CHRISTIAN WOMEN DISCUSS THE INFLUENCE
OF FAITH ON THEIR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

by

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For many young adults, career decision-making is a challenge that may lead to feelings of disequilibrium, stress, and anxiety. This disequilibrium may be especially problematic for young Christian women. On one hand, their belief system may provide a stabilizing anchor, and embue them with a sense of purpose (Fowler, 1981). On the other hand, distinct Christian values may further perpetuate traditional male-female roles and thus limit their labour force participation (Scott, 2002). To better understand this dichotomy and add to the limited research on this topic, my study explored the relationship between Christian faith and career development with a sample of four women (ages 33 to 51) already established in their careers. Research data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Each interview was preceded by the construction of a lifeline, or timeline of major events in the participant’s life (Campbell & Ungar, 2004). Themes emerging from case and cross analyses were (a) life story, (b) centrality of motherhood, and (c) spiritual grounding. These three themes were first reported for each participant as an individual case, and then in an overview of findings across cases.

Implications for post-secondary career counsellors, based on this study’s results, as well as on relevant literature, focus on incorporating the notion of calling into three traditional career development activities: (a) self-discovery; (b) exploration and research; and (c) formulating a plan. Implications for career development researchers include: (a) creating a comprehensive theory reflecting spiritual and non-spiritual factors in women’s career development; (b) studying this topic with different methodologies; and (c) undertaking a best practices study of career programs integrating calling at secular or non-secular universities. These practical and theoretical implications may provide post-secondary career counsellors guidance on how to direct young women of diverse faith backgrounds to explore and pursue their fields of choice.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In a 21st century work world of rapid change, insecurity, and instability, career development—career choice formulation and implementation—is a challenge for many young adults (Arnett, 2000; Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 2000). Inability to make career decisions may lead to feelings of disequilibrium, stress, and anxiety (Guay, Ratelle, Senécal, Larose, & Deschenes, 2006). For young women, factors complicating career development include (a) gender-role socialization, (b) limited exposure to career information, (c) lack of relevant role models, (d) horizontal or vertical labour market segregation (the relegation of women to certain fields, or the clustering of women at lower levels of occupations, respectively), and (e) on-the-job discrimination (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001; Hopfl & Atkinson, 2000). Due to such barriers, these young women may forego promising, viable career paths for others that are lower-status and underutilize their abilities (Cook, Heppner, & O’Brien, 2002).

For young Christian women, faith may offer a stabilizing anchor in the midst of career uncertainty and help them make meaning of life events (Fowler, 1981; Pargament, Magyar-Russell, & Murray-Swank, 2005). Faith may further support their career development by providing them with a sense of calling, or a belief that they are called by God to fulfill a purpose in the world (Towner, 2002). In turn, the perception of work as a calling may imbue them with career meta-competencies, such as vocational identity—a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, personality, and talents” (Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980, p. 1) and adaptability—“the capacity to change” (Hall & Chandler, 2005, p. 163). These meta-competencies, or higher-order skills, may in turn strengthen them to persevere in the face of difficult circumstances (Emmons, 2005; Hall & Chandler, 2005).

The term calling has been applied broadly to work—both paid and unpaid (Dik & Duffy, in press)—that contributes positively to one’s local or world-wide community and to which one
may apply one’s values, interests, and talents. In a spiritual sense, however, a calling is divinely
inspired. Dik and Duffy (in press) further define a calling as:

> a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a
> particular life role (e.g., occupation) in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or
deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness, and that which holds other-oriented
values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (p. 6)

A calling may be discerned through meditative self-reflection, dialogue and interaction with one’s community, and union with God in prayer and scripture reading (Weiss, Skelley, Haughey, & Hall, 2004). For most, a calling is realized gradually, sometimes painstakingly (Hall & Chandler, 2005), rather than by means of a dramatic breakthrough (Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000). Moreover, a calling may be enacted in initial career decisions, as a motivator toward a specific career or field (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007), as well as in one’s approach to daily work activities (Duffy & Blustein, in press).

Conversely, Christian faith may have a limiting effect on career development. For many women, gender-role socialization is a key factor in career decision-making. Within a nuclear family structure, they may experience this socialization as a stipulation that women bear the brunt of housework and childcare duties (Byars-Winston & Fouad, 2006). Mixed messages young women receive regarding career and family often exacerbate career indecision (Farmer, 1996). For instance, a longitudinal study by Levinson and Levinson (1994) on women’s career development stages found that the dichotomous roles of career woman and homemaker created an ambiguity that made it difficult for participants to specify goals. Distinct values found in a Christian context may further perpetuate traditional male-female roles (Scott, 2002). For instance, in many conservative Christian churches, women cannot hold the highest leadership positions and may not be ordained as ministers. Thus they must submit to male leadership (Gallagher, 2003). Such churches also espouse an ideology of divinely ordained gender differentiation. These churches’ preference that women stay at home with their children, especially when these children are young, may limit the extent of conservative Christian women’s labour force participation or
constrain the types of work they consider (Chadwick & Garrett, 1995). Moreover, messages from
religious doctrine often “teach girls to defer to the career priorities of their husbands” (Lucas,
Skokowski, & Ancis, 2000, p. 78).

In my own life, career decision-making, as well as religious and spiritual growth, have been salient since I entered the stage (18 to 25 years) known as emerging adulthood (Arnett,
2000). As a third-generation Seventh-day Adventist Christian female, my upbringing was
distinctly faith-based. From early childhood, church, and later, church school, attendance provided a constant backdrop to my activities. In recent years, as a young adult attending a
secular university, and as the youth leader at my church, I have engaged in a process of defining the role my faith will play throughout the course of my life. As part of this process, it has been vital for me to reconcile my spiritual beliefs, and the specific doctrines of my denomination, with career choice. Thus this research interest has arisen from both my religious background and current spiritual journey, as well as from my desire to uncover information that may assist and guide young Christian women in their career development. This knowledge may then inform the work of counsellors and educators who encounter students from diverse faith backgrounds.

Purpose

The purpose of this interview-based study with four Christian women was to understand the religious and spiritual influences on these women’s career decision-making and professional development. I chose to focus on women who were already well-established in their career paths. By exploring these women’s experiences, I hoped to gain insight into the means by which religious faith might facilitate or hinder females’ career development in the post-secondary years and beyond. With this new understanding, I expected to add to the limited literature on this topic and provide career counsellors suggestions on how to better meet the needs of young women of faith, particularly young Christian women.
Four questions guiding this research were:

1. How do these Christian women describe the role of religion and spirituality in their career decision-making and professional development?

2. How may religious and spiritual beliefs facilitate these women’s career development?

3. How may religious and spiritual beliefs constrain these women’s career development?

4. Which resources do these Christian women describe as best supporting them in the various phases of their career development?

Rationale

To resolve career decision-making dilemmas, traditional career theory and practice rely on identifying an individual’s abilities, interests, and vocational background, and matching those traits with congruent occupations (Bright & Pryor, 2005; Brott, 2001). The dominant trait-matching model may be a practical first step in fostering an increased awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses relative to the job market (Cochran, 1997). However, it assumes that people do not change much over time (Hopfl & Atkinson, 2000) and that their careers develop in a linear, rational, and ordered manner (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001). It also assumes that the work role is most central to individuals’ lives (Betz, 2002). Hence it does not fully capture the complexities of women’s career paths (Stroh & Reilly, 1999). In addition, it may not always bring deeper questions of meaning and purpose into career practice. This limitation is problematic, as early adulthood may be a period of both career development and spiritual or religious exploration and growth (Marcia, 1980; Nelson, 2003; Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000). Moreover, the interrelatedness of religion, spirituality, and career continues over the life span, as career counsellors Colozzi and Colozzi (2000) discovered when over 75% of their clients of all ages
expressed a need to incorporate spirituality in career decision-making. Vocational research also
indicates that values, religious or otherwise, influence most major life decisions (Patton, 2000).

The connection between faith and career-related choices may be even more pronounced
for women. Religious literature indicates that women seek faith-based teachings or advice more
frequently than men (Buchko, 2004; Scott, 2002). They are also more likely than men to have a
personal devotional life and to perceive God as a nurturing inner mentor (Schaffner & Dixon,
2003). In addition, studies on spiritual strivings indicate that older church-going females exhibit
the greatest tendency of all populations to attribute spiritual significance to their life goals
(Emmons, 2005). Religion seems to play a large role in the lives of Canadian women,
specifically, as statistics show 84% of all Canadian women, compared to 78% of Canadian men,
have some type of religious affiliation. Furthermore, in 2003, 21% of Canadian women over the
age of 15 reported attending religious activities once a week or more, while only 15% of men
reported the same (Statistics Canada, 2005).

Although these findings on the significance of faith to women suggest that women’s
career development may be significantly influenced by their faith, there is little empirical
investigation on the subject. On the whole, there is little research on the possible relationship
between faith and career development (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Furthermore, current
career counselling practice incorporating religious or spiritual concerns is still in its infancy and is
largely theoretical (Duffy, 2006). Consequently, this area calls for further study.

Definition of Key Terms

As the terms spirituality and religion are foundational to this research, a clear definition
of each is necessary. Although these terms may be defined in multiple ways, for the purposes of
this research, they are used as follows. Spirituality refers to a sense of connection to something
beyond the individual, which adds coherence, value, and direction to his or her life (Brewer,
2001; Fowler, 1981). Various authors have also conceptualized spirituality as: (a) a behaviour; (b)
a subjective experience; (c) a search; or (d) a type of energy or guiding force (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Robert, Young, and Kelly (2006) define spiritual well-being as “a source of balance, harmony, and happiness through connective relationships to self, community, [and] world” (p. 166). In contrast, religion is “the degree to which individuals adhere to the prescribed beliefs and practices of an organized religion or Higher Power” (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006, p. 228). Both religion and spirituality have been defined as “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (Pargament, 1997, p. 32).

Religion may be further classified as intrinsic or extrinsic. An intrinsic religious commitment is motivated by a sincere and personal faith, as well as by the individual’s desire to express that faith in daily life. Intrinsic religiousness has been linked to religious problem-solving for college students, with school or career decisions as the second most commonly cited issues to which students applied religious principles (Newman & Pargament, 1990). Extrinsic religiousness views religion in terms of external benefits—e.g., security, comfort, sociability, or status (Gorsuch, 1994; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Lewis & Hardin, 2002). Spirituality does not always co-exist with religion. However, it may encompass religion in the sense that an individual may be both spiritual and religious. This co-existence is particularly true of individuals who are religious for intrinsic reasons (Baker, 2003). In my review of the literature, I denote whether or not the term, spirituality, has a religious connotation. For my own research, given the Christian sample, I expected that for participants spirituality would be synonymous with religiousness.

As an sub-genre of religion and spirituality, a basic definition of Christian is: (a) “One who professes belief in Jesus as Christ or who follows the religion based on His teachings;” or (b) “One who lives according to the teachings of Jesus” (Webster’s II: New College Dictionary, 2001). With a belief in Jesus central to traditional Christian dogma, traditional Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God and the only way to salvation. In addition, many Christians feel Christianity is the only true faith, and the Bible, including the New Testament, is the Holy Word of God. Christians also typically believe in an afterlife of Heaven or Hell (Arnett & Jensen,
Concerning daily activities, more conservative forms of Christianity emphasize submission to authority, compassion toward others, and the importance of carrying out tasks with purpose (Walter & Davie, 1998; Weiss et al., 2004). For this study, I considered a Christian to be an adherent to a religion based on the teachings of Jesus, as well as an individual following the teachings of Jesus in his or her daily life.

Lastly, the term, career, is integral to this study. Objectively, a career denotes “the patterns and sequences of occupations and positions occupied by people throughout their working lives” (Young & Collin, 2000, p. 3). This view of career may entail linear, vertical progression within one organization, or “lateral movements within an organization or from one company to another” (Stroh & Reilly, 1999, p. 307). Subjectively, however, a career is the way a person views his or her life as a whole, especially in terms of vocational behaviour, actions, and experiences (Savickas, 2001). Hearn (1977) defined career as “nothing narrower than significant relationships between the individual and work, and the individual, work, and wider life over an extended period of time” (p. 275). The meaning of career is shifting toward a more spiritually-based definition, as “an overarching construct that gives meaning to the individual’s life” (Young & Collin, 2000, p. 5). This reinvention places a greater emphasis on a career as being self-directed and meaningful to the individual. It also looks less at how individuals fit into the labour force and more at how work fits into individuals’ lives (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006; Savickas, 2000). In this vein, career development is viewed as a behavioural process involving lifelong decisions about work and life, self and career identity, salient values, and role integration. Throughout this process, individuals often advance and gain new competencies through time and experience (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006).

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Of the various frameworks employed in career theory, those taking a more holistic view may best lend themselves to questions of the roles spirituality and religion play in career
development. Three such frameworks—Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 2000), complexity theory (Bloch, 2005), and Brewer’s (2001) Vocational Souljourn Paradigm (VSP) — are presented here. To date, both SCCT and complexity theory are supported by empirical data; Brewer’s (2001) VSP has not yet been used in a research study. In one instance, SCCT’s career decision self-efficacy construct was a focus of research on university students’ career development and spirituality (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). In another, non-spiritual study, career counselling interventions based on complexity theory had a more lasting effect on university students than traditional trait-matching methods (McKay, Bright, & Pryor, 2005).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) has been widely employed in quantitative studies with marginalized groups (e.g., first generation college students, women, and racial or ethnic minorities) and often examines barriers or supports to individuals’ career progress (Gainor, 2006; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000). Key constructs of SCCT are self-efficacy—confidence that one is capable of mastering a future task or activity (Betz & Hackett, 2006), and outcome expectations—perceived results of following a course of action. In SCCT, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, predisposed characteristics, and goals interact with demographic variables, background contextual factors, and experiential variables. These interactions guide career development in terms of interest formation, career goals, and achievements (Lent et al., 2000). Within this theory, career decision self-efficacy is the degree to which one feels capable of completing exploration tasks (e.g., self-appraisal and gathering occupational information) necessary to making career decisions (Duffy, 2006; Duffy & Lent, in press). Feelings of self-efficacy affect both behavioural attempts and persistence in the face of challenges (Fassinger, 2005). Low career decision-making self-efficacy may correlate with career indecisiveness or premature elimination of potentially suitable careers (Taylor & Betz, 1983). While recognizing an individual’s ability to exercise personal agency, or self-direction, in his or her career, SCCT acknowledges contextual factors (e.g., mentors, access to educational or career opportunities,
multiple role planning, and religious sub-culture) that may facilitate or constrain career
development (Lent et al., 2000).

Complexity theory, as employed in the fields of mathematics, science, social science, and
management (Bright & Pryor, 2005), posits that “in any system, such as a person or an
environment, each component is directly or indirectly affected by the other components” (Duffy,
2006, p. 57). When applied to career development, complexity theory focuses on nonlinear
changes in career trajectories rather than on the causal effects of specific individual features on a
career (Bright & Pryor, 2005). Within this theory, careers are dynamic and complex adaptive
entities, composed of a large number of components that interact in a recursive manner (Bloch,
2005; Bright & Pryor, 2005; Leong, 1996). As such, they are in a constant state of flux,
“unpredictable, and subject to change” (Bright & Pryor, 2005, p. 296). Spirituality may be one
such variable. Bloch’s (2004) conception of spirituality in complexity theory postulates that
career development occurs within interrelated networks (e.g., the individual, education,
occupations, culture, and the needs of the community). Bloch (2005) also defines several
principles relating career development to spirituality: (a) “believing that one is called to the work
one does by a particular mix of talents, interests, and values” (Bloch, 2005, p. 202); (b)
experiencing community in the work setting; (c) working in a setting convergent with one’s
talents, interests, ethics, and values; (d) believing one’s work serves others in some way and thus
has a purpose beyond financial gain; and (e) achieving balance among work, leisure, learning,
and family relationships. Significantly, individuals who feel their work is spiritual consider it a
contribution to the world. A spiritual view of work, within the framework of complexity theory,
may also reveal order and purpose in apparent disorder (Bloch, 2004).

Unlike SCCT and complexity theory, Brewer’s (2001) Vocational Souljourn Paradigm
(VSP) was created expressly to incorporate spirituality into career development. The VSP cites
meaning, being, and doing as fundamentals of spiritual wellness at work. In this model, meaning
refers to one’s core values and passions, as well as to the significance one ascribes to life
experiences. Being refers to one’s unfolding process of individuation, including the development of personality, talents, interests, expectations, and beliefs. Doing refers to taking purposeful action after carefully examining ambitions, interests, and abilities. Vocation, or enactment of a calling, best represents the alignment of meaning, being, and doing (Duffy, 2006). According to the VSP, a vocation is the most meaningful type of work along a continuum progressing from job, to occupation, to career, and ending with vocation. In the VSP, a vocation is a type of mission that may be paid or unpaid. A vocational souljourn is a recursive cycle of discovering meaning, being, and doing, and expressing that discovery in the external world through work and life choices. When the balance of meaning, being, and doing is not maintained and some aspect of life has shifted, individuals experience inertia; this disequilibrium initially leads to a loss of purpose, but when righted, may lead to personal and spiritual growth. As one of the few career development theories linked with spirituality, the VSP is based solely on the author’s observations and counsellor experience. Collectively, the three frameworks provided both a foundation for my initial research questions and an analytical lens through which to examine the literature in this field.

Overview of Thesis

In this research, the primary method consisted of case studies in which the voices of a sample of four Christian women expressed the influence of religious and spiritual beliefs on their career development, from initial choices to present. The first chapter, Introduction, (a) states my purpose and delineates the study’s broad research questions, (b) presents the rationale for this study, (c) defines key terms, and (d) provides the theoretical frameworks I employed to organize my investigation. The second chapter, Literature Review, places the study within the context of existing research on (a) women and careers, (b) Christians and careers, and (c) Christian women and careers. The third chapter, Methodology, describes participant demographics, and details the
qualitative data collection and analysis guiding the study. The fourth chapter provides the study’s key results, with narrative case reports on each woman per theme. The fifth chapter presents (a) discussion of findings and themes across participants, (b) a synopsis of the relevance of each theoretical framework to case and cross-case analysis, (c) implications for research and for practice, and (d) concluding thoughts.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The complex relationship between faith and Christian women’s career development is rarely addressed in vocational literature. Conversely, much research exists on the career development of women in general. Thus I present key findings from the broader research on women and careers before introducing literature on the careers of Christians, and Christian women in particular. In the first section, women and careers, I overview (a) increases in women’s labour force opportunities from the early 20th century to the present, (b) barriers to women’s career development, including gender-role socialization, and (c) negative and positive aspects of the interaction between the work-family interface and women’s careers. In the second section, I describe and critique findings on (a) workplace spirituality and its positive influence on workers’ attitudes and behaviours, and (b) the role of faith in university students’ career choices. In the third section, I discuss the literature on Christian women, faith, and career development. The majority of these studies examine the relation between faith and career development from the perspective of academics in Christian post-secondary institutions.

Women and Careers

At the start of the 20th century, the notion of separate gender-roles was prevalent in a newly industrialized Western culture (Phillips & Phillips, 2000). This ideology held that innate biological differences suited males and females for dissimilar societal roles. Given this ideology, it seemed natural for men to be engaged in outside employment, while women remained in the home, particularly if married and belonging to the middle or upper classes (Strong-Boag, 1994). Women in lower classes worked out of economic necessity, typically in factories or as domestics (Phillips & Phillips, 2000). In 1911, Canadian women accounted for only 16.2% of the paid work force, as a result of employment in white-collar fields such as nursing, clerical work, and teaching.
Canadian women’s labour force participation increased during the two world wars, World War II in particular, when government incentives (e.g., childcare and tax deductions, Phillips & Phillips, 1983) led women to take over many of the jobs left by fighting men. In the years following World War II, more women worked before getting married and a few years before having their first child, subsequently retiring in their mid-20s (Phillips & Phillips, 2000). At this time, women were mostly employed in tertiary sectors: clerical, sales, and service work. The remainder could be found as factory workers, nurses, and teachers. The notion of separate, gendered spheres remained largely dominant and unquestioned until the latter half of the century (Korabik, 1999). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, with the dawn of the feminist movement, married and single women entered the labour market in unprecedented numbers. The increase in women’s labour force participation in these two decades was equivalent to the increase in the past six decades, aided by the growth of the service sector and expanding educational opportunities for young women (Coward, 2000; Phillips & Phillips, 2000). By the early 1990s, the discrepancy between women’s and men’s labour force participation rates was not as pronounced, and the dramatic gains in women’s labour force participation levelled out (Phillips & Phillips, 2000).

Today the homemaker has become an anomaly, as Canadian women comprise 47% of the paid labour force and the dual-earner family is now the mode in North America (Statistics Canada, 2005). The influx of women into the labour force may be attributed in large part to tremendous societal changes taking place in the latter half of the 20th century in terms of education, marriage and birth rates, and gender-role attitudes. One such change, concomitant with women’s increased commitment to the labour force, is the progress they have made in educational attainment (Barnett, 2004). By the end of the 20th century, their achievement was such that more women in Canada attended postsecondary institutions than women in any other Western country, including the U.S. (Stroh & Reilly, 1999). Further, as of 2003, 67% of all Canadian women aged 20 to 24 had completed postsecondary training or education (Statistics Canada, 2005). Examining enrollment figures of the last decade, it is clear that Canadian women
are enrolling in college or university programs at greater levels than their male counterparts. For example, in the 2001/2002 academic year, women comprised 57% of all students enrolled in university programs, a figure that was 37% in 1972-1973. In the 1999/2000 academic year, women comprised 54% of all students enrolled in college programs. While fewer women than men complete graduate degrees, making up 44% of individuals with master’s degrees and 27% of individuals with a doctorate in 2001, these numbers are also increasing (Statistics Canada, 2005).

As more young women prepare to work outside of the home, there are several accompanying changes in family structure. First, marriage rates are delayed or declining, with the average age at first marriage 28 for women and 30 for men, up from 22 and 24 in the early 1970s, respectively. Then, there is an increasing trend toward later parenthood, and couples are having fewer children (Barnett, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2005). For women with children, even very young children, it is now the norm to work outside of the home. In 2004, for example, 65% of Canadian women with children under the age of 3 were employed, more than double the percentage in 1976 (Statistics Canada, 2005). In the neighbouring U.S., while mothers with school-aged children typically worked part-time in the 1970s (Edwards, 2005), by the end of the 20th century, two-thirds of these women worked full-time (Cohany & Sok, 2007).

Gender-role attitudes have slowly been changing as well, with a shift since the 1960s away from complementary marriages and ideals toward egalitarian partnerships (Cobb, Seery, & McKinney, 2003). Some studies illustrate increasing nontraditional gender-role attitudes for both males and females (Barnett, 2004). For instance, in a recent study on college students’ perceptions of the ideal marital type, the majority perceived an equal-partner dyad as the most stable and acceptable form of marriage (Cobb, Seery, & McKinney, 2003). Taken together, the dramatic changes in women’s education, family structure, fertility, and social and individual gender-role attitudes since the 1970s, as well as economic necessity, ensure that paid employment is the current and future reality for most women (Barnett, 2004; Gallagher & Smith, 1999; Phillips & Phillips, 1983).
Barriers for Women in Careers

While there is much progress in terms of women and careers, women are still faced with certain gender-related environmental or structural barriers (Betz, 2002), including: (a) heavy personal, social, and societal pressure toward nurturing roles for women (Hobfoll, Geller, & Dunahoo, 2003), which places the brunt of care-giving and domestic tasks on them; (b) occupational segregation, which results in females continuing to labour in lower-paying, lower-prestige jobs; (c) a pervasive gender wage gap; and (d) gender-role socialization, which typically classifies females as communal and males as autonomous.

Competing demands from the public and private spheres complicate women’s career development (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). The presence of dependent children, for instance, significantly impacts many women’s career progress. As a study on part-time employment and the wage penalty in five industrialized countries, including Canada, discovered, the presence of children increases the probability of women working part-time. This trend reduces mothers’ annual earnings in comparison to non-mothers and men (Stroh & Reilly, 1999). Another study found a 12% difference in average hourly wage between full-time and part-time workers, with women much more likely than men to work part-time (Bardasi & Gornick, 2003). On the whole, women are limited by the fact that they still tend to work a “double shift” and face societal pressure to undertake most care-giving duties even when both partners are employed outside of the home full-time (Landers, Rebitzer, & Taylor, 1997; Stroh & Reilly, 1999). Thus, even though increasing numbers of men have been involved in childcare since the 1980s, women are more prone than men to take time away from their careers for child rearing (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Keene & Quadagno, 2004; Schabracq, Winnubst, & Cooper, 2003).

Another barrier to women’s career development is occupational segregation. While women are entering a much wider variety of fields now than in the past, they continue to pursue a more limited range of careers than men (Gilbert & Rader, 2001). Occupational segregation first manifests itself in college and university, where fewer women major in traditionally male-
dominated fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (Buzzanell & Lucas, 2006), and continues as they enter the labour force. In Canada, for example, 67% of all women are employed in teaching, nursing and related health occupations, clerical or other administrative positions, and sales and service occupations (Statistics Canada, 2005). Aside from socialization into “gender-appropriate” work, where they may fulfill a nurturing or helping role (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005), women choose careers they feel will be less demanding and thus enable them to balance family and work roles (Fassinger, 2005; Spraggins, 2000; Stroh & Reilly, 1999).

Women’s preference for female-dominated fields is supported by empirical evidence that individuals in male-dominated occupations make more family trade-offs when faced with work-family conflict (Mennino & Brayfield, 2000). With the exception of certain occupations such as medicine, with 55% of all doctors and dentists now female, or business and financial fields, in which females make up over 50% of all workers, the proportion of females in non-traditional employment has not increased significantly since the 1970s (Statistics Canada, 2005). Moreover, while the percentage of women employed in engineering/applied sciences, and mathematics has risen from 3% and 19% in the early 1970s, to 24% and 30% in 2001, respectively, this percentage has remained stagnant since the late 1980s (Statistics Canada, 2005).

For various reasons, including occupational choice and decreased labour force participation, women earn lower average wages than men. In Canada, women working full-time, full-year in 2003 earned 70.5% of the wages of men working full-time, full-year ($36,500 vs. $51,700). Comparing all women and men, the wage differential in 2003 was 63.6% ($24,800 vs. $39,100). For unattached, never-married women in all age categories, the wage gap was considerably smaller, with this subgroup of women earning 94% of men’s wages when working full-time, full-year (Statistics Canada, 2005). As Friedman and Greenhaus (2000) observed, there is no wage penalty for married women without children. On the contrary, for mothers, the gender-wage gap persists, even when controlling for age, education, experience, performance, and other variables (Fassinger, 2005). On the whole, the presence and age of children continue to outweigh
Gender-role socialization, which begins at a young age, is a major factor in many women’s career development. However, according to Gilbert and Rader (2001), the notion of gender is taught, not inherent. Once gender-role expectations are internalized they shape an individual’s behaviour both on a personal/psychological level and on a larger scale, in terms of societal expectations of appropriate behaviour (Glick & Fiske, 1999). These expectations may affect the psychological variables (e.g., career-related self-efficacy) that are a major determinant of career development outcomes, while socially prescribed gender roles may create different opportunities for men and women within the labour market. Cross-sectional studies conducted in Germany and the U.S. found that the gender with which one most identifies is a greater predictor of career outcomes than sex itself (Abele, 2000). Thus young women who adopt conventional female gender roles may forego adequate career preparation, or reduce their career aspirations to accommodate potential family priorities (Basow, 2003; Betz, 2005).

*Integrating Work and Family*

As an extension of gender-role socialization, women’s career development—including career choice, implementation, and advancement—is often strongly impacted by their expectations surrounding the integration of work and family (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001). Literature on the work-family interface typically takes two perspectives. The first is work-family conflict, also termed role spillover, which may be broadly defined as: “the reciprocal tension between the roles and obligations of being a parent or a spouse, on the one hand, and an employee, on the other” (Keene & Quadagno, 2004, p. 3). The second is work-family enrichment, which focuses on positive synergies between work and family (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007).
Tension in work-family conflict\(^1\) is caused by mutually incompatible and simultaneous work and family pressures (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Jackson & Scharman, 2002). Conflict within the work-family interface is bi-directional in that work may interfere with family, and family may interfere with work (Cinamon & Rich, 2002). Excessive conflict has been linked with dissatisfaction with both work and family life, and has been found to affect women differently than men (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Frone, Yardley, & Markel, 1997). It is evident that work-family conflict plays a major role in the early stages of career decision-making as well. A study of high-achieving teenage girls revealed that anticipation of the demands of motherhood fostered greater career indecision (Marks & Houston, 2002). A more recent study on unmarried university students found that females demonstrated less self-efficacy for managing future work-family conflict than males (Cinamon, 2006).

Meta-analyses by Allen, Herst, Bruck, and Sutton (2000) and Kossek and Ozeki (1998) illustrate that work-family conflict affects several aspects of work life, including attitudes on the job, work behaviours, and stress-related variables. A significant inverse relationship between work-family conflict and global job satisfaction persists across various samples, such as executives (Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994), health professionals (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), nurses and engineers (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Conley, 1991), and fathers of elementary-age school children (Stewart & Barling, 1996; all of the above cited in Allen et al., 2000). These findings have been replicated with participants from around the world, including the U.S., Jerusalem, Hong Kong, Singapore, Norway, and Canada (Allen et al., 2000).

Within the non-work related outcomes category, life satisfaction is the most commonly studied factor in work-family conflict (Allen et al., 2000). In general, the more work-family conflict individuals experience, the lower their levels of reported satisfaction with life (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Several studies report a significant, negative correlation between work-family

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\(^1\) In this literature review, the term, work-family conflict, is understood to signify both work-interfering-with-family and family-interfering-with-work. In some studies, however, a distinction is made between work-family and family-work conflict, their antecedents, and outcomes (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998).
conflict and life satisfaction (e.g., Adams et al., 1996; Aryee et al., 1996; Duxbury & Higgins, 1991; Higgins & Duxbury, 1992; Netemeyer et al., 1996). In their 1998 meta-analysis, Kossek and Ozeki discovered that work-family conflict predicts decreased life satisfaction slightly more with females than with males. Within life satisfaction, work-family conflict may impede family satisfaction, in particular (Aryee et al., 1999; Frone, Barnes, & Farrell, 1994; Kopelman et al., 1983). However, the link between work-family conflict and family satisfaction is generally low to moderate (Aryee et al., 1999).

Central to work-family conflict is the scarcity hypothesis: the time and energy given to one role make it more difficult for individuals to devote adequate time and energy to the other role (Marks, 1977). As individuals struggle to complete an infinite number of tasks with finite resources of time and energy, their perception of work-family conflict increases (Sieber, 1974). Thus when involved in multiple roles, they are apt to experience burnout and stress (Aryee et al., 1999). The scarcity hypothesis appears to be especially relevant to women. Women may experience more overall conflict than men and be more prone to burnout (Posig & Kickul, 2004), yet fewer work hours are most likely to decrease work-family conflict for women (Aryee et al., 1999; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Keene & Quadagno, 2004).

With the scarcity hypothesis as their underlying principle, several studies have found gender differences in perceptions of work-family balance and role spill-over. For example, when Keene and Quadagno (2004) surveyed a sample of 443 women and 480 men, they discovered that for all participants, especially women, increased work demands led to decreased perceived balance. More women than men also reported feeling distracted or less productive at work due to family concerns. A similar study using data from employees in technical, professional, managerial, and sales occupations found that women, but not men, reported higher levels of work-family conflict as their work hours increased (Maume & Houston, 2001). Both studies supported a time-based discrepancy in male and female work and family experiences. With a sample of 129 sales employees, Boles, Wood, and Johnson (2003) also found that simultaneous
pressures from the work and family domains predicted dissatisfaction with work for females, but not for males. Another survey-based study found that for women, specifically, organizational time demands preceded emotional exhaustion (Posig & Kickul, 2004). While these studies were statistically significant, they could have been more effective in explaining the results if followed by qualitative data describing the complexities of the work-family interface and career development as experienced by participants. These studies were also limited in their focus on highly-educated, high socioeconomic status participants.

Role salience is another critical factor in work-family conflict. Under role salience theory, an individual’s experience of work-family conflict is dependent on the salience, or centrality, of the work or family role in that individual’s life (Crooker, Smith, & Tabak, 2002). Therefore achievement in a highly salient role will foster a greater sense of purpose and well-being than achievement in a less salient role. In addition, the more central a role is to an individual’s identity, the more he or she will invest in that role, in terms of time and energy (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), and reduce involvement in the less salient role (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Within the work-family interface, an individual may be career-focused, family-focused, or career and family focused (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). The notion of role salience extends the scarcity hypothesis by acknowledging that not everyone values work and family equally (Biggs & Brough, 2005). Role salience may thus exacerbate work-family conflict, as described by Greenhaus and Parasumaran (1999): “A high level of work involvement reduces satisfaction and performance within the family domain, and an intense involvement in family life encourages individuals to restructure their work to meet family needs and reduce career aspirations” (p. 399).

Much research examining the impact of role salience on work-family conflict employs the Life Role Salience Scale (LRSS) (Amatea, Cross, Clark, & Bobby, 1986), which measures the value of a particular life role to the individual. With such items as, “I expect major satisfaction in my life to come from my family,” or “It is important to me that I have a work career in which I
can achieve something of importance” (Biggs & Brough, 2005), the LRSS has consistently found that role salience predicts an individual’s level of work commitment and work-family conflict. For instance, Cinamon and Rich (2002) separated their sample of 213 employees into three categories of salience: (a) Work; (b) Family; and (c) Dual (work and family). As hypothesized, more women than men fit the Family profile (44.2% vs. 32.5%), and fewer women than men fit the Work profile (16.3% vs. 33.3%). Women also scored higher than men on level and frequency of work-family conflict. However, there were no significant gender differences in the Dual profile. Considering work-family conflict in terms of time and identity with a mixed-gender sample, Carlson, Kacmar, and Stepina (1995) found that individuals who evidenced either work or family salience, especially family salience, experienced greater degrees of conflict between work and family. An earlier LRSS-based study with an all-female sample of 94 bank employees found that married women with children were less committed to working or having a career than either unmarried women or women without children (Campbell, Campbell, & Kennard, 1994). Applying the LRSS scale to a university sample, Biggs and Brough (2005) discovered that the higher the levels of family role salience expressed by female students, the greater their levels of work-family conflict.

Overall, research within the role salience framework suggests that time is not as great a determinant of work-family conflict levels as is the role from which an individual derives most of his or her identity. In addition, the female identity tends to be especially tied to the family role, which fosters greater tension between work and home life for females than for males (Biggs & Brough, 2005). Research of this nature provides a valuable starting point but is limited by several factors: (a) a very narrow, survey-based view of the work-family interface; (b) the modification of LRSS for different populations (e.g., Biggs & Brough, 2005), reducing the scale’s validity (Allen et al., 2000); and (c) a dearth of studies taking a more holistic view of how work-family conflict impacts career development from the early to latter stages of one’s life.
Literature on the work-family interface focuses chiefly on issues of conflict between the work and family roles (Sinacore-Guinn, Akeali, & Fledderus, 1999). However, a growing body of literature has begun to examine the positive impact of family relationships and roles on women’s career or life satisfaction, and vice versa (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, & King, 2002). This research presumes that the work-family interface need not always be negative, and there are, in fact, several advantages to carrying out multiple roles (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Wayne et al., 2007). This theory, known as work-family enrichment, posits that “active engagement in one domain provides access to resources and experiences that contribute to individual fulfillment” (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005, p. 98).

Work-family enrichment and work-family conflict are distinct constructs. However, like work-family conflict, work-family enrichment may be considered bi-directional, encompassing work-family and family-work (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Principal means by which multiple roles promote well-being include (a) status enhancement (Sieber, 1974)—e.g., financial gain or security (Betz, 2003), connections, or potential for opportunities and resources (Carlisle, 1994); (b) personality enhancement—transfer of skills and attitudes developed within one role to solve problems in the other role, such as self-esteem and assertiveness (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000); (c) increased emotional (Ruderman et al., 2002), informational (House, 1981), and instrumental support (Crooker et al., 2002; Nordenmar, 2004); and (d) increased efficiency and practice at multi-tasking (Ruderman et al., 2002; Wayne et al., 2007). Investigating work-family enrichment, Sinacore-Guinn et al. (1999) completed a survey-based study on the correlation between the family environment and job satisfaction with 173 women employed in a variety of occupations. Results suggested that the family environment significantly influences a woman’s job satisfaction, in terms of transferable skills and values, and may even facilitate and enhance job satisfaction. Furthermore, individuals carrying active family and work roles are likely to meet both mastery needs and intimacy needs (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003). Finally, with multiple roles, stress or failure in one role may be moderated by success in another (Betz, 2003).
Within the work-family interface, work-family conflict and work-family enrichment often co-exist (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Kirchmeyer, 1992). As stated by Grzywacz and Bass (2003), “work and family are both sources of growth and support as well as burdens and strains” (p. 248). These constructs are distinct, as work-family conflict arises from family and work pressures, while work-family enrichment is facilitated by environmental resources (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006). Role salience theory in work-family enrichment indicates that the more salient a role is to an individual’s identity, the more likely that individual is to apply resources from other roles to the salient role (Carlson et al., 2006). In their 1996 study, Adams, King, and King (1996) found that as family salience increased, family support increased and work-family conflict decreased. Later studies analyzing the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) uncovered that individuals with fewer ecological resources experienced more negative spillover from work to family, and, for both genders, having a child of any age predicted more negative spillover from family to work (Grzywacz & Bass, 2003; Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). However, for all participants, a low level of family criticism/burden and working less than 20 hours per week facilitated work-family enrichment (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Additionally, when family did not create many work disruptions, the home sphere buffered the negative effects of work-family conflict on employees’ sense of well-being and also contributed to their productivity (Grzywacz & Bass, 2003). The last of the three studies revealed that being female was a strong predictor of greater levels of work-family enrichment (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005), a finding consistent with the results of research conducted on employees of a financial service organization (Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). However, as Grzywacz and Butler (2005) cautioned, their study must be interpreted cautiously considering that they did not have a comprehensive measure of work-family enrichment at their disposal, and the instrument used represented work-related benefits to the individual, rather than the individual’s family role.
To date, the majority of studies on the work-family interface are based on self-report scales and observed correlations. Nonetheless, a few studies have approached work-family enrichment from a qualitative or mixed-methods standpoint. One such study, employing semi-structured interviews as pilot research with 15 female and 10 male financial service employees in Norway, revealed participants’ examples of work-family enrichment, such as: “Having kids teaches you how to be creative and tactical, to approach things differently,” or “At work I function in a dynamic field where a lot of power and strategic games go on. So, I do not lose my head quickly when problems arise at home” (Van Steenbergen et al., 2007, p. 284). Another study employing interviews with 61 managerial women found that, for these women, the work-family interface provided them relevant background and information, opportunities to enhance interpersonal skills, and leadership practice (Ruderman et al., 2007). Hill et al. (2007) took a more extensive approach to work-family enrichment from a qualitative standpoint. In their study, they analyzed the results of a survey composed of 100 multiple-choice questions and 10 open-ended questions, with 22,064 IBM employees (50.5% female) worldwide. Among their findings, work enriched family by offering financial benefits, intrinsic job satisfaction, skills, and resources. Family enriched work by providing management skills, supportive family relationships, and individual well-being. Hill et al. (2007) cited key examples of the intricacies of work-family enrichment in participants’ own words. Mia, a mother in the U.S., stated, “[Work] gives me more confidence in my ability to accomplish different tasks, helps me and the family feel more secure, and improves communication and family relationships when I bring what I learn about teaming home” (p. 517). Jane, another American mother, added:  

The skills I’ve learned at IBM have positively affected my home life. Time management, project management, negotiations, decision making, situation analysis and communication are a few skills used on a daily basis at IBM that are transferred over to my home life making it easier/faster to get things done in an efficient manner. (p. 12)  

While capturing the views of a very large sample on the subject of work-family enrichment, this study was limited in its focus on one organization. Studies of this nature employing qualitative
methods would be even more effective if participants represented a wider range of occupations and organizations. Nonetheless, the addition of qualitative studies to the more common quantitative research suggests that the extent to which a woman experiences work-family conflict or work-family enrichment is largely dependent on the degree of junction between her needs and values, and the work and family roles.

**Summary of Literature on Women and Careers**

As wide-spread societal changes since the 1960s and 1970s have promoted an increase in women’s labour force participation, research on women’s career development has also increased (Betz, 2003). Much of the research on women and careers has focused on mutually incompatible and simultaneous work-family pressures, termed work-family conflict, which influence both job and life satisfaction (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). These pressures complicate both women’s initial career decision-making and their continued professional development. Central concepts within work-family conflict are (a) the scarcity hypothesis—participation in one role depletes reserves of time and energy that would otherwise be applied to another role (Marks, 1977), and (b) role salience—the importance an individual places on either the work or family role is a key factor in that individual’s perception of work-family conflict (Crooker et al., 2002). Overall, both the scarcity hypothesis and role salience theories are especially applicable to women. For example, women are more likely than men to experience increased levels of work-family conflict and emotional stress as their work hours rise (Boles et al., 2003; Keene & Quadagno, 2004; Maume & Houston, 2001). Studies on role salience also indicate that many women derive their central identity from the family role, which intensifies their feelings of work-family tension (e.g., Biggs & Brough, 2005). As a result, the presence of children tends to decrease their career commitment (Campbell et al., 1994; Cinamon & Rich, 2002).

Researchers taking a more positive stance on the work-family interface are increasingly investigating work-family enrichment (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). In work-family enrichment, the transfer of resources, skills, and experiences between the work and family
domains may enhance an individual’s global job and life satisfaction (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005). Significantly, multiple roles may provide individuals with the increased social support and feelings of self-efficacy needed for success in various life spheres (Hill et al., 2007; Ruderman et al., 2002; Van Steenbergen et al., 2007). Researchers in the sphere of work-family enrichment generally acknowledge that the interaction of the work and family domains generates both conflict and enrichment. However, provided that the time spent at work is not excessive, and family does not create an undue burden, home life may buffer work-family conflict (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005). Moreover, for a woman, especially, multiple role satisfaction is highly dependent on her attitude toward the work and family roles, and the degree of convergence between her ideal and the reality (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Examining both sides of the work-family interface literature, while women may experience more work-family conflict than men, they often experience more work-family facilitation as well (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Van Steenbergen et al., 2007). This phenomenon confirms findings that women are much less likely than men to compartmentalize their work and family roles, instead viewing their lives holistically (Rothbard, 2001).

As this overview demonstrates, researchers are discovering more and more about women and career development; however, for a deeper understanding of women’s career development it is vital to examine the work-family interface in terms of specific contextual factors, including religion. With their emphasis on survey-based, correlational investigations with large samples, current studies on the work-family interface cannot delve as deeply into the intricacies of the work-family interface as a qualitative study with a smaller sample might. Moreover, even the few existing qualitative studies tend to focus on highly educated, upper-middle-class participants without considering a broader socioeconomic spectrum. Thus current theory and practice in vocational psychology do not reflect the specific needs of Christian women from all walks of life. Vocational research also does not commonly consider either the negative or the positive aspects of the work-family interface within the framework of a Christian belief system (Anderson & Hall,
2005). Hence although women’s career development issues have become a focal point within vocational and counselling psychology in the last few decades (Betz, 2003), the impact of these issues on women of different faith backgrounds is as yet relatively unexamined.

Christians and Careers

Workplace Spirituality

My review of the literature on Christians and careers begins with a look at workplace spirituality studies, in which at least part of each sample is female. Studies on workplace spirituality primarily examine the effect of spiritual values on performance, attitude, and decision-making in the workplace (Duffy, 2006). While this research does not closely investigate women’s unique career issues, it provides an indication of the myriad ways in which spirituality affects women established in their careers. Researchers in this field adopt the premise that religion and spirituality are not easily compartmentalized; rather, they pervade all spheres of individuals’ lives, including the workplace (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). Hill and Smith (2003) link the two constructs explicitly: “Two of the most central and defining features of life for many people are their religion and spirituality, and their work” (p. 231). As popularized by Mitroff and Denton (1999), spirituality at work involves “the effort to find one’s ultimate purpose in life, to develop a strong connection to coworkers and other people associated with work, and to have consistency (or alignment) between one’s core beliefs and the values of the organization” (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003, p. 427). While workers may be influenced by religious beliefs, workplace spirituality is not inherently connected to a specific religious tradition.

The literature on spirituality in the workplace typically points to a connection between the meaning-making and sense of mission inherent in spirituality, and occupational satisfaction and performance (Garcia-Zamor, 2003; Milliman et al., 2003). For example, a cross-sectional survey, based on a seven-point Likert scale, found that 200 part-time MBA students, 47% of whom were women, perceived a positive link between workplace spirituality and (a)
organizational commitment, (b) intrinsic work satisfaction, (c) job involvement, and (d) organization-based self-esteem (Milliman et al., 2003). Similarly, another study surveying 200 full-time workers, 59% women, 78.5% Christian, in various professional and non-professional jobs, found moderately high correlations between existential and spiritual well-being, and job satisfaction (Robert et al., 2006).

While this genre of research frequently includes a notion of calling among other variables, some researchers focus exclusively on this concept. For instance, a 1997 survey-based study consisted of employees from a major state university health service, and non-faculty employees from a small liberal arts college, for a sample of 196 (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). All participants worked at least 35 hours a week, with 79% of the 196 respondents female. Distributed questionnaires began with fictionalized case examples in which individuals perceived their work as: (a) a calling; (b) a career, or means for personal advancement; and (c) a job, or means to a financial end. Participants indicated the case with which they most closely identified on a 3-point Likert scale, with cases followed by 18 true/false questions pertinent to work attitudes. Of the final sample of 135 with fully completed surveys, participants were divided fairly evenly among three categories: job – 32.6%; career – 31.9%; and calling – 35.6% (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Respondents viewing their work as a calling tended to be in high-paying, high-status occupations.

Discovering a subset of 24 college administrative assistants among the 135, the authors analyzed them separately. Despite the sub-group’s homogeneity in terms of occupation, age, and income, 8 (33%) considered their work a job, 7 (29%) considered it a career, and 9 (38%) a calling. Findings within this homogeneous subset suggested that people in the same line of work may view their occupation differently and the perception of work as a calling is not necessarily limited to certain fields or income levels. However, due to the small number of administrative assistants, these results were descriptive rather than statistical. As well, it is possible for the subset, as for the entire sample, that the survey’s true/false measures oversimplified the
multidimensional concepts of job, career, and calling. Nonetheless, self-report measures for the sample as a whole predicted the highest levels of life and work satisfaction for participants who perceived their work as a calling. Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) later reviewed studies on a wide range of workers, including hospital cleaners, hairdressers, engineers, nurses, and restaurant kitchen staff, who felt their employment was more than a job or a career, and thus felt more engaged with their work.

Although most research on workplace spirituality is non-religious, religious beliefs may also impact workplace behaviours and attitudes. Earlier research specifically targeting a religious sample surveyed 1,869 Protestants and Catholics, 53% female (Davidson & Cadell, 1994). Recruited from 31 affluent church communities, participants were questioned on occupation-related outlook. Overall, 15% of participants viewed work as a calling, 56% viewed it as a career, and 29% viewed it as a job. Among those who viewed work as a calling were individuals who reported the highest degrees of religious salience, or centrality of religion to their lives, and participation in religious activities. Participants working with people were twice as likely as those working with things to view their work as a calling. The overall number viewing work as a calling included more women than men: 35% vs. 13% (Davidson & Cadell, 1994). Results corresponded with research suggesting females exhibit a more intrinsic religious commitment than males (Buchko, 2004; Schaffner & Dixon, 2003).

There are some elements of SCCT, VSP, and complexity theory in these studies. Findings that workplace spirituality was related to higher work satisfaction and job involvement in the Milliman et al. (2003) and the Robert et al. (2006) studies, as well as overall life and work satisfaction in the Wrzesniewski et al. (1997) study, could be connected to Brewer’s (2001) VSP by demonstrating the positive impact of enacting meaning, being, and doing in the world of work. Furthermore, these studies, as well as the Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) review, indicated that participants sought meaningful work that would contribute to their communities, a critical component of spirituality in complexity theory. Finally, Davidson and Cadell’s (1994) study
could be linked to SCCT in its suggestion that religious salience and involvement in religious activities are contextual factors influencing the view of work as a calling.

In a departure from survey-based inquiry, Lips-Wiersma (2002) conducted several interviews with her sample, including an introductory interview eliciting a psycho-biographical account, over a period of three years. This sample consisted of 16 adults, 50% women, between 40 to 50 years of age. Of these participants, 12 claimed some religious affiliation and six of the 12 were Christian. Reflecting on the significance of their spiritual beliefs to career choice and transition, these adults felt their spirituality led them to (a) develop and become themselves, (b) express themselves, (c) experience unity with others, and (d) desire to serve others in their work. Participants also kept diaries during a week at work, which served as secondary, yet much less extensive, sources of data. The researcher and participants then analyzed data collaboratively for emergent themes. Subsequently, Lips-Wiersma (2002) visually represented participants’ need to maintain equilibrium between being and doing, two features of the VSP (Brewer, 2001), as well as between other orientation and self-orientation. As in Wrzesniewski et al.’s (1997) research, the individuals represented a wide range of occupations. This study’s main strength lay in rich description and inclusion of participants’ perceptions related to their lives and careers, as the author worked closely with her sample throughout the data collection and analysis processes.

Workplace spirituality literature indicates that whatever the occupation, a sense of calling often creates both purpose and a means of coping with work-related stress. This finding may be true even when an individual is not in his or her “ideal” career. For instance, in-depth interviews with 20 African-American principals revealed that most women born pre-Civil Rights Movement chose teaching out of a very limited range of available professional options (Loder, 2005). Nonetheless, these women generally reframed their work as a calling and were thus able to derive job satisfaction. Karla, once an aspiring writer, said, “[I have] a strong faith and a belief in God. This [work] is a battle for these children’s very souls in this community. It is a spiritual warfare” (p. 254). Patrice, a would-be drama major who initially resisted teaching as a career, added, “Part
of what keeps me going when things get tense—that I’m doing God’s work. These kids are terribly important to us. I don’t know how you could do this without seeing it as something more than just a job” (p. 255). Since this study focused chiefly on the constraints and opportunities aspiring or acting African-American principals faced in their career journeys in light of gender and race, such issues as religion, spirituality, and the conception of work as a calling were not focal points. Therefore, no mention was made of participants’ religious backgrounds, and discussion of work as a calling was limited to the response of a few participants. Regardless, as with Lips-Wiersma’s (2002) study, this research pointed to the potential of qualitative methods in this growing field.

Taken together, these studies suggest that studying the roles of religion and spirituality in the workplace through quantitative or qualitative means may enrich the body of vocational literature. Generally, research of this nature employs a survey or questionnaire. When the sample group is very large, with 200 (Milliman et al., 2003) or even 1869 (Davidson & Caddell, 1994) participants, the use of surveys or questionnaires with large sample sizes facilitates data collection and participant comparison. Nonetheless, surveys and questionnaires provide an overview rather than an in-depth examination of a phenomenon. The qualitative Lips-Wiersma (2002) and Loder (2005) studies probed more deeply than survey-based research by allowing participants to share narratives in relation to career and spirituality. This open structure allowed for a greater depth of information. A potential limitation to this type of research is its self-report nature, which could bring the accuracy of findings into question. For Lips-Wiersma’s study, in particular, the smaller sample size also limited generalizability (Patton, 2002). Despite their disadvantages, however, both types of data collection elucidate the role of spirituality for adults who have been working for a number of years.

Upon further perusal of vocational literature, it is evident that the topic of religion and spirituality in the workplace is gaining in popularity, yet there remains a dearth of empirical studies exploring means by which these constructs impact career development (Duffy, 2006).
Workplace spirituality research supports the conception that being called to one’s work is intrinsic to life and work fulfilment. Furthermore, a sense of calling may lead to greater productivity and higher job performance levels (e.g., Milliman et al., 2003). These associations, however, leave unanswered the question of whether or not a sense of calling may be a factor for individuals, especially women, in the earlier stages of their career development. Retrospective case studies, as in my research, may better target this question.

Religion and Spirituality in Career Development

Research that specifically concerns the role of religion and spirituality in career development, and calling in particular, is just beginning to surface. Exploratory studies with university students search for a possible connection between religion and a greater sense of self-efficacy, or confidence, in reaching goals. This association may be fostered by both personal beliefs and support networks found within a religious community (Snyder, Sigmon, & Feldman, 2002). Such support networks include relationships with other members of the religious community, as well as a relationship with a Higher Power. For many, these relationships provide both a sense of direction and comfort in stressful times (Duffy & Lent, in press). For instance, in a qualitative study on the role of faith in the identity development of five Black students attending a predominantly White university, two students believed God had a purpose for their lives, and thus experienced less anxiety about the future (Stewart, 2002).

In another interview-based study with university students, the majority believed spirituality, defined as an intrinsically held value system, influenced their career decision-making (Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000). Furthermore, spiritual struggles and spiritual growth were identified as having a considerable impact on career choice. Spiritual struggles included a search for meaning and uncertainty about intrinsic values. Those searching for meaning often experienced a lack of purpose or connection. In regard to spiritual growth, 6 of 10 students discussed a significant moment in which they were cognizant of the correlations among spirituality, their sense of identity, and their career-related thinking. This understanding
manifested itself as the identification of a personal value system, the realization and pursuit of a calling, and a sense of connecting with and contributing to their communities (Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000). Participants were especially drawn to service careers. A young Christian woman desiring to enter social service explained, “For some time I tried to convince myself that I needed a more secure, nine to five, eight-hour day, kind of life. When I overcame that obstacle, I was able to acknowledge my calling and run with it” (Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000, p. 7). This study’s main limitation was that, while giving participant descriptions when including direct quotations, it did not include overall demographic information about participants, such as gender, age range, cultural, or religious backgrounds. This knowledge would have been useful in determining how results could be extended to other university students.

The themes of purpose and calling also arose in a recent interview-based study undertaken with 12 African American undergraduate students, 8 of whom were female, majoring in a variety of academic fields (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles, 2006). While the majority of the sample held spiritual beliefs based on Christianity, participants typically identified as spiritual but not religious. However, demonstrating a strong connection between spirituality and career development, several of the interviewees felt God had a specific career plan for them. The sample also relied on religious and spiritual strategies, such as prayer and church attendance, to help them cope with academic and career-related challenges. These coping strategies were useful even to students who felt religious or spiritual beliefs had no influence on their career development. In general, participants reported that their religious and spiritual beliefs provided them with a feeling of self-confidence rather than self-doubt and insecurity concerning academic and career choices (Constantine et al., 2006). Expressing collective sentiments, one student stated:

Part of God’s plan is being fulfilled right now by my being in college and preparing to embark on my future career. . . . I knew early on [in life] that I was supposed to do something special in my work because an inner voice told me I had to make a difference and that I needed to follow God’s plan for me. (Constantine et al., 2006, p. 234)
In this inquiry, Constantine et al. (2006) employed a consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology in which researchers share and document any expected findings, or biases, before coding. This step increased the trustworthiness of the study. In their discussion section, the authors noted that the sample consisted of traditional-aged (18 to 22) students from the same university and of the same ethnicity. In one sense, the group’s homogeneity prevented the extension of findings to students of other regions or ethnicities. Alternatively, the study’s criterion-based sampling helped shed light on the intersection of career and spirituality for a definite population. Both the Royce-Davis and Stewart (2000) and the Constantine et al. (2006) studies indicated that students sought equilibrium among meaning, being, and doing as in the VSP. Participants who pursued subjects compatible with their identities and value systems appeared to be the most satisfied with their decisions. Several students also cited the importance of helping others as a factor in their career choice, one facet of spirituality in complexity theory. Both of these studies, but particularly Constantine et al.’s (2006) research, could have further explored if being both religious and spiritual, as opposed to holding only spiritual beliefs, had a greater influence on students’ confidence in career decision-making.

Recently, Duffy and associates have explored university students’ religion, spirituality, and career development from a quantitative standpoint. First, in 2005, Duffy and Blustein surveyed 144 college students, 59% women, to determine how intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness and spirituality impacted their career adaptability, defined in this study as career decision self-efficacy and commitment to a career choice. Consistent with the authors’ hypothesis, intrinsic religiousness and awareness of God were significant but modest predictors of career decision self-efficacy. However, these variables were largely unrelated to career choice commitment. Subsequent quantitative research with 133 undergraduates, 50% women, involved in religious organizations, revealed that religious support—support from a relationship with God and from their religious community, and general social support—e.g., from family, peers, and significant others, were predictors of career decision self-efficacy. Of the support variables, God
support alone explained a unique, significant variance in career decision self-efficacy. In the God support survey, students agreed with statements such as, “I can turn to God for advice when I have problems” (Duffy & Lent, in press, p. 7). In both studies, students reporting an intrinsically motivated relationship with a Higher Power were more confident in their ability to make suitable career decisions (Duffy & Blustein, 2005).

Finally, in research with 3091 incoming university freshmen, “presence of a calling” was measured by a two-item questionnaire stating, “I have a calling to a particular kind of work,” and “I have a good understanding of my calling as it applies to my career” (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, p. 595). Similarly, “search for a calling” was measured by two items, “I am trying to figure out my calling in my career,” and “I am searching for a calling as it applies to my career.” When results from these two-item questionnaires were compared to the 16-item Career Decision Profile, having a calling strongly predicted career decidedness, comfort with career choice, and self-clarity. Calling moderately predicted career salience. Those still searching for a calling exhibited somewhat less certainty and comfort in their career choice, tended to lack educational information and clarity about their interests, and were less likely to consider future work as central to their lives (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). The two-item questionnaire on calling seemed sufficient for exploratory research, but for subsequent research would need to be expanded. Overall, results from research by Duffy and associates added to findings that individuals who feel they are following a divinely-inspired plan report less career-related indecision and anxiety.

These studies must be interpreted carefully considering that samples tended to be more religious than the average university student and reflected little cultural diversity. In the 2005 study targeting career adaptability, for example, all participants attended a private Catholic university (Duffy & Blustein, 2005). Duffy and Lent’s (in press) sample in their study on religious support consisted of students actively involved in religious communities (45% Catholic, 31% Protestant) at a large public university. This involvement would also indicate a higher-than-average level of religious salience in participants’ lives. The third sample was 54% Christian. Of
the sample as a whole, 85% identified with a specific religion, and only 8% viewed having a
calling as completely untrue of themselves (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Given participants’
predominantly Christian backgrounds, results would not be easily generalized to most students at
secular universities. However, these studies point to the potential significance of additional
research on the interconnectedness of religion, spirituality, and career development for Christians.

**Summary of Literature on Religion and Spirituality in Career Development**

Research on the role of religion and spirituality in career development typically features
traditional university students, aged 18 to 22. These participants have revealed that their career
development and career decision-making (self-efficacy in particular) may be associated with both
spiritual struggles and spiritual growth (e.g., Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000). People may emerge
from spiritual struggles with a stronger sense of identity, which facilitates spiritual growth, as
well as the confidence necessary for career decision-making (Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000).
Religious support networks may directly or indirectly facilitate career decision-making as well
(Duffy & Lent, in press). Studies on workplace spirituality examine individuals past the initial
career decision-making stage who have either worked in their present occupations for several
years or transitioned to new occupations (e.g., Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Lips-Wiersma, 2002;
Milliman et al., 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). These studies elucidate the positive impact of a
sense of calling, as well as the alignment of personal and occupational values, on job satisfaction
and performance. This relation is particularly affirmative for individuals who view their careers
as a calling. Those who consider religion or spirituality central to their lives tend to be even more
likely to have a sense of mission, or calling, in their careers (Constantine et al., 2006; Davidson &
Caddell, 1994). These individuals also tend to regard their careers as a means by which to connect
with and contribute to their communities (Constantine et al., 2006; Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Royce-
Davis, 2000). Although a sense of calling may seem most pertinent to people in service careers
(Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Loder, 2005; Royce-Davis & Stewart, 2000), one may approach any
work as a calling (e.g., Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In general,
studies on workplace spirituality and on the role of religion and spirituality in career development are composed of a female majority. Literature in this field thus suggests spirituality often has a positive impact on women’s careers. However, little research directly targets the religious or spiritual influences on women’s initial career choices and progress in their chosen fields. Exploratory qualitative studies would build upon the present body of research and further indicate ways for career counsellors to assist young women at post-secondary institutions who desire to integrate faith and career development.

Christian Women and Careers

Existing research on Christian women and careers considers both social constraints (e.g., gender-role socialization and work-family conflict) and distinct sub-cultural values (e.g., female submission) that may impede these women’s progress (Scott, 2002). Through illustrative cases, the studies also investigate the work-family interface, calling, and support or discouragement participants have faced along their career trajectories. An underlying premise of this research field is that while Christian faith can positively affect women’s careers, several values within Christianity can lead to the promotion of more traditional modes of thinking about women and work (Glass & Nath, 2006). While most mainline denominations have engaged in feminist theological reconstruction, more traditional values include the notion of gender differences being instituted at Creation, and women’s encouragement to submit to male authority both inside and outside of the home. Certain Biblical passages including 1 Timothy 2:12 (New International Version), in which the apostle Paul states, “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent,” or Titus 2:3, urging women “to be chaste keepers at home, obedient to their own husbands” (King James Version) may be interpreted to support these views. Accordingly, some religious literature establishes a significant, inverse relation between religiously influenced gender-role attitudes and women’s educational and career ambitions.
In their perception of male-female roles, most Christians lean toward either egalitarianism or complementarianism (Scott, 2002). Egalitarianism is defined as the belief that men and women are equal in all realms, including marriage, church, and the workplace (Lidzy, 2005). Hence women are encouraged to seek paid employment that is in line with their gifts (Gallagher, 2003; Scott, 2002). Egalitarians often cite Galatians 3:28 (New International Version), “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” as their guiding principle. Females with an egalitarian gender-role attitude generally aspire to higher levels in their educational and career paths than their more complementarian peers (Colaner & Warner, 2005; Glass & Nath, 2006). In contrast, complementarianism is defined as the belief that males and females have complementary, yet different roles in the family and in society at large. As the male is considered the head provider and chief decision-maker in the home, his wife should put his career goals above her own and perhaps view home-making as her primary vocation (Gallagher, 2003; Hall, Anderson, & Willingham, 2004; Scott, 2002). Nonetheless, even women and men in conservative religions adapt these beliefs to suit current economic and social conditions (Glass & Nath, 2006). In these cases, they practice pragmatic egalitarianism, with roles negotiated according to family needs, and men’s headship seen as a symbolic and spiritual leadership (Gallagher & Smith, 1999).

Scott (2002) explored 21st century relationships between religion and work by interviewing 28 females and 22 males from liberal and conservative backgrounds. Among the criteria, all participants needed to attend church once a week and to be actively involved in congregational activities. Interview analysis found that women from conservative Protestant religions were most likely of all participants to identify their paid work as a calling yet least likely to attach as much significance to work outside of the home as to being a mother. Regardless, many conservative women reported that employment provided a sense of affirmation and
fulfillment above and beyond that of motherhood. Both liberal and conservative women maintained that they sought God’s guidance in career decision-making, with liberal women more likely to endorse a work-family combination. Both female groups experienced a closer connection between their faith and work values than did both male groups. An initial demographic survey also found that, while a higher percentage of women than men held service positions (64% vs. 27%), more men than women (64% vs. 29%) held “profit-making” positions (Scott, 2002, p. 13).

Finally, Scott (2002) discovered that conservative women had the broadest and most unique conception of calling, which encompassed paid work, motherhood, volunteer work, and church work. They also believed they received several different callings at various stages of their lives rather than a single calling. Describing this trend, one woman stated, “I think your calling is what you’re supposed to be doing. When you are doing it, you feel at peace with yourself” (Scott, 2002, p. 23). As these women made decisions about work and family, the one constant remained their desire to follow God’s will for their lives. Scott (2002) added that the sanctification of paid labour enabled conservative women to justify working outside of the home as a part of God’s will. In this manner, their faith both complicated and facilitated the decision to pursue paid employment. Detailed illustrative cases and direct quotations enabled Scott (2002) to depict key gender and religious group differences in conceptions of work and family. However, the study reported such differences among a very specific group, with the majority of participants (80%) holding at least a bachelor’s degree and belonging to the middle class. Follow-up research of this nature might include participants from a more representative range of educational and socioeconomic levels.

A few studies focusing primarily on Christian women and career development have chosen to investigate the lives of female academics who have also opted for motherhood (Hall et al., 2004). On the whole, these studies explore gender-role socialization, work-family conflict, and the notion of work as a calling. A two-part 2004 study delved into the career development of
16 female chief academic officers (CAOs) at evangelical Christian colleges and universities (Moreton & Newsom, 2004a, 2004b). Background contextual themes arising from semi-structured interviews included: (a) parental encouragement to pursue higher education; (b) educators (e.g., high school teachers and university professors) and clergy as mentors; (c) stable, happy childhoods; and, for at least six; (d) a sense of calling. While several CAOs admitted to not consciously striving toward administrative positions and reported they were generally appointed to their current posts, all participants saw their careers as part of God’s plan for their lives. As one participant stated, “I’m finding that I love administration, and I know that I’m here for a reason. I feel that God has called me here. But I never did it. He did” (p. 314).

Another major theme was the work-family interface. Nine of 14 administrators (64%) described feeling tension between family and work, in terms of time constraints, yet typically felt that marriage and motherhood enriched their careers. Ten of 13 married CAOs (77%) described marriage as positively influencing their careers, with three explicitly stating that their spouse’s willingness to take on flexible, non-traditional roles facilitated their career progress. Most participants also made choices that would allow them to pursue their careers while managing family responsibilities (e.g., teaching fewer classes; rearranging their schedules so that they could spend more time with their children). While the topics covered in this study were fairly comprehensive in scope, Moreton and Newsom (2004a; 2004b) targeted women aspiring to higher education administration at an institution belonging to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). As of 2004, 14% of academic officers in the CCCU, and 26% outside of the CCCU were women. This fact considered, despite the study’s narrow focus on Christian CAOs, unveiled themes offered suggestions that might well be extended to any young women seeking non-traditional careers, particularly in academia.

Work-family issues also arose in a 2004 qualitative study on 30 female professors in Christian colleges and universities (Hall et al., 2004). In this study, several participants expressed the desire for their spiritual and work identities to be a seamless whole, and most valued
motherhood more than their careers. Many of the women felt that in their Christian work environments, they were able to prioritize both their faith and their families. “Weaving” was a term introduced to describe how some of these women dealt with managing several different roles. Rather than seeing the private and public spheres as conflicting, participants aimed to integrate them in unique and adaptive ways (e.g., several took their children with them to conferences or occasionally to class; most worked late at night after their children were asleep). These professors also took non-traditional career paths, often rejecting promotions that would disturb the equilibrium of work and family. One woman explained: “I have plenty of time to be a professional and I’ve had my life to be a mother as well, but mother reigns for a short period” (p. 53). Another added: “There have been many times that I have chosen different ways in the career because of what my children needed at that time” (p. 54). These women’s “weaving,” however, was not always easy, and required increased organizational and social support. Unlike the Moreton and Newsom (2004a; 2004b) study, Hall et al.’s (2004) research covered only participants’ present work experiences, with a section on women’s need for supportive policies and practical support. Through including information on how past experiences led women to their current positions, this study could more strongly provide information relevant to young women seeking their calling.

Sellers, Thomas, Batts, and Ostman (2005) similarly employed semi-structured interviews in a study examining the lives of 11 Protestant female professors (ages 34 to 54 years) working at a Christian liberal arts university while raising children. Like Constantine et al. (2006), Sellers et al. (2005) attempted to enhance trustworthiness by airing biases before coding, as well as by member checking on emergent themes following transcription and coding. In the first thematic cluster, the meaning of calling, most participants felt called to their academic careers at an early age; however, they regarded motherhood as an opportunity or responsibility outside of their callings. In the second thematic cluster, formative messages, the women felt most
encouraged to pursue dual roles by female family members, colleagues, or educators, and by supportive spouses. One woman mentioned being given Biblical role models in her childhood.

The religious messages that I got from my mother and my grandmother included stories of heroic women in the Bible. We didn’t hear all that much about the meek and subservient. And that was strong enough that when the church was going on about docile backgroundedness, there was a counterweight there. (Sellers et al., 2005, p. 203)

Conversely, they cited frustrating, unsupportive messages received from church and widespread societal expectations. A 34-year-old participant recalled:

There was clearly a sense [that] a woman’s priority must be with family and that needs to take precedence over any other obligations. I also remember being angry about that at times and frustrated with why don’t my brothers have the same message. (p. 204)

In the third thematic cluster, the lived experience, the women admitted that their multifaceted lives involved a certain amount of sacrifice. However, many of these women also expressed that the two roles, working in tandem, enriched their lives. One woman stated, “I think my kids have contributed a lot to who I am” (p. 206). Finally, in the fourth thematic cluster, wisdom for the next generation, interviewees advised the younger generation of women to (a) pursue both a career and motherhood, if so inclined, (b) learn to adapt, and (c) forgive themselves for any missteps along the way. Compared to similar samples, the women in this study expressed views that were more career-oriented and egalitarian, and described feeling called to their current careers at a younger age.

Oates, Hall, and Anderson (2005) approached female professors in Christian universities from a slightly different angle than prior studies. Rather than taking a descriptive, life narrative approach, these authors looked at specific ways women viewed spirituality as enabling them to cope with the inter-role conflict of balancing motherhood and careers. Their research took the form of two interviews with each participant, 32 mothers in total. As with women in other studies, the sanctification of their work helped these women better manage the stresses of two demanding, sometimes conflicting, life roles.
In a new theory derived from the data, the sense of calling the women experienced was marked by (a) certitude of one’s calling to an academic career, along with a resultant commitment, (b) a sense of collaboration with God in reaching career goals, obtained through prayer, Bible study, or fellowship with other Christians, and (c) a context of purpose, which helped them cope with inter-role guilt and struggles. Most of these women claimed that the combination of their innate gifts, the subjective enjoyment of their jobs, and the seemingly providential circumstances leading them to their work, made them believe they were in the positions God desired for them. “God uses your interests at an intersection of opportunity and blesses that,” one academic stated (p. 216). In this sense, as in Scott’s (2002) study, participants sanctified their work roles. A sense of transcendence and spiritual surrender gave the women the conviction that if they experienced difficulties in balancing the two roles, “God (was) there and He (was) going to work it out” (Oates et al., 2005, p. 218). The authors posited that these women’s coping self-efficacy, or belief in their ability to overcome complex situations (Lent et al., 2000), had been raised by their faith in God (Oates et al., 2005). Finally, as in studies with younger samples, participants demonstrated a faith that God would continue to guide them throughout their careers. As one woman expressed, “I believe God calls all of us. He gives us all a plan although we don’t always know what that is. We have to do the best we can from the circumstances in our lives” (p. 215). While taking different approaches, both the Sellers et al. (2005) and Oates et al. (2005) studies effectively examined issues of faith and work from the perspective of female Christian academics. However, unlike Sellers et al.’s (2005) study, in which participants self-selected into the sample, the Oates et al. (2005) study had inclusion criteria, which strengthened design validity.

In all four of the studies on Christian mothers in academia, the results could be easily extended to highly-educated Caucasian women working in Christian universities in administrative or professorial roles, but perhaps not to women from other ethnic backgrounds or career fields. The fact that these participants chose Christian workplaces could also indicate that they were
more inclined than the average Christian woman to consider their faith while making major career
decisions. Despite such limitations, these studies’ all-Christian samples suggested that strong
spiritual and religious beliefs may engender the feelings of well-being and career-related self-
efficacy necessary to manage very challenging, conflicting life roles. This research also supported
the view that religion and spirituality may drive all aspects of an individual’s life, including
career and other life ambitions (Emmons, 2005). With its direct reference to coping self-efficacy,
the Oates et al. (2005) study may be linked to Social Cognitive Career Theory. With their ties to
the notion of calling, all studies may be related to the VSP, thereby providing further empirical
evidence that spiritual and religious beliefs may influence the career trajectories of Christian
women.

Summary of Literature on Christian Women and Careers

There is a small body of literature on the roles of religion and spirituality in the world of
work. However, this research tends to focus on the role of non-religious spirituality in the
workplace or on the career decision-making of university students who are still inexperienced in
their chosen fields. Vocational research on Christian women briefly touches on early factors
influencing career choice (e.g., Moreton & Newsom, 2004a), while focusing more extensively on
the lived experience of pursuing motherhood and a career (e.g., Hall et al., 2004). Themes
common to this literature are the work-family interface, role salience, and creative role
adaptation. Overall, participants are more family- than career-oriented (Scott, 2002) and adapt
their careers to suit their family’s needs (Hall et al., 2004; Moreton & Newsom, 2004b; Oates et
al., 2005). These findings parallel the results of more general studies on women and role salience
(e.g., Biggs & Brough, 2005). At the same time, Christian women often report they obtain a sense
of satisfaction from pursuing both work and family that surpasses what they would experience if
they pursued only one role (Scott, 2002). In addition, many participants in this literature cite
receiving practical and affective support, especially from their spouses and families, as critical to
their success. This support facilitates work-family enrichment (Ruderman et al., 2002), enabling these women to “weave” different parts of their lives into a cohesive whole (Hall et al., 2004).

While taking dual life roles into account, my study targets Christian women’s career-related choices during and in the years following college and university. As recommended by Colozzi and Colozzi (2000), case examples of individuals older than the traditional (aged 18 to 22) post-secondary school student may present young adults with a past-present perspective on the process of receiving and actively following one’s calling in the face of various constraints. The stories of older women could thus foster young women’s hope in their ability to overcome potential career-related struggles, and help alleviate feelings of anxiety (Colozzi & Colozzi, 2000). It is likely that these women would exhibit higher levels of confidence, identity certainty, and reflectivity than women in their late teens or 20s (Stewart & Ostrove, 1998). In addition, interviewing older women acknowledges the reality that career planning does not consist simply of an initial decision, but continues and evolves over a lifetime (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001). As such, these stories may provide vicarious role models for young women desiring to follow God’s purpose for their lives, in terms of career, spirituality, and future family roles.
Employing a qualitative research method, based on interviewing and case studies, I depicted the formative career development and central life experiences of Christian women already established in their occupations. My study adapted several facets of consensual qualitative research (CQR), a research method designed primarily for interview-based studies (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). CQR may provide rich descriptive results of the phenomenon under investigation, Christian women’s career development, for various reasons. First, throughout this type of study, key themes evolve over time as the researcher’s understanding of the data increases. Then, researchers employing CQR may describe both individual cases and data across cases. Finally, Hill et al. (1997) cite the main function of CQR as delving deeply into complex or unexplored issues in a manner that might not be possible with quantitative research. Unlike most CQR studies, I did not work as part of a research team making data analysis decisions by consensus, but gathered and analyzed data independently. However, as in CQR, an external auditor, my thesis supervisor, provided quality control of my work.

Data Collection

Participants

I gathered a purposeful sample of four women, selecting participants who were information rich and could best provide insight on the phenomenon at hand (Hill et al., 1997; Patton, 2002). This sample size was also in compliance with Polkinghorne’s (1988) recommendation that intensive studies on individuals’ experiences of a particular phenomenon involve between 3 to 25 individuals (Hill et al., 1997). My original criteria, reflecting samples most often found in the literature, were that participants must be: (a) Christians who attended church regularly, (b) had completed college or university, (c) held a career outside of the home,
(d) were between the ages of 35 and 55, and (e) were married with children. By setting specific lower age limits, I hoped to find women who had already made some of the most vital career and life choices and could thus be better role models for young Christian women. At the same time, as recency of experience is vital to this genre of research (Stake, 2005) and census surveys demonstrate that Canadian women between the ages of 25 to 54 have the highest employment levels (Statistics Canada, 2005), I limited my sample to women in the age range most active in the labour force.

My recruitment began informally, by discussing my research with Christian friends and acquaintances and asking if they could recommend initial participants for the pilot or the main study. After receiving the names and contact information of potential participants, I typically emailed them a letter of information specifying what the study would entail, and the time commitment required (see Appendix A). I then followed up with phone calls, employing an official recruitment script only once (see Appendix B). Prior to interview sessions, I also emailed participants the consent form (see Appendix A), copies of the interview protocol, and a brief demographic survey (see Appendix C) covering (a) age, (b) educational background, and (c) religious background. Although most participants received the consent form in advance by email, they read and signed a printed copy at the time of the interview.

I set out to gather my participants by purposeful snowball sampling, a method in which initial contacts recommend participants, and participants recommend more participants, etc., until the participant quota is filled (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). However, this strategy proved fruitless, and I found my final participants solely through initial referrals. Due to the unexpected difficulty of finding suitable participants, two of the women did not fit all of the original criteria. All four women met the set criteria of (a) being Christian women who attended church regularly, (b) having completed college or university, and (c) holding a career outside of home-making. In addition, all were mothers. However, three of four were between the ages of 35 and 55, with one participant aged 33, and three of four were married, with one participant divorced. Thus
participants’ ages ranged from 33 to 51, with an average age of 39.75. Educational credentials varied from the community college level to doctoral studies.

Most vital to the premise of this study was including participants who attended church on a regular basis. Accordingly, all participants attended church at least once a week, with Nancy and Mary citing church attendance of more than once a week. Furthermore, all participants claimed to be involved (1/4) or very involved (3/4) in church activities. While two of the participants committed to their current religions as children, two were raised in a specific faith and changed religious affiliations as adults. All participants were from a Protestant denomination.

In terms of occupation, all participants worked full-time, with one self-employed. Two participants were in the field of education, one in legal administration (government), and the other in sustainability (government). I gathered this statistical information with a demographic survey the participants completed prior to beginning the actual interviews. Table 1 below summarizes demographic information gathered from interviewees. Each participant is addressed using a pseudonym to protect her anonymity.

Deborah, 38, married, has a boy and a girl, 3-year-old twins. She is a Caucasian Canadian. She was baptized Anglican as an infant and confirmed at the age of 12. She completed her Ph.D. in educational psychology in another province, and is now working as a professor. Deborah’s interview lasted 115 minutes.

Mary, 37, married, has two daughters, ages 3 and 6. She is a Caucasian Canadian. She made an initial commitment to the Salvation Army when she was 12, and apart from a low period in her 20s, has been an active church member since then. She completed a college-level childcare course in another province, and is now running a home-based daycare. Mary’s interview lasted 72 minutes.

Sheila, 51, divorced, has two children: a daughter, 27, and a son, 18. She is African, from Zimbabwe. She was raised a Catholic but moved to the Unity Church three years ago. She
Table 1. Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Deborah</th>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Sheila</th>
<th>Nancy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of Children</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Credentials</td>
<td>Ph.D., Educational psychology</td>
<td>College diploma, Childcare</td>
<td>College diploma, Secretarial</td>
<td>M.Sc., Economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Background</td>
<td>Caucasian Canadian</td>
<td>Caucasian Canadian</td>
<td>African, from Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Black Jamaican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>Unity Church</td>
<td>Pentecostal/Non-denominational/Charismatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of Church Attendance</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>More than once a week</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>More than once a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement with Church Activities</td>
<td>Involved</td>
<td>Very involved</td>
<td>Very involved</td>
<td>Very Involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Committed to Current Religion</td>
<td>Birth – Baptized 12 – Confirmed</td>
<td>12 – Became a junior soldier</td>
<td>48 – Converted to Unity Church (raised Catholic)</td>
<td>10 – Anglican 26 – Pentecostal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>Self-employed Full time</td>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>Full time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Occupation</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Childcare provider</td>
<td>Legal administrative assistant</td>
<td>Senior project officer; sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time in Present Occupation</td>
<td>5 years to less than 10 years</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
<td>2 years to less than 5 years</td>
<td>5 years to less than 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

completed a college-level secretarial course in England, and is now working as a legal administrative assistant in the government. Sheila’s interview lasted 114 minutes.

Nancy, 33, married, has two boys, ages 1 ½ and 3 ½. She is a Black Jamaican. She was an Anglican from the ages of 10 to 26, but after marriage and a corresponding move to Canada, chose to join a church she identifies as Pentecostal/Non-denominational/Charismatic. She
completed her M.Sc. in economics in Jamaica, and is now working as a senior project officer in a
government sustainability department. Nancy’s interview lasted 80 minutes.

*Time and Place*

The interviews took place between September and October of 2007. All interviews were
face-to-face and conducted in participants’ homes. The interviews lasted for approximately one to
two hours. At the study’s onset, I did not target specific interview locations, but asked
participants to choose their preferred locations. Deborah, the first interviewee, asked to hold the
interview at her house, as that was most convenient for her. Mary, the second interviewee,
arranged to meet me at the public library. However, as the public library was undergoing
construction that week, we ended up in her home daycare. Thus I was able to observe both her
home and her place of work. Sheila, the third interviewee, asked if we could meet downtown.
When the business centre she had selected for the interview was somewhat busier than
anticipated, we conducted the interview at her home as well. By the final interview with Nancy,
when she asked me if I would prefer to meet at her home or elsewhere, I automatically suggested
her home. A benefit of doing all four interviews at participants’ homes was that the interviews
were less formal and thus more open. In most cases, the women even offered me drink and/or
food. By welcoming me into their homes they were welcoming me, in a sense, into their lives.
Their openness and willingness to share were remarkable.

*Data Collection Strategies*

Various data collection strategies were employed with the participants. These strategies
included in-depth open-ended interviews, observation taking place during the interviews, and
analysis of documents (e.g., lifelines, or timelines of major events in participants’ lives). Patton
(2002) suggests that the use of observations, interviews, and document analysis enhances the
study’s trustworthiness. Therefore, I felt that a combination of these strategies would best
represent these women’s career development experiences (Wilson, 2004).
Pilot interviewing. To begin data collection, I asked my thesis supervisor to interview me and guide me to complete a lifeline. This step was intended not only to test my data collection instruments and provide guidance on how to conduct my interviews, but to reveal my biases and expectations toward the subject. I could then set these aside as a form of bracketing (Pollio, Graves, & Arfken, 2006). Biases revealed included my tendency to be academic/career oriented, my implicit belief that surrender to God’s will is the key to true fulfillment, yet total surrender is a challenge, and my disregard for traditional gender roles. With my supervisor’s feedback, I also altered the order of the interview protocol to begin with broader questions about spirituality and end with questions more specific to career development.

I subsequently conducted pilot interviews with two Christian females outside of the sample. While I had intended to do only one such interview, I decided after the first one that I needed to gain more experience as an interviewer before commencing my main study. Roses, my first pilot subject, was an instructor at the employment resource centre where I had just begun working part-time. Roses, a 46-year-old Mormon, was never married and was childless. Sarah, a nurse attending the Third Day worship centre, was referred to me by a church friend. She was a 31-year-old married woman, several months pregnant, with a 3-year-old daughter. I guided both Roses and Sarah through the lifeline, as well as the semi-standardized interview questions. Both women also completed consent forms.

Roses’ interview, which lasted one hour, took place in a small resource room in our workplace. Overall, it went extremely well. She was very honest during her lifeline, even around sensitive personal and relationship issues, and expressed the significance of the events chosen without much prompting. In her feedback, Roses told me she felt my questions had a nice flow and covered the issue well. She admitted feeling confused about the lifeline but was glad I had given her the opportunity to go back and forth between events. Although the lifeline exercise with Roses flowed quite naturally, I realized I had been unclear, myself, on how to approach this segment of the interview. As a result, before the next interview, I wrote out more detailed
instructions, and created my own lifeline as an example for participants. My example seemed to be effective in helping participants feel more comfortable giving their own stories.

Sarah’s interview lasted approximately 50 minutes, and took place at her parents’ spacious suburban home. The interview went well, as she covered a broad range of topics, including academic, career, spiritual, and relationship decisions. With Sarah, I adopted a more formal interviewer stance, going back and probing on the significance of her lifeline events once the entire lifeline was plotted. This was the approach I carried into the main study. In her feedback, Sarah told me the lifeline sample was helpful, and the questions seemed thorough, covering the subject area very well. She also felt my probing was good, as I remembered little facts she had mentioned throughout the interview. Her main critique was that I had not asked directly what influenced her to become a nurse. While I did not create a question specifically asking why participants chose their careers, if the answer was unclear from their lifelines, I made sure to address it in a follow-up contact. Thus this feedback was valuable and timely.

By completing these three pilot interviews, I evaluated the adequacy of my interview guide, standardized questions, and lifeline instructions. As described, based on my pilots, I refined the study as necessary to ensure that these instruments elicited the desired information (Hershey, Jacobs-Wilson, & Wilson, 2006; Hill et al., 1997). Further, I transcribed all three pilot interviews verbatim and practiced data analysis with Roses’ interview. Taking these steps gave me a better understanding of the qualitative research process.

_Lifeline._ An integral part of my research was the lifeline, which was employed as the first step in an interview study on women’s career development phases (O’Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Previously, the lifeline was utilized to a lesser extent in a qualitative doctoral dissertation on the relationship between spirituality and the career-transition process for middle-aged women “to obtain a visual representation of those critical points and events in participants’ lives and their career development paths” (Akcali, 2000, p. 68). A lifeline typically serves as a form of life review in which clients and career counsellors reveal recurrent themes through the collaborative
examination of critical past and present events in clients’ lives. Based on the life-career narratives created from the lifeline, clients may construct and discuss their preferred futures (Campbell & Ungar, 2004; Cochran, 1997). As Savickas (2004) notes, the career stories unveiled by lifelines “tell how the self of yesterday became the self of today and will become the self of tomorrow” (p. 58). The lifeline is often used as a supplement to more common trait-matching methods of career counselling. It emphasizes meaning-making, personal development, passion, and purpose by revealing patterns in a client’s life story. The lifeline also takes into account multiple roles and influences on career (Savickas, 2000). In this study, the lifeline’s main function was to help each woman reflect on how she arrived at the present, as well as uncover some of the contextual and cultural factors influencing her career trajectory, and gain a holistic view of her career development path (Campbell & Ungar, 2004; Savickas, 2001).

To begin the interview, each participant constructed a lifeline. Lifeline materials included a piece of coloured print or construction paper, as well as a variety of colored pencils, pens, and markers. Choosing any writing tool, the participant drew a line across the midpoint of the paper. On the far left, she labelled the beginning of the line birth. On the far right, she labelled the end of the line present. She used the colour of her choice as she recalled the milestone experiences and defining moments of her life and recorded them chronologically. Three of four participants chose the black pen, and only one, Mary, opted for another writing instrument, a pink marker. For my sample, critical life incidents included entry into the work force, marriage, motherhood, and commitment to current religion. If the event was positive, the participant placed a dot higher than the line in the appropriate section. If the event was negative, she placed a dot lower than the line. She then labelled the dots to identify each event (Cochran, 1997).

Aiming for flexibility, yet focus, in the line of inquiry (Patton, 2002), I prepared an interview guide of relevant topics beforehand for the lifeline exercise (see Appendix D). However, I made minimal use of this tool, instead taking a stance of active listening. I further sought to understand participants’ views without judgment, as is key for maintaining empathic
neutrality (Patton, 2002). This stance correlated with Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie’s (1979) suggestion that, in biographical-narrative interviews, participants should independently construct the main narrative, with the interviewer contributing primarily as an active listener. For each event, with minimal interference, I prompted participants to describe in detail what happened, where they were, who was involved, and what they did (Kidd, 2006). I then asked open-ended follow-up questions derived from the completed lifeline narrative. It took between 30 to 60 minutes to generate and discuss this measure.

**Standardized open-ended interview.** I followed the lifeline exercise with a standardized open-ended interview format, leading each woman through the same questions and sequence. The interview protocol was based on the initial research questions, as well as on the literature (see Appendix E). In CQR, researchers “collect all the data using the same protocol to ensure consistency of responses within a homogeneous sample of participants” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 521). While following a set structure, the questions were open-ended, allowing for a wide range of responses. Additionally, as each case was different, I used probes to explore issues that arose for individual interviewees. This strategy enabled me to gather consistent information with which to compare cases, yet still obtain in-depth information on each case (Hill et al., 1997). This segment lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. I tape-recorded and transcribed each interview verbatim.

While interviewing, I observed and took notes on participants’ nonverbal communication, their appearance, and the interview site. I noted any key phrases and points made by respondents, as well. I subsequently reviewed my field notes and transcripts for potential holes in the data (Patton, 2002) and summarized the information I had gathered in a contact summary form (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (see Appendix F). This procedure prompted follow-up contact with participants, as necessary, by phone or by email. I felt that combining the standardized interview questions with the lifeline was instrumental in unveiling how things came to be rather than simply explaining what they are like, one of the central purposes of qualitative research (Bogdan &
Biklen, 1992). In so doing, I hoped to accurately depict these women’s self-defining life stories, and overarching life themes and purposes in relation to career and faith.

**Research diary.** Throughout the research process I kept a research diary. It functioned as a place to record: (a) my tasks and whereabouts as a researcher; (b) my thoughts and feelings about the study as it progressed, including unexpected developments and problems; (c) my observations during the interviews, as well as clarification of participants’ words (Boynton, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994); and (d) my ongoing thesis to-do list. This diary served most often as a documentation tool for my initial reflections shortly after interviewing, which I employed as I wrote participants’ life stories and began preliminary data analysis. Moreover, it allowed me to reflect on how to overcome stumbling blocks in my thesis progression, and discover creative ways of organizing gathered information (Pollio et al., 2006).

**Triangulation.** In qualitative research, triangulation strengthens a study’s potential for revealing complexity (Hill et al., 1997). With case studies in particular, triangulation aids verisimilitude, or plausibility and coherence, of narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). My study features three types of triangulation: triangulation of data, triangulation of theories, and methodological triangulation (Flick, 2004). First, for triangulation of data, I combined data from different sources (e.g., visual and verbal data). In addition, the data came from individuals representing ethnic, denominational, and geographical diversity (Oates et al., 2005). Then, for triangulation of theories, I based my initial research questions on three theories: Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 2000), complexity theory (Bloch, 2005), and Brewer’s (2001) Vocational Souljourn Paradigm (VSP). Finally, for methodological triangulation, I employed artifacts (lifeline), interviews (lifeline and standardized questions), and observation in my line of inquiry. In a qualitative study, each genre of data gathered works in a complementary way and brings its different strengths to extending knowledge about the research question (Flick, 2004).
As the sole researcher for this study, it was important for me to note and be reflective on my perspective while employing different methods. In so doing, I could be more aware of how this perspective coloured every aspect of my study, from creating the interview protocol to analyzing interview data (Wilson, 2004). As is common to CQR-based studies, I aired biases, or personal preconceptions, on the issue of Christian women’s career development before beginning the coding process (Constantine et al., 2006). These biases were largely informed by my first pilot interview, in which I was the subject (Pollio et al., 2006). This step helped me to acknowledge how my subjectivity might shape the investigation (Wilson, 2004). I also noted any expectations I had formed regarding potential findings after reading the literature and developing the research questions (Hill et al., 1997). I then attempted to set these biases and expectations aside while interviewing. Although striving for empathic neutrality when interviewing, I remained reflective about my own perspective in data analysis to maintain a careful balance between objectivity and subjectivity, and to uphold credibility throughout the study (Patton, 2002). Near the end of the study, I returned to my biases and expectations to see if I had learned anything new, and included these insights in my discussion section (Hill et al., 1997).

In my study, data analysis was a nonlinear and complex process. I had to concur with Wilson (2004) that “the data analysis process is dynamic in that data analysis does not begin and end in a regimented fashion during the research process” (p. 56). To begin analysis, I revisited my research questions, interview protocol, literature review, and theoretical frameworks, and on that basis created an initial coding list (Hill et al., 1997). This list included the limiting or facilitating influence of religion/faith on career, encouragement or discouragement from the church community, and evidence of high self-efficacy for a particular career field.

As a means of practicing data analysis and settling upon a coding method, I analyzed my first pilot interview. To start, I read through the pilot transcript completely, making minor notes in the margins. I then re-read the transcript, this time using different colours to highlight phrases
falling under four major categories: academic, career, personal, and spiritual, and numbering each paragraph. I read through the transcript a third time, using index cards to organize the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the top of each card, I wrote a code based on the evolving domain list and provided evidence of the theme with reference to supporting paragraphs. I then combined several smaller “theme cards” together manually to create a meta-code. This exercise was useful for theme discovery, as I added themes generated in this way to the domain list.

After analyzing the pilot interview, I completed some preliminary steps to organize my primary transcripts. First, I created a contact summary form (see Appendix F), which served as a data analysis tool and reference. At the beginning of this form, I did some coding, expanding on the ideas I had noted during my first read-through of the transcripts. I also employed point-form charts to compare participants’ interview responses and lifeline results (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I then applied the process of reading and re-reading, writing notes, and comparing categories to the domain list, for each interview. At this time, I relied mostly on actual interview data, and merely used the initial domain list as a guide (Hill et al., 1997). Aiming to generate categories applicable to all four participants, I created a set of tentative themes, including egalitarianism, ethics and integrity in the workplace, reciprocity, spiritual guidance/support, and, borrowing from Brewer’s (2001) VSP, seeking an equilibrium among meaning, being, and doing.

For my final codes, I focused on economy and selectivity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). At this stage, I broadened categories to incorporate several different ideas under one general term as I had done with the pilot interview. In the data reduction process (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I sorted data from the lifeline, semi-structured interview questions, and field notes, discarding irrelevant data. I also returned to some of the literature on religion and spirituality, and career development and Christian women to discover new ways to interpret the data (Pollio et al., 2006). At different points, I discussed emergent themes with my thesis supervisor. Finally, I chose two essential themes: (a) centrality of motherhood; and (b) spiritual grounding.
Centrality of motherhood was immediately evident for all participants, as they openly discussed family life and the ways in which motherhood impacted their life and career decision-making. To facilitate coding of this theme, I highlighted all phrases related to motherhood orange. Spiritual grounding was a more difficult concept. I initially conceptualized two themes related to spirituality. One would be spiritual grounding, giving a more general notion of how faith impacted these women’s lives. The other would be based on seeking an equilibrium among meaning, being, and doing in paid and non-paid employment. I numbered the paragraphs and decided to employ index cards once more to find instances supporting the various sub-categories within spiritual grounding. Further, I highlighted all phrases related to spiritual grounding, yellow. Eventually, I decided to combine the two codes related to spirituality into one, to create a stronger, more comprehensive meta-code. However, in my initial attempts at writing this theme, I found I was merely giving a spiritual history for each participant without a strong narrative. After some rewrites and discussions with my supervisor, I limited this segment to focus on how, if at all, these women’s spiritual foundation, including spiritual growth and religious learning (Rubin & Wooten, 2007), influenced their initial and subsequent career decisions, professional development, work-related attitudes and behaviours, and general sense of purpose.

I read the transcripts again, looking for information that had not been included within the two broad themes. On this basis, I considered creating another theme for complementarianism and egalitarianism. However, at my supervisor’s suggestion, I did not make this a major theme, but incorporated parts of it into the life narratives and the spiritual grounding segments. I then attempted to incorporate other minor, yet important, issues (e.g., external influences and messages, personal growth) into the existing schema. To obtain an overall picture of interviewees’ perceptions on the subject matter, I treated each interview, including the lifeline, as an individual case. Within this case, I wrote a detailed life story, which served as a third theme, along with a case analysis of the participants in relation to motherhood and spiritual grounding. Thereafter, I combined the common themes in participants’ verbatim accounts as a comparative,
cross-case analysis (Constantine et al., 2006). For the discussion chapter, I further assessed data in terms of SCCT (Lent et al., 2004), complexity theory (Bloch, 2005), and Brewer’s (2001) VSP, the theories that formed my study’s initial conceptual framework.

To report findings, I first extracted core ideas for each individual case, and then wrote narrative accounts of each woman’s career and life trajectory. Subsequently, I reported on the dominant themes of centrality of motherhood and spiritual grounding, as found in the individual cases. I then reported on findings across cases, describing consistencies, similar phrases, and common themes (Hill et al., 1997). At the cross analysis phase, I also isolated and noted distinct differences across participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Finally, in both the case and cross analyses, I included direct quotations from the women so as to preserve their voices and provide evidence for all claims (Pollio et al., 2006).
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the religious and spiritual influences on Christian women's career decision-making and professional development. This chapter is comprised of findings gathered through this qualitative investigation. The emergent themes arising from this study were developed through inductive reasoning (Wilson, 2004). They are presented in this order for each participant: (a) life story, giving instrumental people and events in the women's lives from birth to present; (b) centrality of motherhood, or the extent to which motherhood has shaped who these women are; and (c) spiritual grounding, or a foundation of faith-based values and purpose.

Deborah

Life Story

The first person I interviewed was Deborah. Deborah spoke softly, yet came across as very warm and self-confident. Throughout the interview, I had an impression of Deborah as being quite ambitious and focused, able to successfully juggle her job, marriage, the twins, church responsibilities, and volunteer work. As Deborah was on sabbatical, her dress was uncomplicated, a light-coloured shirt and jeans, and her shoulder-length light brown hair styled simply.

We conducted the interview in Deborah’s sprawling country home. The family room provided a cozy setting for our discussion, with two green couches, a wooden floor, and wooden drawers. Deborah’s two cats briefly joined us. A quick perusal of the room would reveal signs of Deborah’s son and daughter everywhere. To the right of the room, for example, was a piano, adorned with HOPE in metal letters and church candles, which Deborah said was intended for the
children as they got older. Toys filling the corners of the room included a rocking sheep, stuffed animals, toy drums, and two computers on a low table, which the twins used to play games. Camping gear in one corner implied family togetherness. Deborah later showed me the twins’ bedroom, which was decorated in a Noah’s ark motif.

Deborah’s twins, Aimee and Peter, were often physically present during the first half of the interview as well. Aimee and Peter were very blonde, cute, happy, talkative, and energetic. The Baby Einstein DVD they were watching in the living room did not fully capture their attention, or prevent them from fighting a bit amongst themselves and entering the interview room on occasion. Aimee entered at midpoint to say hi, and ended up colouring quietly for several minutes with the lifeline markers. Peter entered after Aimee had returned to the living room wanting to play on the computer. Soon, however, Deborah’s husband, Jean, returned from his military post, outfitted in full army gear. He very gently and efficiently took the twins outside to play so we could complete the interview uninterrupted. Nonetheless, as I told Deborah after the interview, with Peter and Aimee moving in and out of the room, I had a sense of what it must be like having twin toddlers. For those two hours, I felt I had entered Deborah’s world.

To start the lifeline, Deborah spoke of her father’s death from cancer when she was 9 months old. She was baptized into the Anglican Church shortly before her father’s death. While she was too young to be conscious of his death, Deborah has been volunteering with the Cancer Society since childhood, and has involved the twins in this volunteer activity since they were infants. At 18 months, Deborah’s mother moved her and her older brother from one province to another to better support them as a single mother, to provide them more opportunities, and to “give [them] a life.” When Deborah was three, her mother remarried, which was very positive. Her younger sister, diagnosed with bipolar disorder in her teens, was born three years later. At 12, Deborah was confirmed along with her older brother. Preparation for this event involved spending a few months of Bible study and learning the significance of taking communion, with their minister. Deborah added to her lifeline that, at 13, she began volunteering at the hospital in
the pediatric ward and later with special needs adults in the city. Thus, from a young age she learned to “giv[e] back to the community, doing whatever [she] could, the Christian thing.”

Several years later, at age 18, Deborah began university, eventually becoming the first person on her mother’s side to complete a post-secondary education. A few years before university, at age 16, Deborah had made a conscious decision to challenge herself academically. When her high school removed the enriched program, Deborah switched to another high school to which she had to take two buses. This move set her on the university track. Another significant moment in her teens was that, at 19, she went on an exchange program to Wales. Deborah says, “[This trip] probably changed everything or how I thought about everything. [Before that] I hadn’t seen the world in any stretch of the imagination.” Following this experience, she broke up with her fiancé, a young man whom she had dated since she was 14. She began to imagine that perhaps there was more for her in life than “getting married, having 2.2 children, and being a public school teacher.”

Regardless of Deborah’s change of heart at 19, she did not make a conscious choice to do a master’s and later a Ph.D. She entered an M.Ed. program only after working for a year as a special education teacher and realizing she needed a stronger counselling background. She says, “I always had intended to go back into the classroom.” At age 27, however, Deborah began her Ph.D. in another province following a major education conference she attended during her master’s. At this conference, the professor with whom she had completed research suddenly gave her the opportunity to do the formal presentation of their research findings. Impressed with her presentation, another professor who was her discussant “bribed and cajoled” her into completing her Ph.D. under his supervision. Unfortunately, that year was depressing for Deborah as she began the Ph.D. only two weeks after completing the M.Ed., underwent a difficult knee surgery, and her beloved grandfather died, which was the first death in her family in 27 years. This grandfather was especially influential on Deborah spiritually, regularly sending her the Anglican Church booklet, various scriptures, and religious poems. She claims she “wasn’t prepared in any
way” for his death. Two years later, Deborah married Jean, a French Canadian military officer whom she had met on a plane to a conference. Their eventual romance began on a platonic level, as they had a shared interest in technology. Since he was a non-practicing Catholic, they married in a non-denominational service. Speaking of their opportune meeting, Deborah smiles slightly, “Jean, I mean, he’s absolutely perfect for me. He’s beautiful.”

At 31, Deborah and Jean returned to the province where she was raised to be closer to Jean’s family following his father’s death. Deborah took up her current post as a university professor, and completed her doctorate a year later. She labeled this milestone a neutral event. “I was actually really excited to finish, but it wasn’t like the high that I thought it would be. It was anti-climactic.” Deborah’s next significant event was losing her first daughter, Sophia, a still-born. This was a devastating and significantly life-changing event, one to which she referred frequently during the interview. At this time, Deborah leaned on her faith, her spouse, her chiefly Anglican extended family, and a wide network of friends from all faith backgrounds, to help her move forward. In time, she was able to provide support to others experiencing similar loss as a volunteer counsellor for bereaved families.

At 35, Deborah had twins, a boy and a girl, who are now three years old. Deborah and Jean recommenced regular church attendance, going to the Anglican Church as a family each Sunday. During undergraduate and graduate school, heavy academic and financial obligations limited Deborah’s ability to attend formal church services. While in university, for instance, she worked several jobs in the summers including part-time at the recreation centre snack bar, retail, and full-time in an office job, primarily doing accounting. Despite these time constraints, Deborah says her faith never waned. The same year that she had the twins, the loving stepfather whom she called the “rock of Gibraltar” for the family, died. That was another blow to Deborah and her family, her mother especially.

This year, Deborah began her sabbatical, which has been significant for allowing her more time with her children before they start school. At the same time, it has been a very busy
year, as she continues to conduct research and supervise grad students. She also travels frequently as part of her post. Deborah is content with her career, stressing that she could not have predicted exactly where life would lead her. “You know, my experience with my master’s, my work before coming to this university, all those things have just been serendipitous. I’ve ended up being at the right place at the right time,” she says. In terms of family life, her greatest satisfaction is that her children are happy and healthy. In addition, she feels that, after enduring the worst day of their lives together, when Sophia died, her relationship with Jean is stronger than ever. She avows, “I know for a fact that we can survive anything,” and continues, “Despite the fact that we lost our daughter, I really feel that I’ve had a very blessed life.”

Centrality of Motherhood

After working extremely hard to complete her doctoral degree, Deborah is resolutely career-oriented. She asserts, “My work is a very strong identifier in who I am, and there was never a question of whether I would stay at home as a full-time mother. There was never [that] expectation.” Although she admits the juggling act and “constant negotiation” of her life can be challenging, she is willing to make the sacrifices necessary to be both a successful professional and the best mom possible. Her commitment to work aside, motherhood is a responsibility and a privilege she takes seriously. Deborah says, “We had the kids because we wanted them,” and vows, “Being a mother is probably the most important role I’ll ever play.”

The centrality of motherhood to Deborah’s life is first evident as she talks about the death of her first daughter, Sophia, a still-born baby, when she was 34. She explains that she rushed through the end of her Ph.D., finishing two years ahead of schedule, in large part because of her desire to start a family. When she and Jean discussed starting a family, Jean strongly encouraged her to finish her doctorate first. Taking on the challenge, she “stayed up all night, did all-nighters and whatever it took, just so [she] could fit stuff in.” Doctorate in hand and university position secure, she felt ready to be a mother. In eager anticipation, Deborah and Jean planned out a whole life for their unborn baby. When Sophia was proclaimed dead at birth, Deborah says, “From a
spiritual point of view and a life point of view, losing our daughter was probably the hardest thing I’ve ever had to deal with.” She admits, “When I lost Sophia, my whole life stopped, period.”

With time, and much pain, Deborah and Jean pulled through, relying on each other, on their faith, and on the support of their loved ones.

Sophia is gone, but never forgotten. After her birth, Deborah and Jean had her baptized, and also held a memorial service, which over 100 friends and family members attended. Furthermore, Deborah and Jean cremated their first-born and made plans that when one or the other of them passes away, their ashes will be mingled with hers. Deborah says, “The idea is that the three of us end up together.” In honour of Sophia, Deborah now works as a volunteer counsellor for other parents who have lost an infant. Deborah believes their loss made her both more compassionate and more appreciative of what she has. She also knows she and Jean will never return to the way they were. For instance, when the twins were born the following year, Deborah and Jean decided to return to formal church attendance. She explains, “When we had the twins, we really wanted them to have a sense of religion and, and part of that, beliefs, because we think that’s really what helped us get through our loss.” As such, Christianity is a major factor in the way they are raising their children. To promote this religious foundation, Jean and Deborah attend church with Aimee and Peter as a family, and read to the twins from their children’s Bibles and book of prayers.

Reflecting on the events of the past few years, Deborah firmly believes she and Jean are better parents for their loss, saying:

> With Sophia we would have been more anxious and worrying about everything from a common cold to whatever, but with the twins, they’re so much a part of who we are now, we just feel blessed to have them, that they’re healthy, that they’re happy.

After Sophia, Deborah also changed her priorities during her second pregnancy in the sense that if there was conflict going on in her office, whether or not she was directly involved, she would leave the room. She often took on a mediator role when pregnant with Sophia, and now “consider[s] that a great cost to [herself], as well as to Sophia.” Her goal in the second pregnancy
was to avoid any physiological and stress-related damage to the twins. This remained a priority after their birth, as evidenced by her turning down a “great opportunity” to present a workshop in India while the twins were under a year old and still nursing.

On sabbatical this year, Deborah is happy to have a chance to spend more time with the twins before they start school, and has a lot of fun with them. As important as her career is to her, she also treasures the time she can spend with Aimee and Peter while they’re young, emphasizing:

I’m not willing to take away from their time. I want to really spend the time with them, so what it means is I’m working until 11 or 12 at night, whereas if I didn’t have the twins, I’d have at least a couple hours at the end of the week. But it’s just shifting priorities. I personally feel really blessed to have them, [and] I don’t want to waste a single moment. At the end of the day I don’t want them to say, you know, where’s Mom? Because I do travel a lot with work, yet I want them to know that they’re still the number one priority.

Even in terms of volunteer work, Deborah chooses projects that incorporate her family, instead of “[her] being taken away from the family.” To be fully present as a mother, Deborah has also turned down positions offering more responsibility at other universities. When possible, with Jean to provide additional childcare support, Deborah also brings her children on work-related travels. In the past two years alone, for instance, Aimee and Peter have been on 15 flights.

While striving to do the best she can personally for her children, Deborah agrees wholeheartedly with the saying, “It takes a community to raise a child.” Accordingly, Deborah and Jean were very careful in choosing the children’s godparents, who are diverse in terms of race, profession, sexual orientation, and religious background. These godparents, hand-picked from among the couple’s closest friends, are people who believe in God and who share similar values. Deborah clarifies, “They each bring something different.” She adds, “It was important for us to have people who’d be part of their lives for their entire life, who would be able to help shape their spiritual direction as well.”

In the twins’ first two years, following her stepfather’s death, Deborah’s mother stayed and looked after the twins three or four days a week. During that time, as now, they also attended
nursery school part-time. Additionally, in Aimee’s and Peter’s first seven months, Jean took parental leave, while Deborah returned to work, as “he wanted equal time.” Jean continues to take an active parenting role, and is a true partner to Deborah in every sense of the word. “We believe in equality in our household. This is an equal [partnership].” Jean is also supportive of Deborah’s vocational goals, and serves as her main external resource in making major career decisions.

Deborah is grateful for her community, and feels fortunate that her children are well-socialized and consider themselves at home anywhere they go. With the help of her friends and family, she aspires to raise the twins with a strong belief system, a sense of right and wrong, and the view that they must always treat others as they would like to be treated.

**Spiritual Grounding**

Apart from motherhood, a major force on Deborah’s life has been her sense of spiritual grounding. Deborah was raised in the Anglican faith from birth and, in that sense, inherited her religion. Nevertheless, when she was 12 years old, her mother allowed her to “[go] on a little shopping spree” of other denominations to determine if she really wanted to be confirmed in the Anglican Church. In the end, Deborah independently chose to remain in the religion of her immediate and extended family. Thus, since childhood, Deborah’s faith has been a core value, something that “directly shape[s] everything [she] does.” Her faith in God and in Jesus, as fostered by Anglicanism, has never waned, even during her hectic university years when she temporarily moved away from formal church services.

Deborah’s conception of her life’s purpose, “giving as much as I can,” is based on an Anglican Church dictum that everyone has a ministry on earth, which may be expressed in different ways. This purpose encompasses her various roles as a wife, a mother, a professor, and a volunteer. Deborah’s “ministry” officially began at age 13, when she served as a volunteer with special needs adults and in a hospital pediatrics ward. She immediately refers to her early volunteer work when questioned on what influenced her choices of child psychology, cognitive
psychology, and education as undergraduate majors. “Because of [volunteering] I had a lot more empathy and also wanted to work with people.”

Deborah’s subsequent decisions to complete advanced degrees in psychology and education, however, were based on non-religious factors – her desire to more effectively assist troubled students in the classroom, and later, the persuasion of an influential professor. In Deborah’s estimation, faith was thus not a major driving force in her career decision-making. “I wouldn’t have said that I chose becoming a university professor because of my religion. There are a lot of things [in academia] that make you almost anti-religion.” Deborah adds that while “there are people who do what [she does] who aren’t religious,” her approach to professorship is directly impacted by her faith. As a Christian, she says, “I’ll do my best to do what I’m permitted, if I’m needed. I’ll do anything for anybody, within my power.” Reflecting on how her career has unfolded, Deborah terms her work partially a career and partially a calling. Although she did not envision holding her current position even 10 years ago, she finds her work sufficiently challenging and fulfilling.

I take what life has given me, and I take advantage of every opportunity that has been presented. I’ve ended up being at the right place at the right time and said the right thing and got the job. I never had a clear path that I was going in, but I couldn’t imagine, at this point, doing anything different. This is exactly what I want to do at this time.

Deborah is a pioneer in her family, as the first person to attend university even at the undergraduate level. Accordingly, she has always been career-oriented, which sometimes runs counter to the more traditional views of the Anglican Church. Deborah states that while her religion is relatively modern in its views on women in authority, as women may become ordained Anglican ministers, “they do hit a glass ceiling like in most corporations and everywhere else as to how high they can go.” Furthermore, while the church gives women the freedom to choose their individual paths and “women are viewed highly, on some levels, there’s still women’s place. It’s still perceived as the little woman at home has to take precedence.” In her view, however,
“you can be both a Christian and a career-oriented person and have a family and not have to compromise anything.”

Uniting her faith with her career orientation, Deborah regularly enacts her sense of calling on the job. The tenuous link between her large-scale career decision-making and Christianity notwithstanding, Deborah’s faith-based values infiltrate her daily workplace decisions. One of these is to always follow the Golden Rule when interacting with others at work. “The way that I deal with people, the empathy I share with them, when they come in crisis or whatever, is because of [my] faith system.” Furthermore, “My personal motto is that integrity is everything. My integrity and belief structure is based on, really, the foundations of the Bible in that sense [that] everything’s do unto others as you want them to do unto yourself, the idea of being a good Christian.” Deborah prides herself on standing firm for what she believes is right. For example, she will not put her name first on a published academic paper written solely or chiefly by graduate students, as sometimes occurs with professors and their research assistants. In her view, this is an instance of not treating others as equals, for authorship unmistakably belongs to the individual(s) doing the work.

Deborah continues, “There are very clear things that I will not do, and I have been asked at different points to do things that are against my moral fiber at work, as well as against my beliefs, and I’ve said no.” Deborah admits that on occasion her refusal to bend the rules has been detrimental, and she has had to turn down opportunities. Conversely, her level of integrity has opened different opportunities to her and garnered her respect. Regardless of the outcome, she feels, “At the end of the day I have to be able to sleep with myself. I don’t wan[t] [to] live life with regrets,” and therefore will never make choices that contradict her ethical standards. All of the full-time staff in Deborah’s unit are Christian, whether practicing or non-practicing, and Deborah feels fortunate to have colleagues who share her faith base and solid workplace ethics. Her supervisor is an especially strong advocate and mentor, and they regularly consult one
another about moral or ethical dilemmas. While Deborah and her colleagues do not habitually
discuss God or religion at work, their similar values make it easier to manage issues that arise.

Independent, Deborah relies on various methods to help her discern God’s will. These
include inner dialogues, Bible readings, and, most importantly, prayer. “It’s really an inner voice,
you know, please God, let this work out or please let me make the right choice. Let me have the
grace to do this properly. When [I’m] at wit’s end with situations, I love silent prayer.” Prayer
sustains and guides her through all aspects of her life, including her volunteering. Volunteering is
once again central to Deborah’s identity, as she and Jean decided to take up community service as
a family a few years into their marriage. Stuck on the “career treadmill” and caught up in
fulfilling material needs (e.g., buying a house), they felt volunteering could help them obtain a
more balanced perspective on life. Thus, despite her crammed schedule of “work and 101
juggling acts,” Deborah makes volunteering a priority. Drawing from her professional and
personal experience, she provides respite for a teenager with special needs, serves in the church
nursery, and counsels bereaved families, among other activities. Her community involvement
reminds her, “It’s not all about me. There are a lot of other things happening around me.”
Deborah often returns to her life’s guiding principle. “One of the things that I really believe in is
giving back. I really believe that you give as much as you can, whether financially or time, and
you do what you can do.” At church, at work, at home, and in the community, Deborah
wholeheartedly espouses this belief.

Mary

*Life Story*

The second person I interviewed was Mary. Since the public library where Mary and I
had arranged to meet was closed, we held the interview at her home. As we conducted the
interview in her basement daycare, Mary’s husband watched their two daughters in the living
room upstairs. Befitting the informal interview setting, Mary was dressed in jeans and a white t-
shirt, and wore her long light brown hair casually. Mary presented herself as an open, sincere, and somewhat quiet individual. I noted that she seemed “uncomplicated in personality and manner.” In addition, although Mary expressed concern throughout that her interview would not be as insightful as those of more highly educated participants, her remarks were very perceptive.

Employing the daycare as the interview setting provided a unique insight into her life and career. The daycare seemed a welcoming venue for children with its bright red, yellow, and blue walls. Moreover, several learning and organizational tools and toys were dispersed around the large room included: a large white board, an erasable calendar, costumes hanging on hooks (e.g., dance outfits, animals), a play kitchen and workshop, legos, dollhouses, bouncy balls, toy cars, a vanity, a toy keyboard, a soccer-coloured exercise ball, and a Sesame Street alphabet cloth. Electronic “toys” such as a TV, VCR, videos, and a computer completed the picture of a tidy, colourful, and entertaining daycare. Most impressive were items demonstrating Mary’s creativity and artistic talent, such as a painted number sign, a collage comprised of the daycare children’s pictures, and an alphabet banner painted with articles representing each letter.

In representing her major life events, Mary began by describing her various moves as a young child. Born in Canada, she moved to England with her parents at age one, and returned to Canada four years later. When she was seven, her parents divorced. Subsequently, her mother “shuffled” her and her brother, five years younger, from city to city. Three years later, Mary and her brother were sent to live temporarily with their father in another province. After a while, desiring to stay in one place, Mary made the difficult decision to remain with her father while her brother returned to their mother. This decision triggered a lifelong separation from her brother; although they reconnected somewhat as adults, they are still not close. That same year, Mary began attending the Salvation Army Church, where her stepmother was a member in good standing. Reflecting further on her move, Mary remains sad that she and her brother lost their closeness. She says:
Looking back, I often say I wish I had gone with my mother, but in saying that I don’t think I’d have the beliefs I have, the morals I have, the strong connection I have with God, had I moved back with my brother. It’s almost like I gave up my brother but I found God, which is hard and I pray for my brother constantly.

At age 12, she became a junior soldier, which meant that she could take different classes to learn about God and the Bible. Two years later, Mary became a senior soldier, which signalled a formal commitment to the church and to its rules. At this time, she signed an initial pledge sheet vowing to abstain from harmful substances and from gambling, and was allowed to wear the Salvation Army uniform for the first time. Her early teen years were a spiritual high point, and she was very active in the Salvation Army, attending Sunday school, singing in the youth choir, doing Bible study, attending junior youth councils, and participating in core cadets. She did not reach that level of church involvement again until the present, in which she attends church on Sunday mornings, teaches Sunday school, attends Bible study Tuesday nights, and teaches the children’s singing company on Wednesdays.

The next major event in Mary’s life occurred when she was 18. She met Jim, a non-Christian. They dated for six years, and she moved in with him in the last year. By that time she had also completely given up church and started drinking a bit. Of those decisions, she now says, “I knew [that] was against everything I believed.” Mary also feels responsible for not speaking out about things she felt were wrong, such as the lax manner in which Jim’s family disciplined their children and Jim’s habit of drinking and driving. Mary also began fighting constantly with her father, lying to him, and stealing money from him and from her adoptive half-brother. She sank further and further into debt, and was bankrupt by the end of her relationship with Jim.

Worse yet, the relationship turned abusive. Mary describes the difficulty she faced in leaving:

I shouldn’t have stayed with a guy that beat me [but] I look back and I tell people now, it’s easy for women to turn around and say, “Why do you stay with that person if they’re beating you?” But when you’re in the situation it’s very hard. It is easy to say, “Why do you stay?” but it’s not easy to leave.

Throughout this period, Mary prayed that things would get better between Jim and her, but now realizes that God answered her prayers in the best way. Mary recounts, “I had, by this point, a
broken nose and a broken arm, and finally realized that this [was] ridiculous. One day I called my father and said you have to come get me. I packed up all my stuff while Jim was out drinking and I went home.”

Although Mary carried on an on-again, off-again relationship with Jim for a full year after leaving him, moving back with her father was a vital first step toward regaining her life. Due to the strain in her relationship with her father, she changed provinces once more to live with her mother. “I prayed about it, and it was the best decision I’ve ever made,” she says. A month after this move, she decided to return to church and encountered several people she knew. One of these was her now-husband, Mike, whom she had dated while back in her father’s province. Several months after meeting again, they were engaged, and they married the following year. She describes their union:

It was everything I’d dreamed of. It was a guy that was gonna be there for me. [Also] his parents are Salvation Army officers, so I knew it would really help me in my faith. I’d been so weak in my faith and was leaning on him to help me come back to where I knew I should’ve been years ago.

Two days after getting married, Mary quit her job at the drive-through of a coffee shop, where she had been working for several months. When management accused her of stealing money out of their till after she had given them a year of honest service, she promptly decided to leave. She and her new husband were living with her mother and stepfather at the time, saving until they could afford a house of their own. Her mother then offered Mary the opportunity to start her own daycare in their home, saying, “Well, you want your daycare. Do it in my basement.” Mary gladly accepted. Although Mary had completed an early childhood education diploma while living with her father, her credits had not been recognized by daycares in her mother’s province. Consequently, she had been steered from childcare into other jobs that were ultimately unsatisfying. At last, with her mother’s offer, she saw her long-held dream of running her own childcare business come to fruition.
Continuing the lifeline, Mary almost neglected to mention a very critical and painful incident in her life. At 29, she miscarried. She was distraught. Nevertheless, with support from her spouse, her family, and friends at church, she was able to overcome her frustration and anger with God. In time, she came to realize that she and her husband were not yet emotionally or financially prepared for a baby. When Mary was age 30, with the assistance of a real estate agent from their church, she and her husband moved into their own home. Two years later, at 32, Mary gave birth to a healthy baby girl. At 34, she had another daughter, who was born with a cleft lip. Her daughter’s condition was a test of faith, as Mary blamed herself. Thankfully, her daughter underwent successful reconstructive surgeries.

These days Mary has her hands full, balancing motherhood, her daycare, church work, and marriage. She continually strives to carry out God’s purpose for her in all spheres of her life. In terms of career, Mary feels God opened up all the necessary doors for her in childcare, and her passion and abilities lie firmly in this field. In addition, since she had and continues to have a more practical than academic orientation, she desired a career for which she would not need a university degree. Mary sincerely believes her occupation is a calling. She considers it part of God’s will for her life to build a Christian foundation for the young children. She also establishes that her career choice was never difficult, saying, “So many different things ha[ve] happened in my life, and I [have] moved to different places, but [childcare has] just, it’s been the consistent, and I really believe that’s because that’s where I’m supposed to be.”

Centrality of Motherhood

Mary claims that, since her own childhood, she has always loved children and babies, and wanted to be a mother. Thus, she was devastated when she had a miscarriage at age 29, at two months along. She cried for days. It was both an emotionally and spiritually low point in her life. Making it more difficult was the accompanying Dilation and Curettage (D&C) surgery to remove the fetus, her first major surgery. Mary says, “I blamed God. It was the first time, I think, even from leaving the church and straying so far, that I actually turned around and said, ‘God, I hate
you for what happened to me.”’ Although she later prayed for forgiveness, she said she needed to lash out at the time. Mary worked through her pain and disappointment through prayer and devotional reading, and with counsel from church members, and emotional support from her family, particularly her husband and stepfather. Looking back on this event, Mary realizes having that child would not have been the best thing for her and her husband. They were not at a point of stability in their marriage or finances. “We were still living with my parents. We had just gotten married. We were still just getting used to being married. We weren’t ready for a child.” Of her husband’s role in helping her overcome her devastation, she continues, “We sat and we talked and we cried, and later we prayed about it, and we came to realize that it was the best decision. God didn’t have the child in plan for us at that point.”

Three years later, at 32, Mary was pregnant once more. By this time, she and her husband were more established in their marriage and their careers, and had a home of their own. Mary prayed every day during the first few months of her pregnancy and was pleased to have a “healthy, beautiful daughter” several months later. Two years after that they had their second daughter. Mary identifies both births as highlights of her life. Nonetheless, the birth of her second daughter was an emotionally trying time, as Mary blamed herself when the child was born with a cleft lip. She says that when she was pregnant the ultrasound technicians could not get a clear picture of her daughter’s face, which led her to comment, “What’s the worst that could happen, she’ll have a cleft lip.” She feels now that God gave her a child with a cleft lip largely because she is a perfectionist, to teach her that “it was OK” if she did not have the perfect home and the perfect family. After separate surgeries at three months, six months, and a year, all that remains of her daughter’s condition is a scar above her lip and a slight speech impediment, which a speech therapist is now working to correct. Mary feels her fervent prayers were answered in this regard, and that this incident strengthened her faith.

Discussing her approach to motherhood, Mary reflects on the challenges of not having a Christian family to support her beliefs. While her stepmother was a staunch Salvationist, her
mother, brother, and father were non-Christian. She recounts that while she was growing up her father never belittled her or her stepmother for going to church, or tried to stop them. However, he asked them to read the Bible in the privacy of their rooms and to pray quietly. As a result, she focuses on raising her daughters to be proud Christians. She says, “I’m really planning to bring them up to know God. It’s really important to me and [is] one of my main focuses for my children. We pray every night at bedtime. We pray at lunchtime. We do devotions.” Mary is raising her daughters to know that God always answers prayer as they pray aloud together for themselves and for church members. Moreover, she strives to instill her deepest values in her children, such as the importance of being honest at all times. She also encourages her daughters that they can do anything they want to do in terms of career, sports, or other future plans.

When asked to describe how motherhood has changed her life, Mary admits, “It’s very trying at times. A lot of things that I never believed I would do or say, I do.” Despite some struggles, it is clear she derives great joy from this role. Furthermore, while she sincerely believes her occupation is a calling, she will always put her family first. Explaining the role of work in her life, she says:

In my life, where my job’s important, my family’s more important. If I had to give up my job for my family, I would. If I had to cut back on my hours of work and have less pay, I would. My job is fun. I enjoy going to work, but it’s not the main part of my life.

Asked which roles take priority in her life, Mary says she most treasures her roles as wife, mother, and Christian. Moreover, speaking of why she chose to run a daycare in her home, she describes her own somewhat lonely childhood, and her desire to spend more time with her children:

I knew when I grew up, I wanted a family, and I knew I wanted to be there for my family. I was a latchkey kid. I’d come home to an empty house and I went to school. I was home on holidays by myself. I didn’t want that for my kids. I knew that I wanted to be there when they came home from school, and so, the job that I have now, I could still bring in an income for the family and provide for my family, but I have that flexibility of being home for my kids. Being here when, if they call from school and say they’re sick, you know, not having to send them to a babysitter. So that was, in making a decision, I guess that was important to me too.
At present, Mary’s daughters generally stay with her in the daycare, as they are still quite young. Her husband looks after them if he has a day off of work or is on vacation. The girls rarely have babysitters. In this way, Mary is able to reconcile her sense of calling with her desire to pass her values and beliefs on to her daughters.

*Spiritual Grounding*

Since Mary officially joined the Salvation Army Church at the age of 12, adopting her stepmother’s religion, Christianity has been the source of her strongest convictions, including beliefs about family and career. Facing life’s complexities, Mary has long been a firm believer in prayer, having learned through church teachings and personal experience that “God answers prayers if you truly believe. He might not answer [them] the way you wanted at that particular time, but He answers [in] the way that [is] best for [you].” Moreover, “In any major decision I make, I pray.” Faith has thus been a guiding force throughout Mary’s life, with the exception of a brief period in her early 20s. During this period, Mary was in a tumultuous relationship with Jim, a non-Christian, and briefly abandoned her spiritual and religious beliefs. She began drinking a bit, moved in with Jim, and stopped attending church. After a cross-provincial move at age 25 to live with her mother, Mary broke up with Jim and returned to the faith that has shaped every aspect of her life, including vocational ambitions.

Mary’s dream of opening a home daycare first materialized at the age of 11, due in part to her love of children and in part to pragmatic reasons:

> I was never really, really good at school, so I knew I could never go on and be a nurse or a doctor or a professor, or anything along those lines, but I knew I didn’t need a lot of education for this, and it was a way that I could impact other people’s lives. I knew that I had to pick a career that was suited to those things, and I just always loved children.

Subsequent to making a serious commitment to the Salvation Army in her early teens, Mary’s career goal crystallized and she began to see childcare as a way to minister. “When I was getting a little bit older and it was time to choose [my] career, I knew that that’s the age that you have the greatest impact on children.” Mary’s early decision was reinforced in high school, when
neighbours frequently offered her babysitting jobs. Despite being fairly certain about childcare, Mary held several different jobs in her youth, working in a book store and in various coffee shops. At each job, she prayed, “Is this where I’m supposed to be at this point?” She says, “I tried other jobs and I was never happy. I always ended up back with children.” Also factoring into her career decision-making was that, as Mary’s church commitment increased, she sought a position allowing her to keep Sunday as a holy day.

When Mary moved to her current province and her early childhood education credits were not accepted, she wondered if God wanted her to change careers; however, she fervently prayed to be able to continue in the field she enjoyed. Soon opportunities opened for Mary once more in childcare, culminating in her mother’s offer to open a daycare in her basement. As such, Mary does not doubt that her work at the daycare is part of God’s plan for her life.

I used to pray about what I should do with my life, and I don’t ever remember being guided in any direction other than childcare. I don’t think that it would’ve been where I was supposed to be if all those doors hadn’t been opened. I really believe that God opened all those doors. No matter what ups and downs in my life I had, there was always childcare throughout it all.

Besides prayer, Mary discerned God’s will by analyzing the external circumstances of her life, by considering her personality, including a preference for working alone, and by listening to the counsel of godly friends. “I have a way with children. People have always told me that, and I really believe that that’s God’s purpose for me.” For Mary, career decision-making has never been a major struggle. “I hear people say that when they find their right job, they feel settled, they feel peaceful. They enjoy their jobs. I’ve never felt not peaceful doing daycare. It’s a calling.”

In Mary’s view, the beliefs of her church regarding women and employment also supported her career progress. Mary avows that her religion endorses equal rights for women, as evidenced by the husband-and-wife teams who preach on Sunday mornings. Both women and men take on the highest leadership roles in division headquarters, as well. “Our church is a church that helps people, so I don’t think our church holds women back from working. If anything I’d say it really promotes women to be all they can be.” Mary feels, “Women should be in positions
equal to men. God made man and woman different, but I don’t think, in my mind, that he made us so we couldn’t do the same things. We can both hold the same job. We can both go out for the same sport.” She maintains this stance as a mother, telling her daughters, “You can aim to do whatever you want to do,” and in her daycare, refusing to treat the boys and girls differently. Mary concludes, “Yes, it’s important to be a wife and a mother, but you can do that and be a working woman. You can balance both.”

Mary’s religious background guides her on a daily basis, as she relies on several faith-based values. For instance, in her past and present places of employment, trust, honesty, and integrity are central values she has put into practice. On quitting her coffee shop job, she says, “Trust is a big thing in my life, and if I don’t have that from my employer, then I can’t work for you.” In all she does, Mary also strives to display a strong work ethic, keep her word, and treat “people the same way [she’d] like to be treated.” Most significantly, Mary believes that “you should be an influence when you are at work” and that “if you are a Christian, that should come out in your work.” Hence Mary reveals to all parents that she runs a Christian-based daycare, and her home is a non-violent and non-drinking home. She also shares that children in her daycare pray, sing Sunday school songs, and learn to celebrate Christmas as Jesus’ birthday. Mary sees operating a Christian-based daycare as her part in ministering to the children, and laying a spiritual foundation for them. With only a few exceptions, parents are receptive to this direction and appreciate the fact that their children are receiving some religious values even if they themselves are not religious.

Some of [the children] come from homes where they don’t go to church, they don’t hear prayers, and [here] they are learning little prayers. I really [think] that even if they’re coming from a non-Christian home and we sing Sunday school songs or I have them pray at lunchtime, it might impact their lives when they get older. Even when they leave me at the age of five and start going to school, they’ve got that little bit of a foundation, that they might hear later on in life and say, “Oh, yeah. My babysitter used to do that.”

Reminiscing on her childhood, Mary admits that at times it was difficult not having a strong Christian base in her family. This struggle persists. Of her brother and mother, specifically,
“It’s hard [that] my mother and brother don’t go to church. They don’t understand why I tithe my 10% every week. They don’t understand why I’m so involved in my church.” In the face of this decided lack of spiritual support, Mary’s faith is even dearer to her. As such, she is driven to share her faith with everyone she encounters, including the young children at her daycare. Undoubtedly, her openness in sharing her faith, despite potential opposition, helps Mary successfully navigate her various responsibilities as a wife, a mother, and a childcare provider.

Sheila

Life Story

Sheila was sharply dressed, wearing a beige jacket and sweater, a flowered scarf, and jeans. Her long, dark hair was carefully curled. Sheila and I conducted the interview at her home because it provided a tranquil setting, free from distractions. At our initial meeting, Sheila seemed soft-spoken, charming, and quietly confident, with an accent similar to that of the many South Africans I have met. Her spirit radiated calm and patience as well. For example, she was very accommodating in terms of our meeting time and location. I also took observational notes on her home environment. As Sheila was in the midst of moving, there were boxes cluttering her tables and floor. Paintings of flowers and water scenes hung on lavender walls throughout the house, and real plants brightened up the common areas. Several items illustrated a desire for self-improvement, such as an exercise bicycle, an outdoor bicycle, self-help books on the living room table, and collages depicting her goals for herself (e.g., better health and finances). Sheila’s living room also prominently displayed pictures of her children, her mother, and herself. Overall the small house had a comfortable, yet minimalist feel, and was a proud testament to Sheila’s ability to live independently and support herself.

On her lifeline, Sheila plotted what she viewed as the events most influential in shaping her current reality. Born in Zimbabwe, she moved several times as a young child due to her father’s work on the railroad, and, later as an adult, due to various life choices. Starting school in
Botswana at the age of 5, she would move on to a convent boarding school run by nuns in Zambia at age 12 with her older sister, and later her younger sister. Her father sent her and her sisters there because he wanted to steer them from negative influences. Sheila laughs, “I rebelled. I got into trouble a lot of times.” While she did not enjoy this period of her life and found the rules at the boarding school restrictive, her Catholic school upbringing cemented her loyalty to the Catholic Church until she was well into adulthood.

When Sheila was 16, her father died in a car accident. As she and her siblings never had the chance to see his body or to say a proper goodbye, she never fully accepted his death. Sheila admits that her father’s death may have impacted her older sister, and, perhaps, herself, in ways they did not realize at the time, stating, “Dad was the one that was always pushing us, and he actually was very ambitious for us. He wanted us to go to college. He wanted us to go to university. And he was making sure that he was saving enough money so that we could go.” While Sheila completed high school and college after her father’s death, her sister soon dropped out of school.

Sheila speaks in admiring tones of her mother, who stayed strong throughout this tragedy and supported herself and her children as a single woman. She states, “My mother was a very strong woman. She didn’t let anything stop her. She was a very good role model for me in that I knew that as a woman in a male-dominated world, I could do anything I wanted to. I just had to be determined.” Sheila marvels at how, for a few years, her mother single-handedly ran the butchery she and Sheila’s father had purchased two years before he passed away, and later opened a successful boutique.

At age 18, Sheila obtained employment as a bank teller. This employment was facilitated by the nuns at her school, who arranged for bank employees to meet graduating students. For Sheila, this position served three purposes: (a) helping her become accustomed to the work environment, (b) teaching her how to be really committed to something, and (c) helping her earn enough money to visit the countries she had dreamed of seeing while in high school geography.
classes. She was later promoted to bank manager’s secretary. Finally, at age 20, Sheila had saved enough money to attend and complete a one-year secretarial college in Oxford, England. While abroad, she visited Belgium, Switzerland, and Germany as well. In her second year in Europe, she lived and worked in Germany and Switzerland. Sheila describes this as an educational experience that allowed her to become more independent and less “ naïve,” seeing how people lived outside of her small town in Zimbabwe. After a few years in Europe, Sheila moved back to Zimbabwe to stay with her mother. While in Zimbabwe at age 24, she became a single mother, which halted her plans to return to Europe. With childcare assistance from her mother and her sisters, Sheila continued working as an office assistant in a pathology lab and later as a legal secretary.

At age 29, Sheila met a non-Christian French Canadian during his stint as a business teacher in Zimbabwe, and subsequently moved to Canada to be his wife. Since her husband frequently accepted brief contracts to work all over the world in accounting and business, she moved to various countries in the early years of her marriage (e.g., Swaziland, Zaire). Sheila and her husband had a son when she was 31. Sheila eventually decided to stay in Canada with her children while her husband worked abroad. During the first nine years of her marriage and before separating from her husband, Sheila stayed at home with her children. When she was 38, she returned to work, completing secretarial contracts through an agency. At this time, Sheila also asked her husband for a divorce, finally acknowledging that “[she] really didn’t want to stay in a relationship that wasn’t good for [her] emotionally and mentally.” Unfortunately, she says, “He absolutely, absolutely refused and wouldn’t give me the divorce at all!” At 42, she was hired by the government as an administrative assistant, where she remains, in a different department.

After a 10-year struggle to obtain the divorce and end her largely unfulfilling relationship, Sheila was divorced at age 48. To be able to keep custody of her children and to obtain her divorce, she had to agree to give up receiving any money or property accumulated during their marriage. It was during this difficult time that she learned about a new church, the Unity, from a lawyer who advertised himself as “seeing law differently,” with whom she had an
initial consultation. Based on the simple premise that, “God is a good, kind loving God, and He loves you,” she found that it suited her needs more than the highly regimented Catholic Church, which told her, “Go confess your sin because you’re a sinner, and God doesn’t like sinners,” or the Pentecostal Church, which she briefly joined and was baptized into in her 20s, as a result of persuasion from her mother, who had converted from Catholicism earlier.

Presently, Sheila is working as a legal administrative assistant in the government, doing memos and briefing notes for lawyers as they advise the deputy minister. Sheila describes herself as someone not desiring to “break through the glass roof,” but who is content to stay out of leadership positions because she knows she does not possess certain leadership skills. Moreover, she feels that her current employment draws upon her strengths of seeing situations differently and peaceably managing conflict. In that sense her work provides her enough of a challenge. Thus, despite the many governmental opportunities to “move on up,” she is content to stay where she is. Sheila is satisfied with the income and prestige level of her present occupation, yet does not feel it is a career or a calling. For her, work has always been a means to an end rather than a means of self-fulfillment. For instance, she entered secretarial college in England primarily because it was a way for her to visit Europe. Sheila plans to transition to a more flexible career as a real estate agent within two years, giving her more time to pursue creative interests and to volunteer in the community. Her ultimate dream is to retire in Africa.

Looking back on her life, Sheila says that she would not change anything for the person she is now. She also says that now, in her 50s, she knows herself better and is more comfortable in her own skin. Hence she can avoid compromising herself in relationships as she did before, and feel free to be who she is. As she states, “The way I am is the way I am, and I totally accept myself, and if people are going to criticize me for being either too this or too that, or whatever, it really doesn’t bother me.”
Sheila does not hesitate to choose the births of her son and daughter when she was 24 and 31, respectively, as two of the most positive moments in her life. She describes having her daughter in this manner:

The birth of my daughter, despite the circumstances, it was just such an incredible experience and even though there was a stigma attached to it at the time, being a single mom, and people would look at me, just the joy and happiness I felt of having brought into this world a beautiful life, was something good for me.

Although her pregnancy halted her plans to return to Europe after working and saving some more money in Zimbabwe, Sheila has no regrets. She says her life would have been quite different if she had not gotten pregnant at this time, but notes, “It wouldn’t have been good because I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Following the birth of her daughter, Sheila continued to work in Zimbabwe in secretarial positions. She credits her sisters and her mom, especially her mom, for looking after her daughter when she was at work. In her own words, “What made it easy for me at that time especially was being with family, and there was the African culture where people take care of each other.” After getting married at age 29, she had her son at age 31. Stricken with malaria when she was eight months pregnant, yet determined to have a healthy baby, she resisted taking the medication she desperately needed and finally travelled alone to another country to have her son. As she describes it, “The health system in Zaire at that time wasn’t very good and I didn’t feel comfortable with it. I decided to go to Zimbabwe.” There, another doctor told her that to carry the pregnancy to term, she had to take the medication. Fortunately, she had a healthy baby boy shortly afterward. After marriage, Sheila stayed at home with her children for nine years, until her son was five years old. This was in part a deliberate choice and in part due to the fact that she moved frequently while her husband took international contract work as an accountant.

When it was time for Sheila’s son to go to school, she made the decision to return to the workforce and to stay in Canada, separated from her husband. As a result, she essentially acted as
a single mother throughout her children’s lives, and worked hard to help them feel loved and supported despite an absentee father. Since her husband had no Christian values despite being raised in a strict Quebecois Catholic community, Sheila also took on the full responsibility for her children’s spirituality. At the time, this was not a major concern for her. Sheila says, without hesitation, “The [role] that takes priority above all of them is the fact that I’m a mother, and it’s really very important for me to be there for my kids and to help them in whatever situation they find themselves.” Sheila also cites consciously passing the values with which she was raised, such as the importance of honesty and kindness to others, on to her children. So devoted is Sheila to her mother role that for a period of six or seven years as she chauffeured her son to and from hockey she had no time to attend church regularly. Furthermore, during her painful divorce, Sheila was willing to do anything to maintain custody of her children, even give up receiving any financial support from her husband. This was a small price to pay, as she states, “[The] friction and everything was affecting the kids in a very negative way, so I agreed to it.”

Now that her children are grown, Sheila still supports them through their problems, her daughter having suffered from lupus since 9, and her son dealing with emotional issues and addictions. Regarding her son, specifically, she expresses:

My son is having challenges with, I guess it stems from an emotional issue that he has, that his father was always absent, and that his father was never there for him. I realize that it’s a difficult situation for him, but the only way for him to cope with what’s hurting him on the inside emotionally is doing what he does, you know? I try to be there for him, to support him, and of course I pray for him every night.

Sheila mentions the critical role of her church in parenting, that, “having someone preach very, very positive messages to [her] really helped [her], for taking care of [her] kids.” In the face of her children’s difficulties, she remains hopeful, declaring, “My strong belief in God and faith in prayer makes me see that one day my daughter will be healed and my son will be fine.”

Motherhood is foremost in Sheila’s mind throughout the interview. For instance, when asked, “What overall purpose do you think God has for your life?,” Sheila responds, “OK, the first thing that comes to mind is to be a mother. What God wants from me in my life is to do the
best that I can raising my kids to be the wonderful people they can be and will be.” When later questioned on church beliefs regarding men and women, she indicates that the Catholic faith she was raised in relegated women to a role inferior to men. She ponders, “I don’t see how that can be when she plays the most and very important part in being able to bring life into this world.”

Switching to an evaluation of the Unity Church’s beliefs on women, she states:

I would say that they view the woman equally as they view a man, and, in fact, if they were to give anybody superiority it would be the woman because the woman is the one who is responsible to bring life into this world, and God has actually given us that privilege and that honour to be able to do that. To bring a life into this world is a really very wonderful thing to do, and they honour that.

Expressing a mixture of complementarian and egalitarian ideals, Sheila speaks about the double duty a woman has by working and bringing money to the household, as well as rearing children and taking care of the house. She further admits that motherhood is not easy, yet feels strongly that it is one of the most significant roles she could ever take on, and that motherhood is the one role that differentiates women from men. Throughout the lifeline and the semi-structured questions it is clear that being a mother is the role Sheila considers most dear and most central.

Spiritual Grounding

To carry out her different life roles effectively, Sheila often turns to her spiritual foundation for strength. This foundation was first set in early childhood with a distinctly Catholic upbringing, including five years at a convent boarding school. Although Sheila often questioned Catholicism, puzzling over the church’s conception of God as Someone who judged and punished sinners, yet who was good and answered prayers, she never doubted the existence of a Higher Power. “I’ve always, always, ever since I was a little girl, prayed knowing there is a God that’s listening to your prayers.” This certainty sustained her through various low points in her personal and professional life. Moreover, Sheila’s faith has served as a guiding principle for her life, influencing her thoughts and actions both on and off the job.

Sheila has been a faithful church attendee all her life, even while on an ongoing spiritual quest. For instance, despite Sheila’s reservations about Catholicism, she continued to attend
Catholic services up until a few years ago, and even had her children baptized and confirmed there. In her mid-20s, Sheila briefly joined the Pentecostal Church, to which her mother had converted, and was baptized by immersion. However, regarding the Pentecostal Church’s emphasis on judgment and restriction, Sheila felt, “Why would God go to all the trouble of creating me and loving me [and then] say, I condemn you to hell? I couldn’t figure that one out.”

Finally, in her late 40s, Sheila converted to another Protestant denomination, the Unity Church. This change came about as a result of a consultation with a lawyer about her divorce.

He [said], I can see you’ve gotten yourself in a corner, in a very, very tight corner. He asked me then, what are you gonna do about it? The only thing that I could come up with at that time, and that was the only thing that I was doing because I did it all the time [was] pray about it. I told him, praying about any situation does help.

At the end of their discussion, this lawyer spoke to Sheila about the central beliefs of the Unity Church, which he attended. She says, “I realized that all through my years at the convent and being raised as a Catholic that’s what I was looking for. I was actually looking for somebody to look at me and tell me that God is a kind, loving God and He loves you.” The Unity Church did not focus on penance, but on following Christ’s example in treating others with kindness and respect. Giving a global view of the church’s influence on her, Sheila adds, “Having someone preach very, very positive messages to me really helped me, for taking care of my kids, helping (me) cope with getting my divorce, at work with my co-workers and with my work as well.”

In this church, Sheila also found support for her belief that, as a woman, she should have equal opportunities to men. Sheila’s assertion that

the Unity believes that women have just as much rights, [and] in fact they don’t discern. There’s no difference between man and woman. I just see that [God] created them equally, so both men and women have an equal standing, whether it’s from a religious point of view [or] whether it’s in the work field.

seems to correspond with the church’s mission statement, “Unity Church provides opportunities for everyone to express their highest potential” (http://www.unity.org). Speaking of her own life, Sheila says, “From when I was really very little I always had images of me living, which [were]
never really very specific, but I knew somehow that I would be doing a lot more than just being a stay-at-home mom and getting married and having that kind of life.”

The Unity Church’s more liberal view contrasts with the convent school teachings that “a woman had to be humble, she had to be obedient to her husband. In other words, she took a second role, an inferior role to her husband.” When asked if these values limited her, Sheila says they did, in the sense that she always felt in a relationship the man should have the last word in decision-making and that she was inferior to him. This dynamic played out negatively in her marriage, as she often compromised herself and deferred to her husband’s wishes. In addition, while the convent school did not affect her occupational choice directly, Sheila believes it designated “very specific jobs that women could do, and other jobs [that] were up to men to do.”

When it came time to choose her career, Sheila never had “very big career choices” and “never wanted, or had the ambition to be a manager or some corporate person sitting in a high position and giving orders.” Her initial decision to attend secretarial college in England was sparked by a desire to travel abroad, and her continuation in the field by the necessity of financially supporting herself and her children. Sheila further reveals that she has never considered her past or present employment a calling, or even a career. Somewhat wistfully, she adds, “I wish I could say otherwise, but I’m not there yet.” Nonetheless, Sheila’s belief in God, particularly since joining the Unity Church, has “given [her] a lot of faith” and made her “very, very trusting [that] no matter what situation [she goes] into,” things will work out as they should. “The principles of the Unity [are] that when you pray for something and you have the trust and the faith, you know without a doubt that you will get what it is you’ve asked for.” From the Unity Church, Sheila has also learned that “on Earth, everybody has a different purpose.” For Sheila, prayer, along with her gut instinct or “internal guidance,” is God’s way of talking to her, and has helped her make major career or life decisions. In addition, she gleans inspiration from the Unity
Church’s Daily Word, a Biblically-based daily devotional, meditation, and reflective work, as well as counsel from the two women’s groups to which she belongs.

In the years since Sheila joined the Unity Church and obtained her divorce, she has decided to move into a different line of work – real estate, as opposed to her current legal admin position in the government. When queried about a possible correlation between her religious and career transitions, Sheila responds:

Well, [my move to the Unity Church] has had some kind of influence on my decision to want to do something that I enjoy doing, because [before then] I thought, this is what life is all about. It’s struggle. It’s always gonna be difficult. And I’m doing this job that I’m not passionate about, that I would prefer to be doing something else. OK, I enjoy doing it, but I don’t do it with a passion. But now [at Unity] they talk more about, when you can do something really very very well, when you’re passionate about it, so I believe that. It’s made me realize that there’s more to life.

By transitioning to a new field, Sheila hopes that she may come closer to pursuing her passions in paid and non-paid employment. She anticipates that, in three years, she will be certified as a real estate agent and set up a home office, with the flexibility of setting her own hours.

While not chiefly influential on her career choices to this point, Sheila’s faith has given her an ethical base which guides her actions in every position she has held. Among her key values are honesty and integrity. For Sheila, holding on to these values means that regardless of the situation, she aims to be honest in all dealings with others. Other essential values she carries to the workplace include committing fully to all endeavours and always treating others with kindness and respect. She explains, “It’s really very simple. If you are ever in a position where you can help somebody, help wherever you can and in whatever way,” and rephrases the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would like done unto yourself.” Sheila expects those she works with to treat her with the same courtesy. She describes how, in the job immediately preceding her current position, her boss would not give her the credit for the positive contributions she had made. She viewed her boss’s behaviour as a lack of honesty and integrity, which in part influenced her decision to move to an administrative position in a different governmental office.
On a whole, Sheila feels she can enact her faith-based beliefs in the workplace by being more accepting of and patient with people. Referring to Unity Church teachings, she states, “If someone is preaching to you that we’re all created in the likeness of God and we’re all loved by God, that means that you love everybody equally, right?” According to the Unity Church, she says, “God has good intentions for everybody. God loves everybody and He loves everybody equally, no matter who you are, no matter what religion you practice.” With these teachings in mind, when faced with a difficult person, Sheila tries to understand where he or she is coming from and see the situation differently. As her spirituality has grown, Sheila has come to see being able to deal with conflict as a God-given ability.

My ability, that I seem to be becoming more and more aware of gradually over the years since I was at Unity, is just being able to take a step back and to give the other person a chance to say what they have to say, and also being very very aware of how I respond because my response is going to make a big difference as to whether [or not] this is going to grow into a big conflict. It’s something sometimes as simple as, I understand what you’re saying. And I find that I’m using that talent and that ability more now than I ever did before.

Sheila must employ her conflict-resolution talents on a daily basis, often several times a day, when interacting with people on the phone or with work colleagues, clarifying situations or gathering information an individual might be reluctant to give her. She hopes that, as a real estate agent, she will be able to fully employ this talent, as well as devote more time to serving others in the community. In this vein, she envisions that as she transitions to real estate and is able to set her own hours, “a good part of [her] day, or a good part of the week will be giving [her] the opportunity to do volunteer work.” In this manner, she may act upon her deep desire to help others however, wherever, and whenever possible.
Nancy

*Life Story*

The fourth person I interviewed was Nancy. Nancy and I met downtown, immediately following her church service, and then travelled approximately 20 minutes to her house from there. Her two young sons, Zachary, 3½, and Aaron, 1½, sat in the back seat quietly as we drove. A CD playing contemporary Christian music provided a fitting backdrop for our pre-interview conversation. During this time, Nancy talked about how God had guided every aspect of her life, from her first full-time job out of her master’s, to her marriage and move to Canada, to her current occupation with the government. She advised me, “Tell God, ‘If this is not of you, I don’t want it. Trust God. He has a plan laid out and it’s wonderful.’”

Nancy was fashionably dressed in a green blouse and black skirt, her short black hair neatly coiffed. She was tall with a bright smile. Nancy was also the most outgoing of all participants and was very lively throughout the interview, laughing easily, making broad hand gestures, and changing her vocal or facial expressions for emphasis. She also proved to be quite task-oriented, which led her to complete a lifeline independently whereas I had merely intended for her to read the instructions. We later worked on her lifeline collaboratively. Once we reached her home, I also had a brief conversation with her husband, Shawn, who was very genial and down-to-earth. Nancy had a lovely home, with beige sofas in the living room, and walls painted green and yellow, with a splash of orange. Children’s toys and accessories, such as a rocker, play crib, and toy balls, cluttered the otherwise tidy house. On a middle ledge in the living room were several wedding pictures of friends and family, with Nancy and Shawn in the middle. The wedding picture display illustrated an emphasis on love, family, and friends.

Nancy’s story began with birth in rural Jamaica in 1974. At age seven, her father sent her to live with her aunt and uncle in Kingston, Jamaica. It was his desire to “see better for her” and provide her more opportunities than those typically afforded girls in rural Jamaica that prompted the move. The second eldest of four children, Nancy was the only sibling to leave home as a
child. Moving in with her aunt and uncle also provided her a more structured environment than she received at home, with her father often away due to work commitments, and her mother not strong on discipline. Suddenly the expectations on Nancy in terms of friends, study habits, aspirations, self-esteem, and spirituality were much higher. Nancy asserts that this was a positive change, saying, “Anything that is surrounded by good structure [is] positioned to prosper.” Under her aunt and uncle’s tutelage, Nancy was confirmed in the Anglican Church at the age of 10.

A year later, Nancy entered high school. While the school was not specifically Christian, it was one of the many schools in Jamaica founded by the Anglican Church. Therefore, morning worships were common. She credits her high school teachers with molding her educationally and spiritually, and building her self-esteem. Her closest friends, all top students, also encouraged her and pushed her to excel. At 18, Nancy started university. The pursuit of higher education had always been her and her family’s dream for herself, as a way to “upper social mobility,” and her family provided both their financial and moral support for this pursuit. She chose to study economics due to an especially inspiring first-year economics course, and because “[she] loved to understand why people made certain choices.”

Nancy maintains that her life to that point was generally straight-forward, with school as her main stressor. A year into university, however, she entered her first relationship with a classmate and experienced “a period of turbulence.” Nancy stresses that her boyfriend was not devoid of good qualities, as he was very ambitious and gave her a lot of attention. Conversely, Nancy now sees that this young man was “emotionally and spiritually wayward” and feels she was “unevenly yoked” in the relationship. At the time, however, she lacked the spiritual maturity to see that this was not a good match. She also believes she would not have entered the relationship had her "God-issued self-esteem" been intact. When Nancy reached the graduate level in her studies, the relationship progressed to an engagement. However, the relationship fell apart two months before the planned wedding. As Nancy describes, “It didn’t make sense. We were going ahead and then he just said, ‘Ah! I don’t love you. I don’t want to go through with
Nancy was very hurt, yet refused to give in to depression. She pressed forward with her part-time job and with the last semester of her master’s degree in economics. Even those closest to her did not see her crumble. As her mother would tell her later, “You know, I waited so much for you to break, so that I would be there to hold you, and you never broke.” Nancy explains that she had made a vow with God that this situation would make her rather than break her. In retrospect, she is grateful for the broken engagement, and believes it occurred because she had veered from God’s will for her life.

The same year, Nancy secured her first full-time job as a project officer at a planning agency. Her main role was to be a liaison on behalf of the Government of Jamaica for projects that were financed by an international bank. In our pre-interview conversation, Nancy shared that she had turned down a higher-paying job at the bank for this one, believing that by doing so she could make more of a difference in the lives of others. Fortunately, her new bosses rectified the difference in salary shortly after she began working there. At the planning agency, Nancy also met Shawn, a Jamaican-Canadian economist who had come to work for the Jamaican government for a few years. A few months after meeting, they began spending time together in a group of friends, eventually dating solo in the months preceding his departure to Canada. After a mostly long-distance courtship, they were married when Nancy was 26. Reflecting on her broken engagement, and, later, marriage to her husband, Nancy says her first relationship made her appreciate her husband a lot more and not take their solid relationship for granted. She does not doubt that he is the man God wanted her to marry.

After their wedding in Jamaica, Nancy moved to Canada, where her new husband was working for the government. This move marked not only a change of location but a change of religious denomination. Nancy and Shawn made a compromise to find a church that would suit their Anglican and Pentecostal backgrounds, respectively. They ended up at their current church, which Nancy describes as Pentecostal/Non-denominational/Charismatic. Nancy sees her denominational change as a major spiritual turning point. She enthuses, “God had to take me out
of a stagnating environment to bring me to a place where I could grow in Him and understand Him.” From the ages of 10 to 26, she was very active in the Anglican Church, as a Sunday school teacher and choir member. Regardless, it was not until she joined this new church that she began to get a revelation of who she was in God. For the first time in her life, she was challenged to develop a personal prayer life and read the Word of God in the Bible. This revelation and closer walk with God permeated and superseded all else in her life. She gives this analogy, “It was like I had been happy with pop when all the time I was supposed to be drinking fine drink.”

At 27, Nancy secured a job with a governmental revenue department, focused on promoting social, economic, and environmental sustainability, with the mandate to collect taxes and deliver benefits. Among her various roles at work, she liaises with representatives all over Canada, facilitates workshops, writes reports, trains subordinates, and regularly makes presentations. Of this position, she enthuses, “I love it. It’s beautiful, love the people, love what I do.” Before she landed this position, many people discouraged her, saying because she did not speak French and was not a citizen, the government would not easily employ her. Nonetheless, with persistence, faith, and job search assistance from Shawn, she reached her goal less than a year after arriving in Canada. At 29 and 31, she had her two sons, and for their sake strives to maintain a balance between very demanding roles. At present, Nancy feels her calling within her occupation is to be a “Joseph” to her co-workers, serving as a positive influence and an example of God’s power. However, she wishes to set up a real estate business in two years. This business would allow her to spend more time with her young sons, to employ her strong interpersonal skills, and to create employment opportunities for others. Nancy is most optimistic about the future, saying “[her] life has gone through the roof” in the last several years, and that she knows it will “keep going up.” She concludes, “I just know that God has a wonderful purpose. I don’t know everything, but I have this excitement in me that it’s gonna be wonderful.”
Centrality of Motherhood

Nancy became a mother to Zachary and Aaron at the ages of 29 and 31, respectively. She says it changed her life in terms of having to consciously make decisions that would most benefit her children. She adds, laughingly, that:

At this age they really are the boss. When you try to sleep when they’re up they just walk all over you, sit in your face, and you’re like, OK, I might as well get up. My second son, he caused me to fall out of love with sleep, and I no longer think any hour of the day or night is sacred. I can get up and work any time.

Nancy explains the challenges of balancing work and motherhood: “By the time I get out of the house in the mornings, I feel like I’ve done my first job, just taking them to daycare and so on.”

Despite the inherent sacrifices, Nancy believes motherhood is a blessing. Of her sons, she says, “They push you. They make you, cause you, to realize the potential in you. They have taught me so much.” Nancy also acknowledges her sons’ roles in helping her “face [her] fears” and “push [herself] to the limit.” In this vein, being a mother has strengthened Nancy’s conviction toward strong families, as well as her desire to show her sons by example how to conduct themselves in a family. She aspires to create a family environment in which the home is a haven of peace, joy, and stability. The haven Nancy envisions is something she lacked with her own parents, coming from a weak and troubled family environment. She continually prays to keep this conviction strong:

I seek God and I petition God for change because I see in my own life how my parents handed out junk to me, in terms of the mentality I have towards relationships and to marriages and families. God had to really deal with me [in] a lot of ways so that my outcome could become healthy. I saw that because they got junk, they handed [us] junk. I saw the pain [that] caused and it’s still causing, and because of that I said, Uh uh, that’s enough of that. I won’t repeat that.

Nancy mentions her belief in strong families, with a strong marriage at the core, at different points in the interview. “Strong families make strong societies, relations, and universes that we create.” She feels that, if strong families are in place, the future is more secure.

Nancy also remains cognizant of the legacy she is leaving because her decisions today may affect the lives of her children and their children. “People you won’t even meet, it will affect
them.” She then acknowledges that leaving a legacy is one of the central guiding values in her life, along with the will of God and strong families. Her wish to leave a legacy extends to spiritual, emotional, educational, and even financial spheres. For example, although Nancy and Shawn have comfortable, well-paying government jobs, they want to start a new business to secure a more solid financial future for their children. It is important for them that their sons “start [life] at a plus, not at a zero, where [they] started.” Nancy holds on to the notion of leaving behind a positive legacy for generations to come, as she and Shawn work to ensure “the generations down the line [are] more financially prosperous [and] can be a blessing.”

When asked which roles take precedence in her life, Nancy says being a child of God, a wife, and a mother are most fundamental to who she is. She adds that putting her role as a child of God first helps her keep her various other roles balanced, stressing, “I prayed definitely and asked God, ‘God show me how to balance, and put these things in the right order because it is not easy!’” Nancy adds that if she functions well as a child of God, a wife, and a mother, other roles, such as a professional, a cell leader, and a leader in her church, come easier. She stresses that it is important not to confuse church work with your relationship with God, and in that way take time away from your family. She laughs, “God is not gonna come home and take your kids to the park for you. You have to do it yourself.” Carrying out each role as well as possible is also important to Nancy because she realizes her sons pattern her. As such, she feels if she sees her sons doing something that she “[doesn’t] think looks good, [she’d] better stop doing it.” Additionally, when her husband points out certain flaws to her, she prays for the strength and wisdom to change. Nancy stresses, “Because I know I’m shaping generations to come, I value giving those kinds of messages to my children. So in every way I want to be better, when they’re young.”

Despite the success she has experienced to this point as a working mother, Nancy acknowledges experiencing career versus family conflict, saying, “The only [career-related] conflict I’m having, which is internal, is that at this stage in my kids’ life I want to be there for them more.” While she and her husband are at work, their sons are looked after at the home of a
Haitian babysitter who Nancy describes as “wonderful.” Nevertheless, she does not want to regret not having spent as much time with her children as possible during their growing-up years. Therefore, she and her husband have made a two-year plan for Nancy to start a real estate business which she can run from home. This is not a decision Nancy felt forced into, but one she made whole-heartedly, clarifying:

Maybe it is a conflict: career versus family, but it is a choice that I am making. I don’t have to, but I want to because I always say there [are] some opportunities that [if] you miss it this way around, you’ll catch it the next way around. So I want to be a director. I don’t have to be a director now. I can be a director when I’m 40, 50, 60, whenever, but I only have one chance to be there for them when they’re 4, 5, 6, or 3, 4, 5.

Thus, it appears Nancy is attempting to reconcile the career versus family conflict in a way that will enable her to fully employ the talents, interests, and drive God has given her, while giving herself as wholeheartedly to the role of motherhood as possible.

**Spiritual Grounding**

Nancy’s belief that her primary role, even before motherhood, is as a child of God, is a driving force in her life. Nancy’s spiritual leanings date back to her early childhood, when she attended a Pentecostal church with her parents in rural Jamaica. With a move to Kingston, Jamaica at age 7 to live with her aunt and uncle, Nancy entered a more structured environment. This structure engendered a major educational and spiritual turning point in her life. Three years later, Nancy was confirmed in her aunt and uncle’s Anglican Church. Nancy cites her aunt and uncle, and teachers at her Anglican-founded high school, as her major early spiritual and life role models. Her aunt and uncle especially encouraged her to get involved in church activities in her youth. Early experiences with religion formed the basis for a growing faith, molded by life-changing events. Following Nancy’s broken engagement to a spiritually incompatible young man at age 22, she began to really listen to and rely on God. During that terrible time, she says, “I knew that God carried me through that. He just lifted me up.”

With Nancy's marriage, move to Canada, and resultant change of church denomination from Anglican to Pentecostal/Non-denominational/Charismatic came a period of immense
spiritual growth. Although she had accepted Christ as her Saviour at age 10, and had attended church regularly since childhood, Nancy did not place her spirituality at the centre of her life. In her early 20s, Nancy remembers, “I had my degrees in economics. I had a good job. I had a car. I had everything there for me, but spiritually I was dying.” She believes that her increased sense of God’s purpose in the past six years has arisen out of the challenge put forth by her current church to develop a personal prayer and devotional life. Meeting this challenge head-on, Nancy has gained a much greater understanding of who God is, and who she is in God, which has raised her “God-issued self-esteem” within a short period of time. Speaking animatedly, she describes her new insights as:

For the first time in my life, I began to get a revelation of who I am. What?! You mean my salvation is about me being, doing mighty things for God on this earth? It’s about me having an impact? It’s just amazing.

These days Nancy factors the will of God into all decisions, including those related to career. She claims this is the primary way to success, saying:

Everything I do, I just want to know, is this what God wants me to do? Am I where God wants me to be? No matter how challenging the situation, if the answer to that question is yes, then I know I can do it with God. God has our life already planned out. Therefore, my purpose is to find His will. I believe the will of God for my life and the will of God for anybody's life is the place of prosperity, it is a place of development, it is a place of impact, it's just the best place to be!

The discovery of what God wants for her life comes to Nancy through various means. When making a major decision, Nancy first looks for a feeling of inner peace, accompanied by revelation found through reading the Bible. She then prays that, if a certain decision is not of God, He will close the door. She gauges if she feels stronger or less strong about taking a certain path after prayer. Finally, she seeks counsel from others, including her pastor, her spouse, her family, and, to a lesser extent, godly friends. Nancy enthuses that with this approach to decision-making, her religious and spiritual beliefs influence and permeate every aspect of her life. She declares, "I don't compartmentalize my life. It is seamless. If you are really spiritual, you cannot
separate [your religious beliefs from everything else]. [They're] who you are. When it comes to who you are, everything you do flows from within. We're not made to be disjointed people."

Nancy’s strengthened religious commitment has also influenced the way she views her career ambitions, specifically. Nancy establishes that, as her faith has grown stronger, her vocational identity has grown stronger as well. She laughs, “Like the cart and the horse - faith is the horse. So my faith has been what has pulled, or has been the engine of my goals and my interests.” This faith gave Nancy the strength to press forward until she reached her current position in the government, with the assurance that "whatever [God] has for you, He'll give you a mindset to go towards where He wants you to go.” Nancy shares that, when she revealed her desire to work in the government with others, she met some discouragement and disbelief. Strikes against her included a lack of French knowledge, her race, and her foreign citizenship. However, Nancy smiles, "I was so determined. I just felt this faith that I was gonna get it. I began to speak it: ‘You’re gonna see. I’m gonna get a job with the government.’” Nancy also released her faith monetarily, praying, “I’m going to sow this offering, and I’m asking you to open the door for this job, this job, God.” Her faith seemed well-founded when her Jamaican degree was assessed and given equivalency by the University of Toronto. Eventually, Nancy applied, was interviewed, and hired to work in the government. Nancy states, simply, “To God be the glory.”

Nancy is grateful that “[her] career’s an area in [her] life where [she’s] always been blessed.” It helps that she is very cognizant of her goals, interests, and strengths, and allows these factors to guide her career development. For example, her initial decision to study economics was influenced by her genuine love of the subject and by her desire to understand the reason for others’ choices. Her career decision-making since then has been founded on her strong interpersonal skills, and desire to seek employment that allows her to meet and interact with people. “My faith definitely has helped to bring confidence to what my goals and my talents are. It made [my vocational identity] clearer.” With a sharper sense of vocational identity, Nancy believes “[her] purpose on this earth is to be an ambassador of Christ, to be a channel through
which His goodness can come into this earth.” Speaking of her current work role, Nancy compares herself to Joseph of the Old Testament, who rose to become vizier in Egypt after being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers as a youth. She speaks passionately and at length about her larger role to minister to those she encounters in her workplace.

Where I work, I honestly see myself as a Joseph, just as how Joseph was in the house of Potiphar and because he knew God and he was there, the house of Potiphar prospered. Wherever he went, [even] in the prison, he was promoted, and so, in my job, I see myself as not just working to get a paycheck but I see myself as an agent on that job, to the people who I work with. I believe God to open up doors of opportunity that I can minister to them. I pray for them. I minister to them daily. I tell them things from the Word that they didn’t know themselves. I just don’t say, Thus saith the Lord. I see the purpose of being a source of reaching out to others who are dying, who, on a day-to-day basis, things are not right in their life but they don’t even know what’s missing. I believe God has placed me here to touch the lives, and [be] an agent of His light, to bring them victory for Christ’s sake. I believe that’s God’s will because they’re so wonderful, but so spiritually dead. That shapes the way I view my work life as well.

Moreover, Nancy feels it is her responsibility, as it is for all Christians, to be a positive example for others through diligence and hard work. Nancy touches on how God rewards people for using their gifts to the utmost, saying:

I learned that everybody has gifts, everybody has talents, and those gifts and talents are given to make us productive and faithful. According to the Word of the Lord, our talent[s] are supposed to lead us. If we diligently apply [our talents], the Bible tells us: “See thou my diligent workman; he will stand before kings. He will not stand before lowly men.”

While maintaining a strong devotional life, Nancy aligns her interests and passions with her talents, so that her talents and interests feed into her goals. In this way, she is able to make career decisions that are godly and practical. Nancy hopes to use her life to show how God can take someone from “a stable” and use her to accomplish great things. Considering how far she has come from her humble beginnings, and how far she still hopes to reach, Nancy is certain that “God wants [her] life to be a demonstration of His power.” Thanks to her church’s egalitarian views, which encompass allowing females into top leadership positions, Nancy does not feel limited due to gender. She enthuses:

My religion has absolutely no limitations on women. We believe that in Christ we’re neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, Greek, non-Greek, but we’re all one. My faith

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teaches me that God is no respecter of persons. What He wants is a willing heart, a clean heart, a submissive heart, a humble heart. And if He can make a donkey talk to somebody, why can’t He use this girl? So there are no limitations. I have no limitations, so I agree with it, because they’re wrapped up in the Word.

In the future, Nancy wishes to be a financial blessing to others in her venture to open and run a successful real estate business. She views this goal in terms of being able to “generate more income and generate more jobs.” Nancy says, “It’s not just about money [but] I want to make money because without money you can’t be blessed or be a blessing, in terms of financial blessing.” Her desire to be more of a blessing to others, including her own family, and leave a wonderful legacy behind, is part of what fuels this dream. With excitement, Nancy further describes her major motivations for self-employment: “Sometimes I’d really love to bless a person with $1000, [but] I can only afford $100, but if [I was] in the position to give them a job, [I] could really give them a gift of destiny that could change the course of their life.” Throughout the interview, Nancy vocalizes her dream of being able to change the lives of those with whom she comes into contact, by tangible and intangible means.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Prior to beginning data analysis, I revisited my initial research questions:

1. How do these Christian women describe the role of religion and spirituality in their career decision-making and professional development?
2. How may religious and spiritual beliefs facilitate these women’s career development?
3. How may religious and spiritual beliefs constrain these women’s career development?
4. Which resources do these Christian women describe as best supporting them in the various phases of their career development?

Considering the data in terms of these questions, I realized the questions were not as relevant as I had expected. Although the first two questions did not yield distinct answers, the data could generally speak to the positive role of religion and spirituality in participants’ career decision-making and professional development. However, as participants did not typically discuss religious or spiritual constraints on their career development, the third question was largely irrelevant. Lastly, while most of the women mentioned resources supporting them in their career development, this was not an especially key theme. In the end, my study was guided more by grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), as I derived my themes more from the interview text on the women’s lives, careers, and spiritual beliefs than from the initial research questions. Through this inductive process, I discovered three major themes: (a) life story—which includes the influence of background experiences, relationships, and mentors on life outcomes, (b) centrality of motherhood—which returns to the notion of family salience, and (c) spiritual grounding—which examines the multiple ways in which religion influences participants’ lives and careers. Each theme discussed in this section includes commonalities and significant differences in participants’ experiences, illustrative quotations, and references to literature.
Life story

Giele (1998) suggests that researchers ask themselves, “How do myriad small changes in the lives of individuals suddenly add up to a sea change?” (p. 232). This is a question to which I often returned while analyzing participants’ life stories. Thinking in this fashion, I determined that the life stories could be described as the influence of background experiences—geographical relocations; stifling relationships; and role models, mentors, and career encouragers—on career and life outcomes.

Positive Geographical Relocations

For all participants, geographical moves from one city to the next, one province to the next, or even one country to the next, were relatively small changes that produced hugely positive repercussions. For Sheila, who moved often as a child due to her father’s work on the railroad, moving was a neutral event. For Deborah, Nancy, and Mary, however, childhood moves presented opportunities for growth and learning. In Deborah’s case, moving with her mother and brother from a rural town to a city in another province enabled her to attend a challenge program in high school. The intellectual stimulation Deborah received there enticed her to enter university. Nancy’s move from her parents’ rural home to a larger city to live with her aunt and uncle also allowed her to complete a demanding high school program, and later attend university. Like Deborah, Nancy was the first member of her family to undertake higher education. For Mary, choosing to live with her father and stepmother, a member of the Salvation Army, at age 10, set the spiritual tone for her life. A few years after this move, she committed to the Salvation Army, where, apart from a few years in early adulthood, she has remained. These findings coincide with Hall’s (2002) assumption that relocation, along with other family changes, often molds an individual’s motivation, identity, and behaviour.

As young adults, all participants made further geographical shifts, Mary and Nancy due to relationships in which they were involved, and Deborah and Sheila as a result of their desire to travel. For Deborah and Sheila, travels abroad were both eye-opening and life-altering. As a
second-year university student, for example, Deborah travelled to Wales on exchange. This move increased her world knowledge and prompted her to break off her engagement to a young man whom she had known all her life. This break-up indirectly inspired her to increase her career and educational aspirations, as she had planned to marry immediately after completing her undergraduate degree. Sheila was able to realize her greatest dream when she had saved enough money to travel to Britain for a one-year secretarial course, and travelled and worked in Germany and Switzerland for a year after that. Sheila’s and Deborah’s travels helped them become more independent and more aware of how the world functioned outside of their hometowns. Their willingness to travel demonstrates their openness, adaptability, and sense of autonomy (Las Heras & Hall, 2007). Applicable to their experiences, Hall (2002) categorizes adaptability, a career meta-competency, as: “(a) flexibility; openness to new and diverse ideas and people; (b) seeking new challenges in unexplored territory; exploration; and (c) engaging in and acting out the results of personal development activity” (p. 216).

Negative Relationships

Literature on women and careers often emphasizes the impact of relationships on women’s career and life trajectories. With multiple roles the norm for most women, the choice of a supportive future life partner, which may take place during or around emerging adulthood (ages 18 to 25) (Arnett, 2000), is especially critical (e.g., Thorstad, Anderson, Hall, Willingham, & Carruthers, 2006). Most participants in this study discussed serious early romantic relationships as significant factors in their personal and psycho-spiritual development. While Deborah, Mary, and Nancy described their marriages as positive, Mary and Nancy revealed that they had been involved in negative relationships prior to marriage. In addition, Sheila, divorced, cited her marriage as a low period of her life. For Mary, Sheila, and Nancy, the dissolution of these relationships was severely trying, yet, in time, strengthened them as individuals. Although Deborah mentioned ending her engagement to her high school sweetheart at the age of 19, she did
not describe the relationship as negative, but explained that it came to a natural close following her year abroad.

While dating Jim, a non-Christian, from the ages of 18 to 24, Mary stopped attending church and compromised long-held values. The relationship eventually turned abusive. Suffering from great physical and emotional pain, Mary left Jim to live with her father, and shortly after, changed provinces to live with her mother. This move enabled Mary to finally break free of Jim’s hold on her life and begin to heal. As part of this healing process, she decided to return to church. In benefiting from church attendance as a spiritual coping strategy, she was similar to the students in Constantine et al.’s (2006) study. There, she met an old boyfriend, Mike, now her husband, and with the spiritual guidance of Mike and his parents, eventually “[came] back to where [she] knew she should’ve been long ago.”

Sheila similarly experienced much pain as a result of an ill-advised relationship. She was initially happy after marrying a French-Canadian accountant at age 29 but, as their life together continued, Sheila realized she wanted a divorce. She had entered the relationship despite having some lingering doubts, and now recognized that “this relationship [wasn’t] good for [her] emotionally and mentally.” Sheila separated from her husband and resumed paid work after nine years as a stay-at-home mother. The ensuing 10-year divorce battle was extremely stressful. Throughout this period, Sheila relied heavily on prayer, another spiritual coping strategy emphasized in Constantine et al.’s (2006) study. Eventually, she moved from the Catholic Church to the Unity Church. She found her new church’s positive messages, such as, “There is only one Presence and one Power active as the universe and in our lives, God the Good” (Unity Institute, 2007, p. 4) both comforting and empowering. Sheila now recognizes that she would never have married her husband if she had really known and accepted herself as a young adult. Having overcome this major challenge and regained her independence, Sheila is finally at peace with who she is and where her life is headed, and has set new career goals for herself.
Like Mary and Sheila, Nancy entered a “period of turbulence” while dating someone who was not emotionally or spiritually suitable for her. In her case, she began dating this young man, a classmate, at the age of 19. Parallel to Sheila’s story, she questioned the relationship, yet, due to insecurity, allowed it to progress to an engagement. Two months before their wedding, Nancy’s fiancé broke off the engagement. Deeply hurt, Nancy nonetheless determined that with God’s help she would not crumble, but would grow stronger. With this fortitude, she moved forward with her master’s degree and secured the job where she would meet her husband. In this instance, Nancy demonstrated the resiliency found to be a factor in women’s career success (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, & Johnson, 1997). Resiliency notwithstanding, her story and the others illustrate that a strong sense of identity is vital for success in major life decisions, including career (Hall, 2002) and the choice of a life partner. When this sense of identity is lacking, it is easier for young women to enter harmful relationships (Lucas et al., 2000). Moreover, the choice of a life partner will ultimately impact life and career outcomes, as women’s personal and professional lives tend to be interconnected (e.g., Cinamon & Rich, 2002; Richie et al., 1997), an assumption that is echoed throughout the literature on women and careers (e.g., Gomez et al., 2001).

**Role Models, Mentors, and Career Encouragers**

All four participants cited role models, mentors, or career encouragers who influenced their eventual careers. Among their earliest role models or encouragers were family members. For instance, Deborah and Sheila count their mothers, who worked hard to support their children when widowed, as being especially influential. Deborah credits her mother for moving from her home province to another to “give [Deborah and her older brother] a life.” As there were no jobs in Deborah’s birth town, the move enabled Deborah’s mother to support herself and her children as a single mother before her remarriage. Likewise, Sheila says of her mother, who single-handedly ran the family business for a few years, “She didn’t let anything stop her.” Her strength provided Sheila an example of what a determined woman could accomplish. Sheila’s and Deborah’s perceptions of their mothers as role models corresponded with findings in the literature
on women and careers (e.g., Gomez et al., 2001; Richie et al., 1997) and Christian women and careers, specifically (e.g., Moreton & Newsom, 2004a; Sellers et al., 2005), in which mothers played a critical role in participants’ career development. In later years, when Deborah and Sheila became mothers, their own mothers provided childcare assistance. This assistance enabled them to continue working, with practical support from extended family found to be another key factor for women’s success in literature on female Christian academics (Thorstad et al., 2006). In Mary’s case, her career thrived when her mother encouraged her to use her basement for a new daycare business.

Some of the fathers of this sample also directly impacted their daughter’s aspirations. Before Sheila’s father died, for instance, he was saving for her and her siblings’ post-secondary educations and pushing them to achieve as much as possible. Similarly, while it was Nancy’s entire family’s dream that she pursue higher education, her father was instrumental in sending her to the city where she would have a “bright[er] future” than ordinarily possible for a girl in rural Jamaica. With love and structure in her aunt and uncle’s city home, Nancy flourished. As has been found in qualitative studies on women’s career development, women in these studies benefited greatly from familial encouragement (e.g., Moreton & Newsom, 2004a, 2004b; Richie et al., 1997; Sellers et al., 2005).

In most cases, participants benefited from the guidance of individuals outside of their families-of-origin as well. These benefits are most evident in Deborah’s story. Her path to completing a Ph.D. and becoming a professor was “serendipitous.” Deborah explains that she entered the M.Ed. primarily to build on her counselling competence as a classroom teacher. These plans changed due to the influence of two individuals: (a) the professor who gave her the unexpected opportunity to present their research at a national conference; and (b) her discussant at this conference, who convinced her to complete a doctorate under his supervision. Both professors served as mentors, defined as individuals who “provide advice and assistance regarding success factors in their professions” (Hopkins & O’Neil, 2007, p. 140). Mary does not
name any specific mentors but mentions that her captain is available to give career advice, as he
did by confirming that her leaving the coffee shop when accused of stealing was the best choice.

Sheila’s career path was indirectly influenced by the nuns at her convent school. She
obtained her first job, as a bank teller, and then bank manager’s secretary, through the bank
personnel whom the nuns brought to her school to meet graduating students. Sheila subsequently
used her bank earnings to travel and to complete vocational training at a one-year secretarial
course in England. Nancy’s high school friends served as peer mentors, competing with her and
pushing her to succeed in her academic endeavours. Additionally, Nancy credits her high school
teachers for being spiritual and educational mentors, helping to build her self-confidence. Six of
16 female CAOs in Christian universities also specifically cited high school teachers as
instrumental in their career development (Moreton & Newsom, 2004a, 2004b).

Deborah and Nancy also received specific career encouragement and/or assistance from
their husbands. For example, when Deborah and Jean wanted to start a family, Jean encouraged
his wife to complete her doctorate first. Since they became parents, his practical (e.g., domestic
work and childcare) and emotional support (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000; Thorstad et al., 2006)
have enabled her to continue her career while caring for young children. Nancy refers to Shawn’s
job search assistance when she first arrived in Canada. It was Shawn who found the ad for her
current position on the last day it was open. Now, as she plans to move into a real estate business,
Shawn is her main support and advisor.

On the whole, the importance of role models, mentors, or career encouragers for these
participants mirrors the results found in studies on female academics in Christian colleges and
universities. In these studies, parents, particularly mothers (Sellers et al., 2005), educators, and
clergy (Moreton & Newsom, 2004a) were cited as having a significant impact on participants’
careers. Furthermore, as is the case for some women, Deborah’s and Nancy’s spouses’
affirmative views of their employment promoted their career development (Fassinger, 2005).
Therefore, like the Christian CAOs in a qualitative study on careers, marriage, and faith (Moreton
& Newsom, 2004b), and the Christian professors in similar studies (Oates et al., 2005; Sellers et al., 2005; Thorstad et al., 2006), Deborah and Nancy reported that their husbands had provided them the practical and emotional support needed to progress in their careers while they faced the sometimes daunting challenge of managing dual roles.

Centrality of Motherhood

In this study, all participants regarded motherhood as central to their identities. While participants valued their work roles, they considered motherhood a “higher calling” than anything else in their lives (Oates et al., 2005, p. 215). Thus they felt motherhood enhanced, rather than limited, their life and career satisfaction. This finding is important in that role salience—the centrality of a specific role in an individual’s life, is a major predictor of career outcomes (Crooker et al., 2002). Specifically, women who are family-focused tend to be more willing to interrupt or adjust their careers or work schedules for family than are career-focused women (Friedman & Greenhaus, 2000). Gomez et al. (2001) cite women’s family responsibilities as key factors in women’s career compromises and often nonlinear career paths. Nonetheless, despite heavy family responsibilities, participants often spoke of motherhood in terms of blessing rather than sacrifice. Speaking of her two sons, Nancy enthused, “They push you. They make you realize the potential in you. They have taught me so much.”

Sheila conveyed a shared outlook: “The [role] that takes priority above all of them is the fact that I’m a mother. What God wants from me is to do the best that I can raising my kids to be the wonderful people they can be and will be.” Like all the women, Sheila strove to be the best mother possible despite the challenges inherent in the role. For her, these challenges arose as she worked to meet her children’s needs amidst the strains of divorce, her daughter’s lupus, and her son’s emotional issues and addictions. Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie (1979) found that the most challenging, yet most formative events of individuals’ lives often come from the home sphere. This finding was evidently true of Deborah and Mary. Deborah’s desire to start a family while in
her early 30s was the force propelling her toward early completion of her Ph.D. She then endured
great emotional turmoil when her first child, Sophia, was stillborn. Drawing strength and comfort
from her spiritual beliefs, her spouse, her family, and her friends, Deborah ultimately emerged
from this trial with more patience, compassion, and faith.

Similarly, when Mary had a miscarriage at age 29, she suffered much emotional pain,
blaming God for the event. Her pain eventually subsided through prayer and extensive devotional
reading, as well as through counsel from her family and friends. Overcoming this low period
reinforced her trust that God’s plan was the best, as she and her husband were not yet ready to be
parents. It also enabled her to face ensuing challenges, such as her second daughter’s cleft lip. As
revealed in other studies on women and spirituality, these women credited their faith with helping
them cope with even the most distressing situations (e.g., Buchko, 2004; Oates et al., 2005).
Furthermore, after facing low moments in their family lives and struggling spiritually for a time,
Deborah and Mary grew in their spirituality and level of religious commitment. Similar to Royce-
Davis and Stewart’s (2000) study with university students, this increase preceded a greater desire
to incorporate their faith into all aspects of their lives, including career and family.

Given the positive impact of Christian faith on their lives, particularly during moments of
crisis, all participants approached parenthood from a spiritual stance. For instance, Deborah and
her husband, Jean, made a conscious decision to resume formal church attendance when the twins
were born, feeling that their own beliefs were “really what helped [them] get through [their]
loss.” Furthermore, Deborah and Jean carefully selected godparents who could serve as spiritual
mentors for their children. Mary, having grown up without a strong Christian family, hoped to
“bring up [her] daughters to know God” and to be proud Christians. Accordingly, Mary had the
girls pray at lunchtime and in the evenings, for themselves and for church members. Besides
taking their children to church, both Mary and Deborah regularly did devotions with their
children, reading the Bible and praying together as a family.
With a non-Christian partner, Sheila took the sole responsibility for her children’s spiritual beliefs when they were young, having them baptized and confirmed, and passing on her long-held values of honesty and kindness to others. Similar to the other women, Nancy, her husband, Shawn, and their sons weekly attended church as a family. In addition, Nancy spoke passionately about wanting to be a positive example for her sons and leaving a legacy of strong families. Her belief that strong families are the building blocks of society is supported by Las Heras and Hall (2007): “Through family [people can] contribute to society, fulfill the desire of legacy and perpetuation, and give back what they received” (p. 183).

With these women’s motivation to transfer their values to their children, motherhood inevitably influenced initial and subsequent career choices, congruent with the broader literature on women and careers (e.g., Fassinger, 2005), as well as the literature on Christian women and careers (e.g., Scott, 2002). Participants typically organized their careers around their family roles (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). For instance, as an academic, Deborah turned down positions of greater responsibility that would considerably reduce her family time. Further, in attempting to “weave” together her various roles, analogous to female professors in Christian institutions (e.g., Hall et al., 2004), Deborah arranged her schedule so she could spend more time with her children during the day and work at night (Moreton & Newsom, 2004b; Oates et al., 2005). Mary’s desire to be an integral part of her children’s lives while maintaining a career was a critical factor in her early decision to start a home-based daycare. Likewise, Nancy envisioned starting a home-based real estate business, “which [could] provide [her] the level of flexibility and control over [her] time that the organizational world [could not]” (Hopkins & O’Neil, 2007, p. 143). In this manner, she was hoping to resolve the work-family conflict which arose, for her, out of not having enough time to fully dedicate to both roles, a tenet of the scarcity hypothesis (Marks, 1977). Finally, Sheila was a stay-at-home mom for several years, managing her work and family roles sequentially rather than simultaneously (Powell & Mainiero, 1992). In many ways, these women
provided evidence for literature that women tend to exhibit higher levels of family role salience than their male counterparts (e.g., Biggs & Brough, 2005; Cinamon & Rich, 2002).

Although participants’ career accommodations differed, findings confirmed that “an intense involvement in family life encourages individuals to restructure their work to meet family needs” (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999, p. 399). However, in seeking balance between the work and family spheres, participants could be classified as adaptive, rather than solely work- or family-centered (Hakim, 2000). Of the four women, Sheila and Nancy revealed a more sequential approach to the work-family interface, focusing on their careers first, then family, and then careers (Powell & Mainiero, 1992). In vocational literature, such adaptive techniques are often seen as limiting women’s capacity to “make significant achievements in the world of work” (Marks & Houston, 2001, p. 524). However, for these women, it seems this approach was a viable strategy for balancing career and family outside of the simultaneous career pattern (Stroh & Reilly, 1999). As Nancy stated, “I don’t have to be a director now. I can be a director when I’m 40, 50, 60, whenever, but I only have one chance to be there for them when they’re 4, 5, 6, or 3, 4, 5.” Nancy’s words echo those of a Christian mother and professor, “I have plenty of time to be a professional and I’ve had my life to be a mother as well, but mother reigns for a short period” (Hall et al., 2004, p. 53). Overall, participants demonstrated that individuals who align the time spent on various life roles with the salience attached to each role experience less work-family conflict (Carlson et al., 1995). For the most part, the women seemed satisfied with their work and family lives and did not express that they had experienced excessive work-family conflict. In addition, their family orientation did not seem to severely disrupt their career decision-making abilities, as has been found in studies with young women (e.g., Marks & Houston, 2002).

Despite a focus on work-family conflict in vocational literature (Sinacore-Guinn et al., 1999), having managed work-family conflict in individual ways, these women generally evidenced work-family enrichment (Betz, 2003; Wayne et al., 2007). On a basic level, work provided each woman status enhancement, in terms of financial benefits (Betz, 2003). These
benefits were especially critical to Sheila as a single mother. For Deborah and Nancy, who had completed advanced degrees, work provided them a sense of personality enhancement through achievement and mastery (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Mary also experienced achievement as she was able to successfully teach her young charges, and transfer skills developed within her daycare role directly to her role as a mother (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Of all participants, Deborah uniquely reported that her colleagues and supervisor provided her the increased emotional and instrumental support needed to succeed as a working mother (e.g., Van Steenbergen et al., 2007). Greenhaus and Parasuraman (1999) suggested that in the work-family interface, work-family conflict is episodic rather than chronic. As these women made both short-term and long-term choices in keeping with the centrality of their mother role, they allowed their careers to evolve, creating work-life balance one moment at a time (Whitehead & Kotze, 2003).

Reading through my completed thesis draft, I considered once more whether or not I had gathered all the information I sought at this study’s onset. I discovered that while my research yielded rich, enlightening data, this data did not specifically cover the extent to which participants’ religious and spiritual beliefs affected their views on the importance of motherhood in their lives. My original premise was that the beliefs of their religious sub-cultures would be cited as factors relegating them to the family sphere and thus constraining their career ambitions. This premise was based on relevant literature, as well as on some of the messages I had received, yet largely ignored, growing up in a conservative Christian church. However, the women generally did not mention religious messages, either positive or negative, when they expressed their valuing of motherhood above work and other roles. In considering their children a blessing, and organizing their work and family lives accordingly, they were quite similar to samples in non-religious literature. In this sense, implications derived from this study regarding the combination of work and family could apply to a broad spectrum of young women.

Overall, participants’ spiritual and religious beliefs were linked with the centrality of motherhood in their lives in two ways: (a) all participants had or were currently raising their
children in a Christian environment; and (b) when faced with challenges as mothers, participants employed various spiritual coping strategies. As I did not initially expect the centrality of motherhood to surface as a major theme, during the interviews I did not probe further into how, if at all, the sample’s faith mediated their approach to the work-family interface. More in-depth research on this issue would offer career counsellors specific tools for dealing with young women from Christian backgrounds or from other faiths with similar views on male-female roles.

**Spiritual Grounding**

Participants’ spiritual foundations, set in childhood, facilitated both their success as mothers and as career women. Each woman would concur with Deborah’s belief that her faith “directly shape[d] everything she did.” Conversely, in adulthood, most participants had also experienced a drop in involvement with formalized religion. This drop was often accompanied by an active reexamination of their faith, and search for purpose, as is typical in the post-secondary years (Buchko, 2004). In Deborah’s case, while she maintained her religious and spiritual beliefs, time constraints and financial obligations as a university student temporarily halted her formal church attendance. Later, when she and Jean had the twins, they decided to attend church as a family. Mary left the Salvation Army completely as a young adult, influenced by her relationship with a non-Christian young man. After changing provinces at age 25 to live with her mother, she ended the relationship and returned to the church of her youth. Thus for Mary and Deborah, as for many young adults, settling down (e.g., choosing a geographical location, marrying, and having children) preceded a renewed religious commitment (Arnett & Jensen, 2002).

While Mary and Deborah returned to the denominations of their childhoods, Sheila and Nancy experienced more circuitous paths to their current faiths. Throughout much of her life, Sheila did not stray from her Catholic roots, despite questioning its doctrines, apart from a brief conversion to the Pentecostal Church in her mid-20s, along with her mother. However, at 48, while consulting with a lawyer about her divorce, she learned about the Unity Church and was
drawn to its focus on following Christ’s example, rather than on following an exacting set of rules. Joining the Unity, she felt that, after years of spiritual exploration, she had found what she was looking for. Nancy also changed denominations twice – first from her mother’s Pentecostal faith to the Anglican Church when she moved to Kingston, Jamaica, at age 7, and then to a Pentecostal/Non-denominational/Charismatic Church following her marriage and move to Canada. As Nancy was challenged through her new church to develop a stronger devotional life, she increased her knowledge of God and of the Bible, and her “God-issued self-esteem” rose.

Sheila’s and Nancy’s experiences support literature indicating that women who undergo religious change increase in self-reliance and self-confidence (Zinbauer & Pargament, 1998).

For the entire sample, their renewed commitment to both public and private forms of religion provided internal peace, balance, and direction (Gomez et al., 2001). All participants cited prayer as a considerable factor in managing stress in their daily lives. As is common for religious individuals (Mohr, 2006), prayer was an effective coping strategy. Deborah explained, “When I’m at wit’s end with situations, I love silent prayer.” It was also a factor in decision-making, as Mary clarified, “In any major decision I make, I pray,” her sentiments similar to those of a Christian CAO: “I never try to do anything without praying about it first” (Moreton & Newsom, 2004b, p. 323) and to university respondents in Constantine et al.’s (2006) study. Bible study was another source of revelation. Nancy, in particular, targeted Bible study in her process of discovering God’s will by: (a) looking for a feeling of inner peace; (b) reading Scripture; (c) praying; and (d) seeking counsel with her pastor, spouse, and family. Sheila was the only participant who did not do Bible study; however, she read from “The Daily Word,” a Unity devotional incorporating Bible verses in each daily message. Further, while social support from godly friends was important to all participants, Sheila spoke of the guidance and support she received from two church-based women’s groups. Overall, as in a quantitative study of 133 undergraduate students, support from a relationship with God appeared to make a vital difference in these women’s lives (Duffy & Lent, in press).
While the women agreed that faith provided them a general sense of purpose in various life spheres (Perrone, Webb, Wright, Jackson, & Ksiazak, 2006), they cited other variables, such as academic inclination or disinclination, mentorship, and personal interest, as being more influential in their initial career choices. For instance, Deborah did not link religion to her decision to become a professor, describing instead the impact of a year of teaching special education and mentorship from professors. She called her career path serendipitous, saying, “I take what life has given me, and I take advantage of every opportunity that has been presented.” Nonetheless, her original interest in the fields of education and psychology stemmed from early volunteering activities, which she considered part of her Christian ministry. Mary’s early goal of becoming a daycare provider arose from her love of children, from babysitting opportunities in her youth, and from her desire to take a practical, rather than academic, route. Sheila, who never felt she had “very big career choices,” attended secretarial school in England to fulfill her dream of seeing the world. Finally, an intellectually stimulating introductory economics course so piqued Nancy’s interest that she majored in economics at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Although the women did not consider faith a key variable in their early career development, most approached their current employment as a calling (Dik & Duffy, in press). In this sense, their attitudes toward work were congruent with those of African-American women in elementary or high school teaching (Loder, 2005), and post-secondary Christian administrators (Moreton & Newsom, 2004a, 2004b). Their definition of calling was work that employed their interests, gifts, and talents for the greater good of society (Hall & Chandler, 1995). Consequently, they considered their work a blessing or gift from God (Perrone et al., 2006). Deborah said, “I never had a clear path that I was going in, but I couldn’t imagine, at this point, doing anything different.” As Mary’s faith increased, she came to see her work as a calling, eventually opening a distinctly Christian daycare. She reflected, “I don’t think that childcare would’ve been where I was supposed to be if all those doors hadn’t been opened. I really believe that God opened all those doors.” Similarly, as Nancy developed a stronger devotional life, she came to factor the will
of God into her career decisions: “Everything I do, I [ask], is this what God wants me to do? No matter how challenging the situation, if the answer is yes, then I know I can do it, with God.” Like the Christian professors in Oates et al.’s (2005) study, both Nancy and Mary specified that their faith in God had increased their confidence in making career decisions.

On the whole, participants espoused both complementarian and egalitarian ideals in their personal lives, with regards to family and career. However, when questioned specifically about women’s roles, the sample expressed an ideological egalitarianism. Similarly, in a study on non-working and working mothers, participants promoted egalitarianism for women on a whole, yet were more ambivalent in their degrees of egalitarianism on a personal level (Marks & Houston, 2001). Communicating the sample’s ideological view, Deborah said, “You can be both a Christian and a career-oriented person and have a family and not have to compromise anything.” With the exception of Deborah, who believed some of her church’s views were complementarian, participants did not feel their churches imposed traditional roles on women. In this arena, Sheila felt that her former religion, Catholicism, was far less egalitarian than the Unity, which taught her that “there’s no difference between man and woman. God created them equally.” Quoting Scripture, Nancy added:

My religion has absolutely no limitations on women. We believe that in Christ we’re neither male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, Greek, non-Greek, but we’re all one. My faith teaches me that God is no respecter of persons. What He wants is a willing heart, a clean heart, a submissive heart, a humble heart.

Regardless of any ambiguity between personal and ideological definitions of egalitarianism, like the Christian CAOs in Moreton and Newsom’s (2004a, 2004b) study, none of the women felt that her gender, or her church’s views on her gender, prevented her from reaching life or career goals.

One goal for these women was to bring their values and ethics to the workplace, as described in studies on workplace spirituality (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). On the whole, their beliefs guided them to value honesty and integrity, and to practice the Golden Rule in their dealings with others on the job. When facing situations compromising their sense of honesty and integrity,
participants were willing to risk their jobs to stand for what they believed was right. For instance, Sheila and Mary left their positions because of an incongruity between their value systems and their supervisors’ behaviour. In Mary’s case, immediately after leaving her job at a coffee shop, where she had been falsely accused of stealing money, she set up a daycare in which she could share her Christian faith with the children and the parents she encountered. With the motto, “integrity is everything,” Deborah mentioned passing up work opportunities that would require her to go against her personal code of ethics. She considered herself fortunate to work in a unit with colleagues who shared her faith base and value system. Nancy gave a more general sense of workplace spirituality as providing a positive Christian example for others. However, she extended the Golden Rule to mean being an ambassador for Christ on the job and advising co-workers in need on the basis of her Biblical knowledge. “I minister to [the people I work with] daily. I pray for them. I tell them things from the Word that they didn’t know themselves.”

Like the other women, Sheila felt she could employ her talents and Christian values, such as treating everyone equally, in her current work setting. However, in contrast to the rest of the sample, Sheila was still searching for her calling, which she hoped to find in volunteer work. Dissatisfied with her current field, Sheila planned to obtain certification as a real estate agent in two years, giving her the flexible hours to pursue both her creative and humanitarian passions. Nancy, while happy with her current career, set a similar goal, hoping to spend more time with her sons and leave a financial legacy for them. Sheila’s dilemma most clearly demonstrated that sometimes one’s calling must be found outside of paid employment (Brewer, 2001).

Studies on Christian women and careers suggest that women feel called to various spheres of life, including career, family, volunteer work, and church ministry (Oates et al., 2005; Scott, 2002). While expressing their callings at work, Mary and Deborah also drew from their personal and professional experience to carry out their callings in non-work settings. At church, Mary taught Sunday school and led the children’s singing company. Deborah had been volunteering since early adolescence; however, after Sophia’s death, she discovered her calling as
a volunteer counsellor for parents facing a similar loss. Nancy, in her work as a Bible study leader and volunteer, as in other roles, looked to fulfill God’s purposes for her life and to be a blessing to others. The four women’s notions of reciprocity are exemplified by a participant in a study on religion, spirituality, and women’s mid-life career transitions, “As I get older, and as my beliefs are clearer, [I feel] it’s fine for me to have a job and have a salary, but my role is to serve. I have to give something back. I can’t just take” (Akcali, 2000, p. 96).

Re-examining the spiritual grounding section of my discussion chapter fills me with more questions on the issues of faith and career than I had before I undertook this research. For instance, the sample generally exhibited a drop in involvement with formalized religion in their early 20s. However, when they later committed or re-committed to their current religions, they seemed more steadfast in their faith than before. I wonder if spiritual exploration, so often frowned upon, may be positive in some cases, and whether or not an increased religious commitment precedes an increased desire to have a calling rather than a job or a career. Participants implied, but did not explicitly state, that this was the case. In addition, while most of the sample felt they were fulfilling part of God’s purpose for their lives through work, it is possible that their strong religious convictions would have led them to approach any suitable employment as a calling. Finally, I asked myself, if factors unrelated to faith were more influential in participants’ initial career decisions, when exactly did a sense of calling first surface? These ambiguities render an answer to the question of how to find and follow God’s calling indefinite. Nonetheless, finding that there was no specific answer to this question enabled me, as a young woman at a crossroads, to be more patient and realistic when trying to find this answer. For my participants, as for many individuals, the revelation of God’s will and purpose for their lives came through searching, seizing opportunities, and taking purposeful action, rather than through a miraculous intervention. Hence in my implications for career counsellors, I sought to reconcile the notion of calling with more conventional career advice in a way that would honour and unite the rational and the spiritual.
Theoretical Frameworks

In the final stages of my research, I revisited the three theoretical frameworks – Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 2000), complexity theory (Bloch, 2005), and Brewer’s (2001) Vocational Souljourn Paradigm (VSP) upon which I initially based my study. In SCCT, career choice develops through the interaction of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, predisposed characteristics, and goals, with demographics, background contextual factors, and personal experiences. Complexity theory considers careers dynamic and complex adaptive entities, with each career component directly or indirectly affected by the other components. In complexity theory, spiritual individuals strive for a sense of calling, community in the workplace, work-life balance, and concordance of the workplace with their talents, interests, ethics, and values. The VSP postulates that a vocation is the alignment and outward expression of (a) meaning–core values and personal significance given to life experiences, (b) being–personal characteristics, including talents, interests, and beliefs, and (c) doing–purposeful action taken after consideration of meaning and being. When these constructs are unaligned, the individual experiences disequilibrium and loss of purpose. However, after this imbalance is corrected, he or she experiences growth and an increased sense of purpose.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) is best at explaining non-religious factors in the participants’ career development. These factors include self-efficacy, predisposed characteristics, experiential variables, outcome expectations, and goals. All four women evidenced some measure of career-related self-efficacy. For instance, Deborah demonstrated academic self-efficacy starting from her high school years, when she switched high schools to remain in a challenge program, while Mary evidenced great career decision self-efficacy in her willingness to complete the exploratory tasks needed to make a suitable choice. Sheila claims her mother’s role modelling increased her sense of self-efficacy in forging her own path in the world, while Nancy’s career decision self-efficacy has always been high, as evidenced by her choice as a recent university
graduate to forego a higher-paid position at a bank for a position at a planning agency that more closely suited her humanitarian interests.

In terms of predisposed characteristics, Mary’s love for children led naturally to her career as a daycare provider. In addition, the entire sample cited experiential variables, for example, Deborah’s year as a special ed. teacher, as influencing career choices. Related to outcome expectations, Mary anticipated that completing practical training in early childhood education would have a more positive outcome for her than attending a degree program. Finally, all participants set career-impacting goals, with Nancy’s strong desire to complete higher education, for instance, leading her to a master’s in economics.

Apart from Mary, participants did not consider gender or such background contextual factors as multiple role planning and religious sub-culture in their initial career choices. Nevertheless, they generally considered multiple roles in later decisions, with Sheila’s decision to be a stay-at-home mom for nine years as an illustration. For this sample, SCCT could most strongly explain the influence of non-religious personal, experiential, and environmental influences on participants’ career development. However, as a theory geared toward quantitative studies (e.g., Duffy & Lent, 2005), it could not extensively explain such ambiguous factors as the impact of religion and spirituality on the women’s career trajectories or key variables in their career transition processes. Analysis of my findings using SCCT indicated that this theory is most effective when employed in quantitative or even mixed-method research.

Spirituality in complexity theory demonstrated how all aspects of the participants’ lives, such as their childhood, key events, and tragedies, were interconnected, and how one facet of life or career might directly or indirectly influence other facets. Deborah’s year abroad, for example, set the course for her personal, relational, and professional life. For Nancy, marriage brought about shifts in marital status, country, Christian denomination, and place of employment. All participants exhibited several of this theory’s tenets including: (a) seeking life-work balance, for example, turning down work or responsibilities that would disturb this balance, as did Deborah,
(b) working in a setting congruent with their talents and ethics, all participants citing the Golden Rule as their guiding principle at work, (c) feeling called to their careers by their talents, interests, and values, and (d) seeking a purpose for work beyond financial gain. As an illustration, running a Christian daycare, Mary was able to both express and transfer her ethics and values to her young charges. Sheila was the only participant still seeking her calling, which she hoped to discover in volunteer work. Sheila’s case illustrated that, while spirituality in complexity theory links spirituality and career for individuals who view their work as a calling, some of its major premises do not apply for individuals who consider their work merely a career or a job.

Moreover, while spirituality in complexity theory allowed for a more holistic examination of these women’s careers, with its broad acceptance of many variables, it could be considered inadequate in explaining specific factors on career development. In future research of a similar nature, spirituality in complexity theory would be most useful as an entry point for understanding data rather than as the principal theory employed in data analysis.

The Vocational Souljourn Paradigm’s constructs of meaning, being, and doing could generally apply to the entire sample. For instance, as Christians, all participants evidenced a faith-based sense of meaning which guided and comforted them. Sheila’s and Nancy’s sense of meaning grew subsequent to denominational transitions. Further, all participants were able to express being in the external world. Thus they applied their individual traits, sense of ethics, and desire to help others, to volunteer work, church work, and paid employment. Of the sample, Nancy especially felt it was her mission to minister to her co-workers, and Deborah considered her volunteer work part of her vocation. In every woman’s life story, there also was a period of disequilibrium, in which she experienced a spiritual, personal, or employment-related low. As when Mary was accused of stealing at a coffee shop and quit her job, this low was followed by a shift in priorities and resultant personal growth. Overall, the VSP provided a holistic view of life and career, including major transitions. It also uniquely allowed for the notion of non-paid employment as a calling. With its focus on personal agency and spirituality, however, the VSP
did not touch on external influences, such as the mentors, role models, and career encouragers present in each woman’s narrative. Regardless, of the three frameworks, the VSP most closely represented the sum of participants’ life and career trajectories. These findings suggested that the VSP will be useful in future studies on the relationship of religion and spirituality to career development with women of various faith groups.

Implications for Career Counsellors in Colleges and Universities

During the transition from youth to adulthood, many individuals undergo a concurrent spiritual quest and search for life purpose (Dalton, 2001). Thus, as this study with four Christian women indicates, religion and spirituality may be key considerations in students’ career and broader life goals. As students are seeking counselling services, including career counselling, at post-secondary institutions at an increasing rate (Winer, 2001), career counsellors will encounter more students from various faith backgrounds. For students who so desire, religious and spiritual beliefs should be considered throughout career decision-making and planning. A focal point within the juxtaposition of career and spirituality is a calling. Dalton (2001) states, “For students with religious convictions, the belief in calling is often tied to the belief that they are chosen by God for a specific role or task in life” (p. 20). For especially religious young women, career counselling should incorporate the notion of calling into traditional career development activities, such as: (a) self-discovery; (b) exploration and research; and (c) formulating a plan (Lifton, 1964). Following are suggestions of means by which career counsellors may assist young women for whom religion, and the search for a calling, are significant. These suggestions are based on the results of this study, as well as on my review of career counselling literature.

With self-awareness critical to career, relationship, and general life success (Hall, 2002; Whitehead & Kotzke, 2003), self-discovery is a vital first step in career development. During the intake process, the counsellor and the client may collaboratively identify the client’s values, beliefs, and underlying motivations (Robert et al., 2006). This assessment may take the form of a
semi-structured interview (Gysbers, 1987), written exercises (Dik & Steger, in press), or a lifeline. During the semi-structured interview and written exercises (e.g., using prompts to write a paragraph about life/career goals), the client may express her objective and subjective definition of career success. The lifeline, as employed in this study, can reveal recurrent themes and significant background influences in the client’s life, clarify her career development trajectory, and uncover her most salient (religious and non-religious) skills, interests, and values (Crozier, 1998). This process of self-discovery should bolster the client’s confidence in facing an uncertain future (Bloch, 2004). It will also be useful later in her career progression as she will need to draw upon her self-identified ethics and values if faced with morally questionable situations.

Weiss et al. (2004) posit that a vocation, or calling, is not received individually. Rather, it is discovered by the individual and the community together. Therefore, exploration and research, within the context of calling, would incite the client to discern the needs of her community (Weiss et al., 2004). As this study indicates, a calling may be found in or through volunteer service. While enabling the client to give back to society, volunteering may also help her discover more about her unique gifts and the world of work (Dalton, 2001). The career counsellor may provide the resources and contacts to help the client initiate a volunteer plan. If feasible for the client, volunteer service abroad may be an especially life-changing event. Travel may encourage adaptability (Hall, 2002) and global thinking, as it did for Deborah and Sheila. The client may also benefit from a formal mentorship program with alumnae of similar faith backgrounds. As with this study’s sample, mentorship may positively impact the young Christian woman’s eventual career. Moreover, for a young woman of faith, mentors from both traditional and non-traditional fields may convey that any field of work can be a calling, and thus of service to others.

Once the client has reached an initial career goal, she and the counsellor may create an individualized career map as a useful point of reference. As found in this study, women’s valuing of family roles typically influences career plans at the outset or further in their professional development (e.g., Biggs & Brough, 2005). Therefore, this map should take a life planning
approach, considering other life and personal roles – especially in the family sphere, along with
the career role (Farmer, 1996). The career counsellor and the client may collaboratively
determine various strategies for combining work and family roles, including: (a) spiritual stress
reduction methods; (b) emotional and practical support structures from extended family, future
spouse, or others; and (c) career accommodations, if necessary (Whitehead & Kotzke, 2003). By
steering, rather than drifting into, life-family choices (Lifton, 1964), the young woman may
realize that family and career do not have to be opposing forces, and create a life in line with who
she is and what is most important to her (Whitehead & Kotzke, 2003).

Limitations and Implications for Research

Although much research indicates the importance of spirituality in women’s lives (e.g.,
Buchko, 2004), literature on the intersection of faith and career development, particularly for
women, remains sparse (Dik & Duffy, in press). Presently, the majority of relevant studies target
either the career development of university students or the current careers of female academics in
Christian colleges and universities. Composed of four in-depth case studies, my research closely
examines the spiritual, experiential, and contextual factors leading Christian women representing
diverse fields to their current careers. The retrospective nature of this study provides insight into
career development across different life stages for this sample. In addition, this study calls for an
increase in research on Christian women and career development, which may assist researchers in
understanding how to tailor current career development theories to meet the needs of this
subgroup. Thus, as an exploratory qualitative study, my research adds to the limited empirically-
based knowledge on Christian women and careers within the field of vocational psychology.

Findings from this study leave many options for future research. The first area for future
research is to produce a career development theory that more accurately reflects spiritual and non-
spiritual factors in women’s career development. My research was initially based on three
theoretical frameworks. At first, I focused on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) (Lent et
However, I found that, while it explained the effect of non-religious factors (e.g., self-efficacy, predisposed characteristics, and experiential variables) on participants’ career development, as well as on supports and barriers to their careers, SCCT could not extensively explain religious factors. While the next theory—complexity (Bloch, 2005)—demonstrated how one facet of life or career, including spiritual beliefs, may directly or indirectly influence other facets, it was limited by its emphasis on a calling as paid employment and also took a somewhat broad approach to the fusion of spirituality and career. As was true for my four participants, the VSP may be most relevant for religious women, as its notion of calling included non-paid work, and it considered the discovery of calling a recursive process. However, unlike SCCT, it did not widely examine non-religious variables in career development. Based on my critique of these frameworks, a theory combining the non-spiritual and spiritual elements of SCCT and the VSP, respectively, with the VSP as a base, would provide a more holistic view of the career development of Christian women and women of other faiths.

The second area for future research is to study this topic with different methodologies, such as a mixed-method approach. In this research, for instance, themes or sub-themes that could be better supported with both qualitative and quantitative research include career decision self-efficacy and life-role salience. During their interviews, most participants implied that their spiritual beliefs had increased either their past or present sense of career decision self-efficacy. As a follow-up to qualitative research, with a larger sample and control group, the career decision self-efficacy scale (Betz, 2001) might further illuminate a religious or spiritual effect on this variable. Similarly, all participants cited motherhood as central to their identities. A mixed-methods study might follow qualitative inquiry with the administration of the Life Role Salience Scale (Amatea et al., 1986), providing more evidence for claims that a woman is either career- or family-oriented. Mixed-methods would thus offer further evidence for emergent themes.

The third area for future research is a best practices study of career programs incorporating calling at secular or non-secular universities. The most relevant research to date,
completed by Dik and Steger (in press), found a workshop integrating the notion of calling with more traditional career development activities to be at least as effective as the strictly traditional workshop. For a best practices study, an example of a target school might be Biola University, a Christian university in Southern California, which appears to take both a spiritual and practical approach to career development (http://www.biola.edu/admin/career/). Accordingly, its website incorporates information on finding a calling with pages on career exploration, career planning basics, and jobs and internships. Furthermore, the comprehensive list of career assessments offered at Biola University includes both the spiritual gifts inventory and the more traditional Myers-Briggs Assessment (Biola University Career Services, 2008). Case studies of the career services department at Biola and other universities with a similar approach to career development could provide more suggestions on how counsellors may help students seeking their life purpose.

Concluding Thoughts

From the time I began this thesis until the present, my personal and spiritual beliefs have evolved and grown. This process of evolution continues as I gather more information about myself, my faith, and the world around me. Over the course of a year, I have experienced various transitions, from non-athlete to athlete, from youth leader at my church to co-leader, and from full-time student to full-time student and part-time worker at an employment resource centre. These transitions, along with my research journey, have impacted me in many ways.

First, when I initially began my research, I could not easily relate to participants’ multiple role concerns as a single woman without children. However, as the year progressed and I sometimes experienced difficulty managing my various roles, I learned that doing it all is not easy. Sometimes it is necessary to prioritize one role ahead of the others. Often times, you simply have to do the best you can, and forgive yourself for any short-comings. In my case, to complete my thesis, I had to shift its salience in my life, from one of many activities, to my main activity. I also gained a sense of the importance of a social support in managing multiple roles, as I
benefited greatly from having an understanding boss, a thesis supervisor who would not let me quit, and a co-leader with whom to share my heavy church responsibilities. With support, I was able to derive more satisfaction from multiple roles than I would have otherwise.

Then, some of my basic assumptions going into this study have been challenged. My specific biases at the outset were: (a) many women are career-oriented; (b) women who limit their career goals for the sake of their families are making a sacrifice; and (c) having an academic/career orientation brings more external success than having a family/relationship orientation. Discovering that family and work were not equally salient for all women was a major revelation! In general, from childhood, I viewed academic and career achievement as more important than achievement in the family sphere. Presently, I would say I value both roles, but remain somewhat more career-oriented. However, I am not sure where I will fall on the spectrum of family versus career when I reach that stage of my life. At any rate, I have learned that, for many women, making career accommodations due to family is not a burden but a way for them to be fully present in their children’s growing-up years.

Further, based on my understanding of the literature, I expected that these women would cite religion and spirituality as major influences on their career paths. In addition, I expected these women to put more emphasis on the positive correlation between religion and spirituality, and career development, than on the negative. I also believed faith would help these women cope with the tensions of carrying out several roles at a time. From these women, I learned that spirituality does not always initially influence career decision-making, but may influence workplace behaviours and career development down the line. As anticipated, faith played a critical role in helping participants manage stress in various facets of their lives. Most significantly, from my research, as well as from my serendipitous experience of obtaining part-time employment in a field of interest, I learned that a calling is not presented like writing on the wall. It is not easy to find, and it may change over time. Nevertheless, as Matthew 7:7 states, “Seek and ye shall find.” I now believe that, through a combination of seeking, Bible study, and
prayer, the possibility of finding a calling is more tangible. Furthermore, as my views on work, family, and calling were modified throughout this study, I served as my own case example of how the stories of more-established Christian women might be a powerful tool to guide young women just beginning their life and career journeys.

Finally, re-reading my results and discussion section, I am reminded of what a humbling and surprising experience writing this thesis has been. In terms of the research itself, I did not set out to have a culturally or educationally diverse sample, nor did I try to fill a quota of types of career fields. However, I desired to gain a deeper understanding of women’s career development with a sample of Christian women from different life spheres. On the whole, I feel that my study represents a fairly broad spectrum of Christian women, with participants from a range of denominations, occupations, and socioeconomic statuses, and I am happy about that. On a personal level, having never taken on a research project of this depth, I was unprepared for the challenge of maintaining momentum over the long term. At several points over the course of this year, I found that I could relate to American journalist Gene Fowler, “Writing is easy: All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead” (http://www.quotegarden.com/writing.html). When I read the final product, however, I am able to forget the difficulties and simply enjoy the fruits of my labour.


APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Letter of Information

Dear Participant:

I am completing my Master of Education degree at Queen’s University. I am conducting a study entitled “Christian Women Discuss the Influence of Faith in their Career Development” under the supervision of Dr. John Freeman, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Queen’s University. The ultimate goal of my research is to uncover information that will facilitate the career development of young Christian women. This research has been cleared by Queen’s University’s General Research Ethics Board.

I invite you to participate in this study, which examines the role of religion and spirituality in the career development of Christian women. You have been selected because you meet pre-established criteria that will make your contribution especially valuable. To collect data for this research, I will conduct individual interviews, which should last approximately 90 minutes. Literature on Christian women and career reveals that their faith may play a dual role of empowering them with a sense of calling, or promoting traditional, career-constraining gender stereotypes. Your personal insights may shed more light on this issue.

Each interview will be audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. After transcription, the tape will be destroyed. In the first 30 to 40 minutes of the interview, I will ask you to create a lifeline, or a timeline which highlights significant events in your career, spiritual, or personal development. Following this, you will be questioned on different aspects of the research topic. Please note that your lifelines will be kept as data, and you may be contacted by phone for clarification of interview responses.

Participation in this research will not cause any foreseeable risks or inconveniences. Moreover, you will not be obliged to respond to questions which make you feel uncomfortable or which you find objectionable. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences.

This research may result in publications of various types, including academic and professional journals, newsletters, and my master’s thesis. Findings may also be presented at conferences. Your identity and other identifying features (e.g., place of employment) will be concealed using pseudonyms. To the extent possible, information collected will be confidential, and your identity will be protected. Data gathered during this study will be secured in my residence. Upon request, you may obtain full description of the results of the study after its completion.

For further information, you may contact my supervisor, Dr. John Freeman, at (613) 533-6000, ext. 77298 (freemanj@educ.queensu.ca) or me at (613) 329-7542 (cagboka@hotmail.com). If you have additional questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, please contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofré, (613) 533-6120 (brunojor@edu.queensu.ca), or the Chair of the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton, (613) 533-6000, ext.77034 (greb.chair@queensu.ca).

Sincerely,

Christelle Agboka
Consent Form

Dear Participant:

If you agree to be a participant in this study, as described in the letter of information, please sign this letter of consent. You may keep one copy for your records, and provide me with one copy at the time of the interview. If you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study, you may write your email or postal address at the bottom of this sheet.

I have read and retained a copy of the letter of information concerning: “Christian Women Discuss the Influence of Faith on their Career Development,” and my questions have been sufficiently answered. I have been informed of the purpose and procedures of this study, namely that the interview will be audio-taped. I am aware that my participation in this study is voluntary and I may withdraw at any moment. I have been notified that my identity and other identifying features will be protected with pseudonyms at all times. I have been informed of the measures that will be taken to ensure that the information I provide remains confidential.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns about this research project, I may contact Ms. Christelle Agboka at (613) 329-7542 (cagboka@hotmail.com), or her supervisor, Dr. John Freeman, at (613) 533-6000, ext. 77298 (freemanj@educ.queensu.ca). I am also aware that for questions, concerns, or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I may contact the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr. Rosa Bruno-Jofré, (613) 533-6120 (brunojo@educ.queensu.ca), or the Chair of the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Leighton, (613) 533-6000, ext. 77034 (greb.chair@queensu.ca).

Participant’s name:

Signature:

Date:

Please write your email or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study.

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Christelle Agboka. Retain the second copy for your records.
Hello. My name is Christelle Agboka. I am a graduate student completing my Master of Education degree at Queen’s University. I am calling to request your participation in my upcoming research study, Christian Women Discuss the Influence of Faith on Their Career Development. The aim of this research is to reveal the positive or negative impact religion and spirituality have had on the career paths of Christian women already established in the work force. My ultimate goal is to uncover information that will facilitate the career development of young Christian women.

I am seeking your insights into this issue, as you meet participant criteria of being a female Christian who (a) regularly attends church, (b) is between the ages of 35 and 55, (c) has completed college or university, (d) holds a career, and (e) is married with children. The primary method of data collection in this study will be individual interviews. These interviews will last approximately 90 minutes. To the extent possible, all information, including your identity, will remain confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this research project and would like further information, please contact me, Christelle Agboka, by phone at (613) 329-7542, or by email at cagboka@hotmail.com.
APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

I understand that completion of this sheet is entirely voluntary and that I need not complete any items which I find objectionable, or which make me uncomfortable.

1) Pseudonym:

2) Age:

3) Marital Status:

4) Number of Children:

5) Educational Credentials:

6) Ethnic Background:

7) Religious Affiliation:

   8) How often do you attend church?
      a) Once a week
      b) Once every two weeks
      c) Once a month
      d) More than once a week
      e) Less than once a month

   9) How involved are you in the activities of your church?
      a) Very involved
      b) Involved
      c) Somewhat involved
      d) A little involved
      e) Uninvolved

   10) At which age did you commit to your current religion?

   11) Employment Status:
       a) Full-time (35 or more hours per week)
       b) Part-time (less than 35 hours per week)
       c) Unemployed
       d) Other ______________________________

   12) Your position in your present occupation: _________________________________________

   13) Length of time in your present occupation:
       a) Less than 6 months
       b) 1 to less than 2 years
       c) 2 years to less than 5 years
       d) 5 years to less than 10 years
       e) More than 10 years
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LIFELINE

A: Probes for plotting lifeline events.

Plot moments of peak experience (3 or 4).
1 academic
2 career-related
3 spiritual
4 personal

Plot moments of breakthrough or turning points (3 or 4).

Plot low moments in your life (3 or 4).
1 academic
2 career-related
3 spiritual
4 personal

B: Probes for clarifying significance of lifeline events.

Emotions experienced at the time of the event (positive or negative).
1 anxiety
2 frustration
3 peace
4 joy
5 mixed emotions

Learning experienced as a result of the event.
1 academic
2 career-related
3 spiritual
4 personal

Problem-solving resources employed during low moments.
1 internal
2 external
3 transcendent
APPENDIX E: STANDARDIZED OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) What are some guiding values and beliefs to which you adhere?
   Probe: How did these values develop over time?

2) To what extent have your religious or spiritual beliefs shaped your outlook on life? On the place of work in your life?

3) What are the roles you play? Of the different roles you play, which one takes priority?
   Probe: How has this changed over the years? Why?

4) Vocational identity is defined in career counseling literature as “a clear and stable picture of one’s goals, interests, personality, and talents” (Holland, Daiger, & Power, 1980, p. 1). Someone with a secure vocational identity will more easily make appropriate occupational choices and feel confident in her ability to make career-related decisions. How do you view your own vocational identity? What influence has your personal faith had on your vocational identity?

5) What purpose do you think God has for your life? How do you feel you discern the purpose God has for your life?

6) Generally speaking, how does your religion view women? To what extent do you agree with this view?

7) In your opinion have the beliefs of your religion regarding women and work been facilitating factors in your career development? Have they been limiting?
   Probe: How so? Please explain.

8) In the past, which career-related conflicts have you experienced?

9) Which significant resources have you drawn on to help you deal with career-related conflict?

10) Have career-related difficulties ever caused you to lose faith?
11) Which internal or external resources have most supported you in making major career decisions?


12) In vocational literature, occupations may be classified into three categories: (a) a job – or a way to meet your financial needs, (b) a career – or a way to achieve personal success, and (c) a calling – or a purpose given you by God. In which category would you place your current occupation?

Probes: To what degree do you feel your present occupation allows you to employ your unique abilities and talents? Please elaborate.

13) In your opinion, how may career counsellors at secular universities facilitate the career development of young Christian women?

14) How would you advise young Christian women concerning their career development?

15) That concludes my interview questions. Is there anything you would like to add?
APPENDIX F: CONTACT SUMMARY FORM

1) What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?

2) Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on the target questions you have for this contact.

3) Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important for this contact?

4) What remaining questions do you have for follow-up with this contact?