is a self-described conservative Republican who works in politics. He's

White and serves as a deacon at Living Hope. Although Living Hope is a diverse church,

he assumed that his Black brothers and sisters were politically conservative like him

because they were committed Christians. "I didn't really think about it," he said. "They

love the Lord," he thought, "they must be conservative." On one occasion he posted an

image of President Barak Obama on Facebook with the Bill of Rights under the

President's feet. In response to his post, a Black woman from the church posted on her

Facebook page, "I can't believe somebody gets a pass on being a racist bigot because

they're an officer in our church." When he found out about it, his first instinct was to

have a conversation with her. He asked himself, "What in the world could I have said or

done that would have communicated that?" He could not imagine a scenario where the label "racist bigot" would fit him, yet there it was. Awareness of his assumptions as a White conservative Republican had come to the surface. He said, "I had never thought about the assumptions through which I viewed the world and assuming that so many people agreed with me when they didn't." He and the woman did meet and have a clarifying conversation. He describes this social media event as a turning point, causing him to realize that there were privileges that came from being a part of the majority culture that he took for granted.

Others also experienced awareness of identity through the artifact of socio-political perceptions and expectations. Sarah felt her whiteness even more after leaving her diverse setting to visit her family back in her hometown. She felt frustrated as she tried to explain different perspectives to her family who did not have the kinds of cross-cultural friendships she'd developed at All Saints. For Courtney, her whiteness was highlighted for her in the perceptions and expectations around her daughter's hair. Her husband is Black and young daughter is bi-racial. Courtney admitted, "I knew her hair was looking pretty bad! So it's been a challenge, dealing with her hair." She had to solicit help from some of the Black woman at church. When she saw a Black woman at church whose hair she liked, she would ask her what kind of products she used. However, the expectation from some seemed to be that Courtney would need to figure it out for herself. Some refused to share their hair secrets with her. However, she continued to ask and has spoken with women who are excited that she would even bring the issue up and who have helped her get the products she needs.

Cultural artifacts that become mixed together in diverse churches caused awareness of people's identity, for better or worse, to come to the surface.

**How do people's identities form as they experience belonging in a diverse church?**

The common theme in how participants' identities formed as they experienced belonging in their diverse church is through experiencing dissonance. Ten participants reported some occurrence of dissonance that had an impact on their identity. Their awareness of themselves began to change as they realized, and in some respects embraced, the discomfort of their diverse context. The dissonance was not always their personal experience. The dissonance others experienced also impacted their identity. Through this dissonance, they are formed into multi-cultural people.

For example, Eun shared the impact a Black woman at church had on her sense of identity. The woman shared her story about the struggles of growing up as an adopted Black girl in a White family in a White Midwestern community and attending an historically Black college as a young adult. Eun said the woman realized that she did not have to choose between a White identity or a Black identity. She just needed to choose Jesus Christ as her identity. Eun said, "It was very eye-opening." She continued,

> I hadn't heard of a person of color going from one extreme to the other extreme and that the end result of the process is that my identity lies in Jesus. Because it lies in Jesus I can, not necessarily balance, but I can go through this all White community, all Black community because I don't have to struggle with whatever identity because that doesn't define me. Jesus defines me.

Eun thought she always knew this on the inside, but hearing the woman's testimony of struggle was formative because she could relate to it. She seeks to find her identity more in how Jesus defines her than in her Korean-ness.

Likewise, the dissonance experienced in the life of a church member had a formative impact on Jake's identity. A fellow deacon, who is Black, has become a very close friend. The shooting death of Trayvon Martin in 2012 had deep affect on his friend. Jake said that the incident didn't affect him, but the closer the two of them become, he says,

> the more I'm learning when something really affects him and he feels like there's been an injustice, I feel like I have an obligation to go study the circumstances around it because I want to see it from his eyes.

This obligation is not how he would have thought about or approached things prior to belonging to Living Hope. As a Christian and as a friend he must look at things carefully, trying to put his friend's glasses on. Jake now says, "Who I am, the very core of who I am and what I value and who I value is found in this church." His friend's discomfort has played a role in shaping him.

The experience of identity-forming dissonance may also be one's own in diverse churches. Darryl described the pressure to assimilate at All Saints. As stated earlier, he felt as though he could not be Black at the church, having to suppress his ethnic identity. Where it used to upset him, now he sees things from a different perspective. He said, "The other side of suppression is actually me just finding the other side of myself. So I guess in suppressing myself, I found another part of myself." This "part" is one who has different mannerisms, and even some different likes in the context of worship. Steven talked about the impact of his formation at Living Hope in a similar way. Like Eun, his sense of identity has been helped in terms of understanding who he is in Christ. "Being in a multi-ethnic church has caused stress spiritually, culturally, but God has used it to grow us." Now the songs he used to just tolerate are in his playlist because, "I love what the

people of God love." This is formation occurs through the stripping away of preferences and provision of new preferences.

Joyce directly described her formation as the stripping away of preferences. Some Black friends who are not a part of All Saints were aware of the difficulties she was having at the church. She said they asked her, "Why do you even go there? If you feel that way, why are you still there?" Her response was that her growth in Christ was not based on preferences; her growth is based on a stripping away of her preferences. This hard process is taking place at the church, and she is able to see the growth happening.

Dissonance may not be preferable or pleasant; no one expressed that they desired discomfort, conflict, or awkwardness. However, as they embraced it, the result was formation into more multi-cultural people and growth in Christ.

**What are the benefits of identity formation for people who experience belonging in a diverse church?**

The final research question sought to determine what, if any, benefits of identity formation there are for people who experience belonging in a diverse church. The benefits that emerged from the participants centered around the type of formation that takes place when being in relationship with others who do not share your ethnic identity. All of the participants said that they had changed for the better as a result of belonging to a diverse church. The benefits can be categorized into three areas, a sharpened sense of Identity in Christ, Denying of Self, and Loving and Valuing Others.

*Identity in Christ*

Six of the participants spoke directly to their experience of belonging in a diverse church helping them to keep their focus on Jesus Christ and find their identity in him. Steven said that he and his wife remain well aware of the differences and distinctions

among the diverse people of Living Hope. Yet, he said that these distinctions have "helped us in our identity and who we are in Christ." As mentioned earlier, Eun now seeks to find her identity more in Christ than in her Korean-ness. It is not that she denies or disdains her Korean identity. In fact, it is the opposite. She values her ethnic identity, but belonging to a diverse church means it is no longer her primary definition. In her church she feels as though people want to know who she is, not just her ethnicity. Melvin called it a "Galatians 3:28 kind of thing." Belonging in his diverse church sharpened the reality that "we are all one in Christ." Jesus Christ is at the heart of his understanding of himself and those he is connected to at church.

For Jake this identity awareness came through trauma. The pastor whom the Lord used to build and shepherd the diverse church he belonged to decided to leave for another pastorate. He said that he needed about three months to get over being upset with the pastor. He saw how much his security and identity was wrapped up in the pastor and the church, "rather than in the Lord, who's not leaving." This recalibration of his security and identity toward the Lord helped him to realize,

> God's been faithful. I know he loves this church more than I do. He's going to see this church through. He's not going to let this church fall away. He's not going to let our impact be diminished. He's got something in store and it must be better than this.

It is important to note that as people expressed a sharpening of their identity in Christ as a part of their diverse church, they were not simultaneously saying that their ethnic identity no longer mattered to them. Their ethnic identity was not a barrier to authentic relationships within the community because they felt as though they belonged.

*Denying of Self*

The second benefit was a sharpening of what it meant to deny themselves for the sake of others. Five of the primary participants spoke to this benefit. Darryl expressed those very words when he said, "I think I've been learning over the years how to deny myself." He feels compelled to be a minister of reconciliation through this denial of self. Joyce said, "I feel like I've changed for the better as far as my maturity level is concerned." She feels this way because, she said, her growth in Christ is based on the stripping away of her preferences. All of the participants indicated that belonging to a diverse church meant that they would have to go without certain preferences they desired, and this going without had a positive impact on who they have become.

This assertion is not to make it seems as though the participants considered the process an easy one. They started out preferring their preferences after all. Melvin said the most significant con to joining a diverse church is the time it takes to connect with people. The differences make it difficult to build trust. However, he said one goes through a process of filtering things out. Some things matter, and some things don't.

Jake realized this as well as he dealt with the fallout from his Facebook post about President Obama. Here's how he described his conversation with the Black woman who considered him to be a racist bigot and his subsequent thoughts,

> I said, "Let's go to lunch next week," and we went to lunch and started this dialogue where for the first time in my life, I just let her talk. I listened, and she said things about some of my posts and my views. I had no idea that my views could be interpreted that way. It was the first time I stepped out of myself, saw myself from her perspective. I thought man, maybe she's not alone; maybe there's a whole church of people that think somehow I'm racist or bigot because I'm a conservative and I support Republican policies.

Out of that conversation he began to have conversations with other non-White members, asking what they thought of him and his views. Through those conversations he realized there were some things he was missing. Dinesh also realized that God was changing him through his experience of belonging at Christ the King. For him, sharpening what it means for him to deny himself came through growing in patience. He admitted, "I'm still in the process. I'm not there yet, but I feel like God has given me a greater sense of his grace that people are in the process." He said that he is a perfectionist, and God has had to change him growing in patience with people. He said, "God's grace just stands in opposition to my perfectionism." He believes this is a particular benefit of belonging to a diverse church. Steven put it succinctly saying that belonging to a diverse church allows his family to forgo legitimate comforts.

*Loving and Valuing Others*

The last benefit to identity formation for those who experience belonging is a sharping of one's love for and valuing of those who are different. This benefit might be understood as coming from the formation of a new in-group, an in-group comprised of diverse peoples. Every participant expressed this benefit in some way.

When asked what he thought he got from belonging to a diverse church that he would not get in a homogenous church, Melvin's reply was, "perspective." Here's how he put it:

> I think it's really simple. Perspective. You wouldn't be able to see things
> from other people's perspectives. Some of these churches are very
> homogenous, so there are a lot of people who just think alike. If I were in
> that [kind of] church, I wouldn't be able to draw on relationships with
> other races as sort of mitigating factors to my thought process.

This sharpening of perspective has had an impact on how Jake thinks about his role in the work that he does. He runs an education reform policy organization in his state. Belonging to a diverse church has influenced the very nature of what he does for a living. He said,

> I'm not running a Tea Party organization, which I might've been if it hadn't been for Living Hope and my friendships and my relationships. I'm running what is trying to be a very diverse coalition of people who want to make sure every child [in my state] has a quality education. There's a multitude of ways Living Hope has impacted it.

So, the expectations attached to his professional life have been changed, internalized, and acted upon.

Eun said that one impact that belonging to Resurrection has had is realizing that God is training her to be able to look at things differently. She thinks that her experience with diversity in the church is the reason for the change.

Courtney and Joyce described the impact upon them as a growth of humility. Joyce said that this humility was in the context of interactions with people in the church whom she has genuinely come to love and is sure that they love and care about her as a person. Courtney said expressed her growth in humility in the context of appreciating other people's backgrounds. She said at first she was ignorant and thought, "Oh, we're all God's people and we can worship together." Then, she realized, "actually, we need to talk to each other and find out what our differences are." She related an experience from her work in children's ministry at Christ the King that demonstrated this approach. She heard that some of the church members from Africa did not feel accepted at the church. She explained,

> I talked to a lady and said, "Why? What are we doing wrong?" And she said, "Well, when you're asking for background checks for them to serve in the nursery they get really offended." And I said, "Oh, but it's because

we're just putting safety for the children first." She said, "Well the person who brought that up to them did not say it that way. They said it in a wrong way and a very abrupt way." So, I'm very cautious in the way that I speak. And the words I say lots of times might come out the wrong way. So I'm still learning how to be very careful. And then if I do offend somebody, I want them to know that they can come and talk to me. Many people know that I'm an open book, and I'll tell them flat out if I messed up. So if I do that, if I tell them, "look I messed up," then hopefully they'll come to me when I've done something else wrong.

The ability to love, appreciate, and value others across differences is a particular benefit to identity formation in diverse churches.

## Summary

In this chapter, the data gathered during the interview process was categorized and reported. The data revealed that people experience belonging in a diverse church through the cultivating of a mission mindset, making room for others, developing authentic friendships, having people with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and the church's commitment to the gospel message. Secondly, people gain awareness of their identity in experiencing belonging in a diverse church through the cultural artifacts that are at experienced in the church, like food, worship, and socio-political perceptions and expectations. Third, people's identities form as the experience belonging in a diverse church through dissonance. Lastly, the benefits of identity formation for people who experience belonging in a diverse church are a sharpened sense of their identity in Christ, denying of self, and loving and valuing others.

The final chapter of this dissertation will analyze the themes that have emerged from the literature review and interview process, providing recommendations for future research and practice.

**Chapter Five**

**Discussion and Recommendations**

In the introduction to this dissertation the author stated the Bible indicates that God intends for his church to represent humanity's diversity. This diversity is not just a generalization for a worldwide body, but a specific reality for individual churches in local communities. The literature review on imaging God detailed that for humanity to image the triune God, diversity must exist in individual churches. God's triune nature, his unity in diversity as one who exists in mutual glorifying community, is instructive for knowing how he designed humanity to image him. The unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in diversity is seen in the created diversity of humanity. David Livermore states, "Few things are as sacred and worthy of our connection with other human beings than our shared identity as image bearers of the Holy Other."[354] Thus, the church is obligated to pursue unity in diversity and diversity in unity among its members.

It follows that this diversity benefits the church. Particularly, it benefits those who belong to the church in the way that they are shaped and formed in their identity as image-bearers. What are the benefits to identity formation when the church is healthy in diversity? How does the diverse church impact the identity formation of its members? As noted in the introduction, though scholars have studied and written about the church's

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[354] Ibid., 86.

need to better reflect the diversity of their neighborhood,[355] this diversity remains a dubious enterprise. Although many scholars have written on identity formation, few have researched identity formation within diverse churches or addressed how identity is formed and challenged in a diverse church. This dissertation was undertaken in order to addresses this gap.

The purpose of this study was to explore how people who experience belonging in a diverse church assess the impact the church has on their identity formation. The study was guided by the following four research questions:

1. What are the ways people experience belonging in a diverse church?

2. How do people gain awareness of their identity in experiencing belonging in a diverse church?

3. How do people's identities form as they experience belonging in a diverse church?

4. What are the benefits of identity formation for people who experience belonging in a diverse church?

In order to gain insight into the research questions literature on identity formation, connection through vulnerability and belonging, and imaging God was reviewed. Then, interviews guided by these four questions were conducted with members of six ethnically and socio-economically diverse churches. Twenty ethnically diverse people were interviewed, eight of them in depth. Each participant had experienced belonging in their church, and possessed an awareness of the church's impact on them. Their answers to the

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[355] Some of these helpful works along these lines are Randy Woodley's, *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Ethnic Diversity*, Soong-Chan Rah's, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church,* Curtiss Paul DeYoung and Michael O. Emerson's, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation As an Answer to the Problem of Race.*

research questions were analyzed and presented in chapter four. This chapter brings the data from the literature review together with the findings of chapter four in order to discuss the findings and provide recommendations for practice and further research.

**Discussion of Findings**

In exploring the way people assessed the impact their diverse church had on their identity formation, their experience of belonging had to be considered. Their experience of belonging allowed for examination of their self-awareness of their identity. In the diverse church setting, the experience of belonging was organized into five themes: A Mission Mindset, Making Room, Authentic Friendship, Similarity, and the Gospel Message. Belonging was experienced as ethnic minorities educated non-minorities about minority culture and identity. Belonging was experienced as people were valued when room was made for them in fellowship and worship. Belonging was experienced as deep and real friendships developed across ethnic lines. Belonging was experienced as ethnic minorities, in particular, had others of their ethnic group in the congregation. Lastly, belonging was facilitated by the church's commitment to God's Word as the as the rule for faith and life.

In the examination of how people gain awareness of their identity as they experience belonging in a diverse church, the data revealed that cultural artifacts play an indispensable role. The meaningful things that can be observed about people and their background brought awareness of ethnic identity to the surface. Culturally observable artifacts like food, habits, gestures, dress, music, and worship practices are informed by

values and beliefs that are unobservable.[356] In diverse churches people become much more aware of their own artifacts and the artifacts of others. This growth in insight highlights an awareness of their own identity.

Identity is not the fixed marker that people may assume it to be. Identity is dynamically constructed socially.[357] Thus, it was prudent to explore how people's identities formed as they experience belonging in a diverse church. What emerged from the findings is that in diverse churches identities are formed through the experience of dissonance. Dissonance includes some degree of tension, discomfort, conflict, or disharmony arising out of the differences that exist in a diverse church. People's awareness of themselves began to change as they realized, and in some respects embraced the discomfort of their diverse context.

In spite of the struggles that each participant dealt with in the process of experiencing belonging in their diverse church, all of them spoke to the positive ways that they have been shaped and formed by their respective church. There were benefits of their identity formation.

Therefore, in light of the literature and the findings, the impact of the diverse church on the identity formation of its members develops in at least three ways.

*A New "We"*

In the literature discussion of culture, we saw Allport describe people's preference for sameness with the term in-group. His description of preference in this way was positive because in-group memberships are vitally important to an individual's survival.

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[356] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, 81-83.

[357] Oyserman, Elmore, and Smith, "Self, Self-Concept, and Identity," in *Handbook of Self and Identity*, 69.

Members of an in-group "all use the term *we* with the same essential significance."[358]

The first way the diverse church impacts the identity formation of its members is by

developing a new "we." People do not forget who they are ethnically, or become less

aware of their ethnicity. Rather, they embrace their identity as part of a new group.

Steven said that Living Hope taught him that he loved what the people of God

loved. The people of God he was referring to are the diverse members of the church. His

preferences had been shaped and formed into new preferences. Andrew discussed how,

when his perceptions changed about the difference in experiences between White men

and Black men, he did not feel ashamed or guilty about his White identity. Instead, the

change in perceptions resulted in his growing in love and appreciation for his brother.

Joyce struggled with the experience of belonging at All Saints for three years. As she

experienced the stripping away of her preferences, she was not left feeling lonely.

Belonging ensued, and she moved from the edge to the core. These personal shifts

represent the formation of new in-groups.

In-group membership is still vitally important, as Allport postulated. What

changes for people who find belonging in a diverse church is their in-group. This change

happens as people move from the edge to the core. Recall that Christerson, Edwards, and

Emerson differentiated core members from edge members in religious organizations.

Edge members are those people who are atypical of the organization. Core members are

those people who belong to the largest group, the group having the most influence and

power and sharing a visceral connection with the identity and mission of the

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[358] Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 31.

organization.[359] Thus, another way to describe the new "we" is the development of a visceral connection to the church.

The visceral connection that forms people into a new "we" takes place as authentic friendships develop. The authentic friendships are akin to the healing relationships described by McMinn. Healing relationships allow people to experience grace and hope in the middle of life's trials.[360] This healing happened in the diverse churches as people embraced vulnerability and decided to trust across racial and ethnic lines. Thompson called trust the building block of all secure relationships, and thus the starting point for those relationships.[361] Putnam said that trust benefits the individuals within a community by fostering cooperation and honest communication.[362] We saw this intersection of authentic friendship, vulnerability, and trust with Joyce. She felt as though people at All Saints were not authentic. Then, at the women's retreat in an experience of shared vulnerability, trust was developed with several women. She said that their vulnerability caused the guards and barriers in her heart to come down. As a Black women, she experienced these non-Black women as sisters in Christ and began to feel a real sense of connection. A similar experience of vulnerability was key for authentic friendships to develop for Dinesh as well at Christ the King. In the midst of struggling over whether to stay at the church he said he found that he belonged there. This

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[359] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*, 154.

[360] McMinn and American Association of Christian Counselors, *Psychology, Theology, and Spirituality in Christian Counseling*, 51.

[361] Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships*, 248.

[362] Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 134-35.

realization occurred because authentic friendships were developed across ethnic lines as he learned to be someone who is willing to take the risk of sharing his deep struggles. They, and others, took the risk of trusting people who did not share their ethnic identity.

Authentic friendships developed in the diverse churches as members embraced vulnerability and took the risk of trusting others. These friendships had an impact on the way those members viewed the whole community. It was a key aspect of how the sense of a new "we" flourished.

*Locating Oneself in Christ and Culture*

A second way diverse churches have an impact on the identity formation of their members is by helping them to locate their identity in Christ along with their ethnic identity. Randy Woodley noted that God did not only create humanity male and female, but he created ethnicity also. It is a gift to be celebrated, not a handicap to be hidden.[363] Although some participants felt pressure to suppress their ethnic identity and conform to a White cultural norm, they were formed through this dissonance to grow in awareness of their need to locate their identity in Christ.

One of the themes that emerged from the data is that people experience belonging also through similarity. People need to be able, in some way, to locate themselves culturally in the context of their diverse church, in spite of the fact that they are being shaped into a new "we."

Melvin's instant connection with another Black person at Resurrection caused him to think, "Now that you're here it makes it easier." The addition of just one more

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[363] Woodley, *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Diversity,* 67.

person from his country to the membership of Christ the King enriched Dinesh's

experience at the church. These experiences support Kuecker's postulation that the group

dynamic of ethnic identity and ethnocentrism provides a way for people to know

themselves in a world of dizzying and complex diversity.[364] So, even if the complex

diversity is within a church context, people's ethnic awareness ought to be maintained.

This necessity was seen even in the mission mindset theme. The ethnic minorities

in particular expressed a missional approach to educating the majority culture people in

the church. Several participants began to see their membership at their church as God

calling them to help educate other church members who have not developed any

substantive relationships with people from their ethnic group. As they went about this

mission, they were simultaneously affirming their ethnic identity.

Thus, a benefit of identity formation in a diverse church is also a sharpened sense

of one's identity in Christ. This benefit matters because, as pointed out in the literature

review, ethnic identity is also socially constructed and therefore fluid. To those embedded

within their culture, a person's ethnicity *feels* inherent to his identity. It feels absolute.[365]

Locating one's primary identity in Christ helps to guard against making ethnic identity

absolute, when it is not. Put another way, the diverse church is helping people keep their

focus on Jesus Christ, and finding their identity in him helps them avoid cultural idolatry.

Lints made the point well when he said that people are to know that their security

and significance are rooted in the God they image.[366] The care to avoid making one's

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[364] Kuecker, *Ethnicity and Social Identity*, Location 1557.

[365] Ibid., Location 1725.

[366] Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, 87.

ethnic identity an idol brings back the second commandment discussion in the literature review. Connecting the notion of idols to desires, Lints spoke to the great danger for Israel that the second commandment articulated. This danger was that Israel would be led astray by their own desires, and they would be remade in the image of those desires. Their identity would then mirror those images instead of God. This warning and danger applies even today in the context of understanding one's ethnic identity. People are not called to strike a balance between identity in Christ and ethnic identity as if too much of one washes out the other. Instead, people are to understand their ethnic identity as subservient to their identity in Christ. The diverse church helps to form people in this way by revealing that their ethnic identity is not absolute.

*Worship*

Steve Guthrie said that the experience of community is profoundly connected to the act of music-making. Music-making is a way of manifesting the community.[367] Both the literature and the data revealed the importance of the worship experience in identity formation within diverse churches. Certainly, the worship experience is broader than music. Sarah even discussed the impact a congregational prayer had on her during the worship service at All Saints. In addition, worship as a formative aspect in diverse churches would fit as a subset underneath the development of a new in-group, or the way one locates her identity in Christ. However, its prominence in the literature and from the participants calls for worship to stand on its own as a way the diverse church has an impact on the identity formation of its members.

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[367] Guthrie, *Creator Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Art of Becoming Human,* 91.

Dr. Korie Edwards' research into diverse churches revealed that in the American context, churches are most successful when they appeal to one group.[368] This conclusion caused her to call religious integration a dubious enterprise.[369] Lifeway's 2014 research survey, *American Views on Church Segregation,* found that sixty-six percent of Americans have never regularly attended a place of worship where they were an ethnic minority.[370] Bob Smietana, in response to that survey noted that American churchgoers are lukewarm about diversity.[371] The Pew Research Center, in 2007, reported that Protestant churches in America are not ethnically diverse in any substantive way.[372] Thus, the research participants for this dissertation are outside of the norm within Protestant Christianity in America. They have all experienced belonging in an ethnically diverse church, and the worship experience played a significant role in their formation.

Worship was one of two formation themes that each primary participant included. The worship experience in the church was not neutral for anyone. It either helped or hindered the experience of belonging, the formation of a new "we." It communicated to people whether or not room was being made for them in the church. This theme will return in the recommendations below. For now, it is sufficient to say that the worship experience impacts the identity formation of its members broadly and deeply.

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[368] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches,* Location 72.

[369] Ibid., Location 59.

[370] Research, *American Views on Church Segregation*, 4.

[371] Smietana, "Sunday Morning Segregation: Most Worshippers Feel Their Church Has Enough Diversity."

[372] Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, 75.

There are positions that diverse churches ought to hold that help in the identity formation of their members. In the next section three positions arising from the literature and data are recommended.

## Recommendations

Identity formation takes place in community and is influenced by that community. Dr. Michael Hogg says, "Groups furnish us with an identity, a way of locating ourselves in relation to other people."[373] Therefore, it is important for the diverse church to hold positions and engage in practices that encourage healthy identity formation of its members. Based on an analysis of the literature and the interview data, I offer three recommendations for pursuing healthy identity formation in a diverse church. The first recommendation connects the gospel message theme from the data with the Trinitarian focus of unity in diversity in the literature. Churches need to embrace the theology of unity in diversity as a gospel imperative. The second recommendation connects the literature on culture with the dissonance people experienced in the formation of their identity within the diverse church. Churches need to have an awareness of the unseen cultural values that operate beneath the surface of their expression of church. The third recommendation connects the literature on dignity and hospitality with the practices that help to affirm the full humanity of all members.

### *Gospel Imperative*

Each church's commitment to the gospel in word and deed was a prevalent theme among the research participants. This commitment helped participants persevere through

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[373] Hogg, "Social Identity and the Psychology of Groups," 502.

the aspects of the church that hindered belonging. Because each church was committed to the Bible as the central authority in the church, the participants were willing to overlook or work through some of the ways their experience of belonging was hindered. Andrea's desire was for the Word of God. That desire was a key draw to her church. Steven expressed that belonging was also facilitated through the church's love for God's Word as expressed in Reformed theology. Eun, in her search, asked the question, "Is the pastor preaching the gospel, and am I going to get fed?" Alea continued to make the one-hour drive to Cross Community Church each week because she had never heard truth the way it was shared there. Indeed, if it were not for each church's commitment to God's Word, and what the participants considered doctrinal soundness, none of the participants would have experienced belonging. They would not have remained at the church.

One particular aspect of the gospel will help facilitate belonging and identity formation. The literature discussed God's inner life and the relationship of that life to the communal life of his people. God's triune nature, his unity in diversity as one who exists in mutual glorifying community is instructive for how he designed humanity to image him. Therefore, since God in himself has both unity and diversity, it is not surprising that unity and diversity are reflected in the human relationships that God has established. Thus, in the church there are many members yet one body.[374] Fellowship within the church becomes the basis for identity itself. To be made in the image of God is to be

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[374] Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine,* 256-257.

made in relationship.[375] The unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in diversity is seen in the created unity in diversity of humanity.

God's existence in mutually loving and glorifying community suggests an important way in which Christians can be like members of the Trinity. Christians are called to defer to one another, glorify one another, be readily available for one another, and promote one another's purposes—loving each other as God has loved them.[376]

This belief cannot be seen as a tangential or side issue to the gospel if diverse churches are going to facilitate belonging for their members. To refuse to pursue unity in diversity as a gospel imperative is to fundamentally neglect what it means for humanity to image God. Bavinck is correct to say,

> Only humanity in its entirety—as one complete organism, summed up under a single head, spread out over the whole earth, as a prophet proclaiming the truth of God, as priest dedicating itself to God, as ruler controlling the earth and the whole of creation—only it is the fully finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God.[377]

The gospel imperative for the church is not simply the call to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In that way of expressing the gospel message, a radically individualistic emphasis overwhelms the definition of what it means to be a Christian. While no one would argue that the Lord saves individuals and reconciles them to himself, the gospel is so much more than that. It must include the fullness of what it means to be made in the image of God. The finished image, the most telling and striking likeness of God is the entirety of redeemed humanity. Holding a position like this will

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[375] Kapic, Morris, and Vos, "Where Does Authority Come From? A Conversation with a Theologian, a Biologist, and a Sociologist," 3.

[376] Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 696.

[377] Bavinck, Bolt, and Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation,* 577.

change the character of preaching in a church as well as the way a church lives in

fellowship.

For example, here is how a commitment to the gospel imperative of imaging God

by unity in diversity impacts one's understanding and implications of a text like the

Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-8.[378] Humanity was in solidarity with everyone having

the same language and speaking the same words. However, unity among humanity after

the Fall resulted in rebellion and rejection of the Lord's commands. Humanity was one

big happy family against the Lord.

The word that fell from God at Babel in Genesis 11:7 included judgment and

mercy. Humanity's language was confused so that they could not understand one another

and were forced to fill the earth. The willful rebellion of humanity against God's explicit

command resulted in the use of all their faculties united for an impossible goal. They

joined together to establish themselves as God, with all authority and power. God

mercifully moved to restrain their sin by confusing their language.

Yet, there was still the issue of the confusion of their language. "Ghetto living"

had been created. From Babel onward people are still in solidarity against God, yet this

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[378] Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore, its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth. Genesis 11:1-8.

solidarity is expressed in isolated communities. These ghettos, because they are in rebellion against God, are also naturally against each other.

Thus, what happens far too often is that people understand their human dignity and value as coming from isolated community. And they begin to love their ghettos to a fault—ethnic ghettos, social ghettos, cultural ghettos, economic ghettos, academic ghettos. When people see cultural and ethnic differences they do not naturally embrace their God-given, creational dissimilarity. Instead of rejoicing in God's created diversity, groups immediately distrust others. They instinctively reject others and often mock.

When Christ came, he proclaimed far more than individual salvation. He proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom. Integral to that is the restoration and renewal of community, the reversal of Babel. Jesus said that his Father assigned to him a kingdom, and he assigns this kingdom to his apostles.[379] This language is covenantal.

After his resurrection, Jesus spent forty days speaking to his disciples about the kingdom of God.[380] When the Spirit came and filled the disciples for kingdom proclamation and work, the first thing they did was declare the mighty works of God. Men from what Luke calls every nation under heaven—Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Crete, Arabia, Rome—were able to hear, understand, and respond to the message.[381] The work of bringing people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation under the banner of the Lamb of God had begun.

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[379] Luke 22:28–29.

[380] Acts 1:3.

[381] Acts 2:5.

God continues this work today, and it will not be complete until the consummation of the Kingdom. The day is coming when the redeemed will fully reflect the image of our Creator as one family, summed up under our single head, Jesus Christ. This vision is the biblical, covenantal, and gospel calling for every church on earth.

The Tower of Babel text may be preached any number of ways, with any number of implications for people. However, viewing a text like this through a Trinitarian lens of imaging God by unity in diversity will not prevent the issues that hinder belonging in diverse churches. What it does is ground people in the theological foundation needed to remain committed to a diverse church.

*Cultural Awareness*

The second recommendation is for diverse churches to gain cultural awareness of their church and the members who make up the church. Because cultural values lie beneath surface of the things we see, hear, and experience, they often go unaddressed. Therefore, churches need to develop an awareness of the unseen cultural values among them. Those churches have been formed by those values, and if they are to pursue the creation of a new "we," where the dividing walls of hostility are broken down, they cannot afford to ignore the values that form their expression of "church."

This study's literature review concluded that culture influences identity formation by providing a seemingly fixed understanding of the self, even though in reality identity is fluid. Additionally, identity and culture are so linked that they are often viewed as synonymous.[382] In religious organizations, differences in culture are often framed in

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[382] Stryker and Burke, "The Past, Present, and Future of Identity Theory," 284.

absolute terms. A particular challenge in diverse churches is the mixture of different

cultural backgrounds into one group. People may enter that context with a seemingly

fixed identity and culture. Yet, the diverse church (as do all organizations) develops its

own culture. It cannot be stated enough that, when measured in terms of numbers,

churches in America are most successful when they appeal to one group. Diverse

churches are included in that measurement. Thus, it was seen in the interview analysis

that Darryl and Joyce felt the pressure to assimilate to the cultural context of All Saints

church. All Saints is a diverse church, and as Black members Darryl and Joyce contribute

to that diversity. However, to them the church's culture appealed primarily to White,

highly educated people. Since this research focused on church members, the pastors of

All Saints were not interviewed. It may still be concluded that they had some awareness

of the way the church's culture came across to non-Whites because Darryl wrote a letter

to them to that effect. Whether or not any changes were made is unknown, but it is better

for them to be aware of their cultural preferences, than to let them linger beneath the

surface of their practices unaddressed.

Just as Livermore claimed that people ought to develop cultural intelligence (CQ),

so churches ought to develop it. That is, churches need to be able to better express love

cross-culturally.[383] This is not to say that there ought to be an "everything is up for grabs"

attitude toward practices in a diverse church. However, there must be a clear grasp of

what are essentials and what are preferences. The preferences may need to be subject to

change for the benefit of loving others, an implication of CQ, where a church would

contextualize itself for the benefit of those they desire to welcome. In other words, the

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[383] Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World,* 125.

contextualization is for the purpose of loving one's neighbor. If the diverse church is not aware of its own culture, it will not have the tools to discern its preferences.

The need for contextualization appeared in Courtney's story of a misunderstanding with some of the African women who wanted to serve in the children's ministry. The decision to implement a background check for people who serve in the nursery is certainly culturally sensitive. However, it is a wise and almost essential practice. Because of the background checks and how the requirement was communicated, the African women involved did not feel accepted by the church. In this instance, the cultural practice was not going to change, but Courtney and others were going to have to understand how the practice was heard by their African sisters. Courtney was also willing to contextualize herself in order to help the women feel accepted.

The interview analysis demonstrated that a common theme among the participants in how their identities formed as they experienced belonging in their diverse church is through dissonance. Their awareness of themselves began to change as they realized, and in some respects embraced the discomfort of their diverse context. The goal of this recommendation for cultural awareness is not to remove the experience of dissonance in diverse churches. That would be impossible. Rather, it is to impress upon diverse churches that if they are to help facilitate belonging for people, and contribute to healthy identity formation, they must be aware of the values that underlie their practices and how those practices are received by others.

### *Affirming Full Humanity*

Harrison claimed that it is the church's responsibility to find ways to affirm the full humanity—the royal dignity—of all people, especially those whom others are

inclined to despise.[384] As image-bearers of God all people have inherent dignity. Part of the challenge that people face because of sin is, as Pratt implies, toggling somewhere between two poles. One end is having a sense of worthlessness, and on the other end is having an over-inflated sense of self-importance. One person says, "I am nothing." Another says, "I am God."[385] To affirm the full humanity of people is to help them be situated rightly in understanding their immense value while simultaneously grasping that they are not God.

This self-awareness is a particular challenge in a diverse church context because race and socio-economic status in society contribute to one's sense of dignity by assigning value to one's race or position. Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson found in their research that in cross-cultural contact even if people feel personally warm toward one another, social factors larger than individual relationships appear to overcome the cross-racial ties.[386] The impact of racial hierarchy, of privilege, and class in society has a substantial impact on the way people interact with one another and value themselves. Their research was particularly focused on religious organizations. So, the diverse church is not immune to this dynamic. It cannot simply be said, "Just believe in Jesus, and those cross-racial social challenges will disappear." Courtney said as much when she admitted that at first she was ignorant and thought, "Oh, we're all God's people and we can worship together." Then, she realized, "actually, we need to talk to each other and find

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[384] Harrison, *God's Many-Splendored Image: Theological Anthropology for Christian Formation,* 106.

[385] Pratt, *Designed for Dignity: What God Has Made It Possible for You to Be*, 2.

[386] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*, 156.

out what our differences are." You don't overcome the dignity dynamic simply by believing in Jesus together.

In order to affirm the full humanity of all, diverse churches should pay particular attention to two of the practices in the literature that make for healthy community. One of those intentional practices is a focus on structural inclusion. Structural inclusion is an aspect of hospitality and of making room for others. Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson found that structural inclusion was one of the ways to move people away from the edge and toward the core of an interracial religious organization. In one case efforts were instituted to draw edge people in toward the core, but not in terms of assimilation. Instead the effort focused on influence, social ties, and structural changes.[387] DeYoung, Emerson, Yancy, and Kim created three categories to describe the degree of racial integration in multiracial congregations; the assimilated multiracial congregation; the pluralist multiracial congregation; and the integrated multiracial congregation. The integrated multiracial congregation is the theological ideal where a new "we" is created.[388] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson note, since people in the out-group (edge members) pay the greatest cost to belong in an interracial organization, their representation within the organization can be increased through structural inclusion like, incorporating music from the out-group's culture, increasing diversity in the staff, accommodating different attitudes and understandings of time, and instituting children's programs.[389]

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[387] Ibid., 154.

[388] DeYoung et al., *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race,* 159-63.

[389] Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations,* 154.

This structural inclusion has to be pursued with authenticity, not as a way of creating a statistical diversity within the church structures. Recall that Joyce was asked to serve in a leadership position on a ministry board at All Saints, but she felt it was more like a token than a valued member, which damaged her trust in the church's authenticity. The research participants also endured struggles as they felt pressure to assimilate. Melvin spoke about the discomfort and difficulty in relating to others as a Black man in one of Resurrection's small group Bible studies. He would not assimilate, but that left him without a good foundation for camaraderie and fellowship. The churches did not feel like the integrated multiracial congregations described in the literature as the theological ideal. One of the ways that perception changed for Eun was when she experienced similarity in leadership. Structural inclusion occurred after hearing her Korean American pastor share his testimony. She said that she's always felt like the loner and that no one understood her background and experience as a Christian or Korean. But when her pastor shared his testimony she said, "I was like, 'Oh my gosh, he's speaking about me!'" It helped her experience more belonging because the similarity of their stories, in a Korean American context, helped her realize that she was not a loner.

The second practice that helps diverse churches affirm the full humanity of its members is the proper exercise of power. The use of power in the world as a battle for dominance cannot be the way it is exercised in a diverse church.[390] Such norms would, as Crouch says, make power the destroyer of community, the "unmaker of humanity."[391] The proper exercise of power in a diverse church means creating an environment where

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[390] Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power,* Location 664.

[391] Ibid., Location 450.

people are able to flourish.[392] Edwards expressed the difficulty of this challenge in

diverse churches. She found that in interracial churches, those who wield power affirm

white privilege and culture. Non-Whites bear the burden of maintaining a racially mixed

worship experience.[393] Her finding is not a result of malicious intent; it is another

implication of the way cultural values operate beneath the surface.

The practice of properly exercising power is directly related to structural

inclusion. The diverse church must value people by making room for them in fellowship

and worship. Leadership has the responsibility to exercise authority in a way that

facilitates this kind of welcome and embrace, as when leadership provided forums and

conferences for members to address the issues of race and injustice. These dialogues

facilitated belonging for Eun, Joyce, Darryl, and Dinesh. Their experience of belonging

was enhanced by their church's willingness to bring up the issue of race in a way that

invited open dialogue and vulnerability.

These recommendations—embracing the theology of unity in diversity as a gospel

imperative, developing an ongoing awareness of the unseen cultural values operating

within the church, and affirming the full humanity of members—are no easy task. I

submit, however, that they are necessary if diverse churches (and those who desire to

become diverse) are going to intentionally contribute to the healthy identity formation of

their members. Intentionally or otherwise, they will be contributing to their members'

identity formation, so they may as well lead in ways toward improved identity formation

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[392] Ibid.

[393] Edwards, *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches,* Location 485.

as opposed to continuing what may have become bad habits leading to limited identity formation in Christ.

## Recommendations for Further Study

Several areas related to this study could not be pursued, due to time constraints and my narrow focus on identity formation, and yet, they are worthy of further investigation. First of all, the influence of church leadership on identity formation within diverse churches was evident in the interviews. Decisions that leaders make in diverse churches, their particular perspective on what makes for church health in a diverse context, and their own sense of ethnic identity, have significance. I did not speak with any pastors other than as a means of getting connected with their congregants. It would be beneficial to research identity formation in diverse churches from the pastors' perspective. Such research may lead to helpful analysis of the differences and similarities between the way members assess their identity formation and the way pastors influence identity formation.

A second area of study would be to examine identity formation in homogenous or mono-ethnic churches. As the Pew and Lifeway research demonstrated, most American Protestant churches fit that situation. This particular study assumed that, because God intends for his church to reflect humanity's diversity as it gathers, this diversity would be beneficial to the identity formation of the members. Indeed, the interview analysis revealed identity formation benefits. However, these conclusions do not imply that there are no identity formation benefits in homogenous churches. While I would argue that those churches are not God's ideal, he has in his providence allowed them to flourish. The literature not only revealed a preference people have for sameness but that this

preference can be positive. It may at times be crucial for survival. This situation is particularly so with minorities in America, since the tendency even in diverse churches is still toward majority culture expression. People may need to remain in ethnically minority homogenous churches. What are the benefits in that context to identity formation? How does it compare with the diverse church?

Lastly, this research focused exclusively on the American context. Yet, the church is all over the world. What would research into identity formation in diverse churches in other parts of the world reveal? How is the American context, with our history of racialization, different from other parts of the world that do not have the same racialized society? It is likely that those places still exhibit a hierarchy of privilege, but is that different from racial hierarchy?

In closing, my desire is for this study to benefit the church as we continue to experience the growing diversity in neighborhoods across America. This study is not intended to be an end in itself. Rather, I pray that it is part of a beginning point to examining and discovering ways the church can become more intentional in shaping and forming people into faithful witnessed to Jesus Christ in the midst of America's changing demographic. I am certainly committed and challenged toward this end as a pastor.

**Research Subjects Consent Form**

| RESEARCH SUBJECTS CONSENT FORM |
|---|

I agree to participate in the research which is being conducted by **Irwyn Ince** on identity formation in diverse churches. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:
1) The purpose of the research is to explore how people who experience belonging in a diverse church assess the impact the church has on their identity formation.

2) Potential benefits of the research may include: (1) helping to address the impact that committing to a local congregation comprised of multiple ethnicities has on the individual's maintenance, development of, and challenge to ethnic identity, (2) assisting churches and their leadership who want to understand how the challenges of pursuing ethnic diversity impact their members and congregations, (3) assisting denominations that want to reject ethnic homogeneity and learn how to love those who have not historically been members of their churches.

3) The research process will include: researching literature on identity formation, belonging, and imaging God, as well as interviewing members of diverse churches, and analyzing the data gathered in the interview process.

4) Potential discomforts or stresses: sharing intimate or uncomfortable details about church experiences and relationships within the church.

5) Potential risks: None.

6) The results of this study are confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law. Audiotapes or videotapes of interviews will be erased following the completion of the project/dissertation.

7) The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the study.

_____          _____
Signature of Researcher        Date            Signature of Participant        Date

Please sign both copies of this form.  Keep one and return the other to the researcher.
Thank you.

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Research at Covenant Theological Seminary which involves human participants is overseen by the
Doctor of Ministry Committee. Questions or problems regarding your rights as a participant should be
addressed to:
      Director, Doctor of Ministry
      Covenant Theological Seminary
      12330 Conway Road; St. Louis, MO 63141          Telephone (314) 434-4044

**Appendix B**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Name: _____          Date: _____

1. What is your age?

   a. 25 or under

   b. 26-40

   c. 41-55

   d. 56 or older


2. What is your gender

   a. Male

   b. Female


3. What is your primary language?

   a. English

   b. Other _____

4.  How would you classify yourself?

    a.  Arab

    b.  Asian/Pacific Islander

    c.  Black

    d.  Caucasian/White

    e.  Hispanic

    f.  Indigenous

    g.  Latino

    h.  Multiracial

    i.  Other _____

5.  Did you grow up in a Christian home?

    a.  Yes

    b.  No

6.  Is this the first ethnically/racially diverse church you have been a member of?

    a.  Yes

    b.  No

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