

KEEPING THE FAITH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING
INTELLECTUALLY-GIFTED ADULTS WHO REMAIN PRACTICING CHRISTIANS

by

Deborah Glynn

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs. At this stage in the research, an intellectually-gifted adult will be generally defined as an individual who has scored at least two standard deviations above the mean (minus the standard error of measure) on a standardized intelligence test (Ohio Department of Education, 2017). The primary theory guiding this study will be Vygotsky's (2011) theory of cognitive development. It is appropriate for this study because it will shed light on Jesus as a possible more knowledgeable other (MKO) for gifted adults who are practicing Christians and examine the potential level of development in a spiritual light as well as a worldly light. The secondary developmental theory guiding this study is Gagné's (2013) differentiated model of giftedness and talent (DMGT), as it sheds light on the many catalysts that may or may not have caused these gifted adults to embrace or ignore their faith. The central research question is: What are the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs? The sub-questions will look at who intellectually-gifted adults use as their MKO in their lives; how intellectually-gifted adults perceive or experience their Christianity in their academic lives; and, how some intellectually-gifted adults navigate society's perception of Christianity. Data will be collected through interviews, focus groups, and journals. Data will be analyzed using strategies from Moustakas (1994) that include horizontalizing and clustering.

Keywords: Chance, environmental catalysts, giftedness, intellectually-gifted, More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), potential level of development, practicing Christian

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my loving and encouraging family and to the holy trinity who have given me the strength and faith to carry on. It has been a long and interesting journey, but one well worth traveled.

Acknowledgments

Through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and the knowledge that He is always there, I have been able to complete this study though at times it seemed the obstacles were great. I want to acknowledge the patience, kindness and tremendous Christian knowledge of Dr. Rebecca Lunde and Dr. James Swezey who, without their encouragement and belief in my abilities (that I sometimes lacked in myself) this paper would never have been completed. I also want to acknowledge my big brother Michael, who as I type this is just beginning his Chapter Four. His reassurance and motivation helped move this journey to completion.

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List of Abbreviations

Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT)

Institutional Departure Model (IDM)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)

National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC)

Ohio Association of Gifted Children (OAGC)

Ohio Department of Education (ODE)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Strong faith and a high intelligence quotient (IQ) are two traits that are seldom linked together. Faith and intelligence seem to contrast with one another. Some with high IQs have often been outspoken in their disdain of faith especially that of Christianity, according to some research (Subotnik, Karp, & Morgan, 1989; Terman, 1959; Zuckerman, Silberman, & Hall, 2013). In all three studies, the results present a picture where faith and intellect do not go hand-in-hand, and intelligence and faith cannot coincide. Yet, there are those highly gifted adults who not only profess their Christian beliefs but persist in them (Yancey, 2014). In this phenomenological study, 15 intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who are practicing Christians were interviewed, kept journals, and participated in focus groups in an effort to help identify and explore factors that have allowed them to keep their faith.

The purpose of Chapter One is to provide an introduction of the historical, social, and theoretical background of highly intellectually-gifted adults who are practicing Christians. In order to do this, literature on Christian belief in America, the difference between wisdom and intelligence, gifted adults, and Christians who persist in their faith, as well as those who lack faith, were all examined. The phenomenological study will focus on understanding intellectually-gifted adults' experiences with and perceptions of being a practicing Christian and persisting in their faith. Chapter One will also provide an introduction to any biases concerning gifted individuals, highly intellectual adults, and Christians that may be found when conducting the study, as well as the problem statement and purpose of the study.

Background

Findings in numerous studies over several decades (Subotnik et al., 1989; Terman, 1959;

Zuckerman et al., 2013) lay claim to the negative correlation between intelligence and faith. Research (Douthat, 2012) suggested that a high intellect and a belief in Christ are at definite cross purposes. It seems that the United States is no longer a nation of believers, and Americans are more concerned about logic than they are about faith (Douthat, 2012). Americans are less willing to allow faith to drive their beliefs in God and now want proven facts (Douthat, 2012). A meta-analysis of 63 studies (Zuckerman et al., 2013) showed a significant negative association between intelligence and religiosity. In that study, Zuckerman et al. (2013) stated that one of the reasons for this negative association was that intellectuals are generally more analytical than the religious in society. Yancey stated, “Belief in superior cognitive abilities in atheists, and other irreligious individuals, has found support in social science literature” (2014, p. 17). Even certain leaders of this country seem to be shying away from Christianity (Coe & Chenoweth, 2015). The Christian faith that the United States was founded upon is taking a backseat as Christianity is being downplayed even by recent U.S. Presidents (Coe & Chenoweth, 2015). This phenomenological study will examine the factors that allow highly intellectual adults to remain true to their Christian faith.

Historical Background

Research on gifted individuals and on giftedness is plentiful, but mixed messages abound. Attempting to formally define what exactly constitutes giftedness or a gifted individual is difficult because it is a matter on which no one can agree. A study investigating the definitions of giftedness (Carman, 2013) in over 15 years of research found that there is no generally accepted definition.

The definition of Christianity yields similar findings, with even the human authors of the Bible itself not agreeing. According to Betz (1991), “Even within the New Testament itself

several authors have made serious attempts to self-define Christian religion as they have understood it” (p. 316). In examining those who are Christians, there are those findings that address the perseverance of the faithful (Aboderin, 2014; Bengtson, 2013). Families who share their faith and have it as an important part of life pass their faith and practices on to future generations (Bengtson, 2013). These families maintain their faith and pass it on because, “Their belief in a personal relationship with God is the core issue in this family, around which all activities and relationships are built, and they are highly committed to transmitting their faith to the next generation” (Bengtson, 2013, p. 181). Keeping the faith against all odds is not a new concept for Americans, but one that is not shouted from the media rooftops. Throughout history there have been those who cling to and proclaim their faith while in the midst of dark times (Aboderin, 2014).

America seems to be losing the Christian values that are its foundation. To be a Christian, it would seem to some (Zuckerman et al., 2013), is to be a zealot whose IQ score is lower every Sunday morning. But, there are those who persevere (Aboderin, 2014). In looking at those intellectually-gifted adults who not only believe but persist in their faith, I hope to, through this research, study those who do not doubt that faith and intellect can and do go hand-in-hand. I also hope to expand the literature that seems to be one-sided regarding faith and intelligence. This research will assist those who are perhaps struggling with their faith, brilliant or not, as well as those working with gifted adults in an academic or spiritual realm.

The research on both gifted adults and gifted adults who practice their Christian faith is not easy to find. There is in general a limited amount of research that deals with gifted adults (Rinn & Bishop, 2015); there has been a longitudinal study of gifted students conducted by Terman (1959) that spanned over 30 years, and a study of gifted adults by Subotnik et al. (1989)

which showed that gifted adults do not practice religion. In both the Terman (1959) and the Subotnik et al. (1989) studies, the researchers found that as adults only 16% of the participants derived personal satisfaction from religion. In the Zuckerman et al. (2013) meta-analysis study, out of 63 studies, 53 showed a negative correlation between intelligence and religiosity. Zuckerman et al. (2013) added that perhaps those of high intelligence are more logical than the religious within today's culture.

As a country, the United States is seeing a decline in all adults who profess to be Christians. A 2015 survey (Pew Research Center, 2015) found that among the more than 35,000 Americans surveyed, the percentage of adults (ages 18 and older) who describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly eight percent in just seven years, from 78.4% in 2007 to 70.6% in 2014.

Social Background

Academia, it seems, may adhere to the notion that intellect must be devoid of religion to be taken seriously. As Chamorro-Premuzic (2013) stated, "Some people satisfy their desire to find meaning via religion, whereas others do so via logical, analytical, or scientific reasoning – and IQ predicts whether you are in the former or latter group" (p. 46). Leaders of the United States today are also less likely to proclaim a Christian foundation than in the past. According to Coe and Chenoweth (2015), "In particular, we find that recent presidents have emphasized linkages between Christians and those of other faiths or no faith at all, but deemphasized linkages between Christianity and America's heritage" (p. 375).

All is not lost for Christians, and the news is not all bad for the highly intelligent and their average counterparts. There may be a reason for the negative correlations. According to Yancey (2014), "Findings suggest that previous assertions of the cognitive superiority of the

nonreligious may reflect ideological bias within the testing measures instead of an innate cognitive ability difference” (p. 17). And, perhaps bias is not limited to testing instruments. In response to the Zuckerman et al. (2013) study, Winston (2013) found:

It’s not that intelligence leads to atheism, or education leads to loss of faith. But I think there is a certain peer pressure as one moves up the educational ladder to dismiss all religion as fundamentalism. It’s one of the last acceptable biases in an environment that prides itself on being open-minded. (p. 1)

Theoretical Background

The primary theory guiding this study will be Vygotsky’s (2011) theory of cognitive development and how Christ may or may not be the participants’ more knowledgeable other (MKO). Vygotsky (2011) looked at the MKO as one who better understands or has higher ability level than that of the learner. In looking at these Christian adults, there is a need to know who has helped them in their ability to maintain their faith, be it Christ or others throughout their lives thus far. Vygotsky (2011) looked at the need for there always to be someone who is more knowledgeable than the learner and that person may be the MKO for a brief or extended time. The secondary developmental theory guiding this study is the differentiated model of giftedness and talent (DMGT) (Gagné, 2015) as it sheds light on the many catalysts that may or may not have caused these gifted adults to embrace or ignore their faith. One area of special interest (Gagné, 2015) is the role that environmental catalysts play in the fulfillment of gifts to talents for these adults. Gagné (2015) named milieu, which includes culture and family, as one environmental influence that can help or hinder development. Gagné (2015) also examined intrapersonal catalysts that can influence the learning process positively or negatively, including the catalyst of motivation. The DMGT was used as a framework as the adult participants were

questioned about their motivations in learning and faith as well as if family had any influence on their giftedness and faith. Tinto's (1993) institutional departure model (IDM) will be another secondary developmental theory guiding this study. Tinto (1993) looked at student retention and the causes of student dropout rates in institutions of higher learning. In the IDM, Tinto (1993) examined the interaction between students and the academic and social systems of their institutions and looked at the role that persistence played in success for students. Tinto's theory will be used in this study to explore participants' persistence in their faith and if applicable, their intellectual growth.

Situation to Self

In the 1940s and 1950s, many broadcasters on both radio and television would end their programs with, "the family that prays together, stays together." This seems to be the trend for Christians today. Families who share their faith and have it as an important part of life pass their faith and practices on to future generations (Bengtson, 2013). These families maintain their faith and pass it on because, according to Bengtson (2013), "Their belief in a personal relationship with God is the core issue in this family, around which all activities and relationships are built, and they are highly committed to transmitting their faith to the next generation" (p. 181).

Keeping the faith against all odds is not a new concept for Americans but one that is not prevalent in mainstream media. Throughout history there have been those who cling to and proclaim their faith while in the midst of dark times (Aboderin, 2014). These Christian beliefs and the clinging to and persistence of them underpin this research study. America seems to be losing the Christian values that are her foundation. To be a Christian, it would seem to some (Zuckerman et al., 2013), is counterproductive to being intellectual. But, there are those who

persevere (Aboderin, 2014). This research will assist those who are perhaps struggling with their faith, be they brilliant or not.

In looking at the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of gifted adults, I am impacted by the burden they may have carried since childhood and the many ways that they have continued to keep their faith during adulthood. The ontological assumption that there are many different realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and that these are seen through many views will guide how I conduct and present this study. The nature or reality, or the fact that “multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences and interactions with others” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35), will guide this study as I look at the lives of these gifted, Christian adults and their experiences and relationships with Christ and others. I will use my ontological assumption of reality throughout this study and when presenting findings, I will report how those involved viewed their experiences in their own different and unique ways (Moustakas, 1994). My ontological assumption is that the realities that each participant has are vital to fully understanding how each remains faithful. I cannot define the reality of being a highly gifted adult who remains faithful and so think it is very important that the participants themselves share their meanings experience and their perceptions. Likewise, my epistemological assumption is that the only meaningful, fair, and accurate way to reveal the experiences of the participants is to allow them to have their own voice to share the lives they live and the processes that have brought them where they are today.

The axiological assumption will also be used for my research, as, “the inquirers (using the axiological assumption) admit the value-laden nature of the study, and actively report their value and biases as well” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). The axiological assumption not only allows for values to be part of the research but looks at the importance of these values and their

relationship to social change. My axiological assumption is one based on pragmatism. Pragmatism, a philosophy built around “the scientific loyalty to facts (with) the old confidence in human values and the resultant spontaneity, whether of the religious or of the romantic type” (James, 1896, p. 15), will guide this study. The connection of belief and logic and how the two can and do co-exist in these gifted adults is the essence of this study. Pierce James’ (1896) thought that faith was sensible, though not rationally demanded, and his view that there was room for logic and belief is a valuable guide. The study itself looks at those individuals who are highly intelligent, so in the world’s view most likely logical, and yet have strong beliefs and commitments to their faith. According to Pierce (1992), “We may define the real as that whose characters are independent of what anybody may think them to be” (p. 2). My Christian worldview has also led me to this study and my axiological assumptions. It has led me to develop the research questions and had influenced even the topic itself—that of gifted Christian adults who keep their faith. My Christian faith and the desire to strengthen not only my own faith, but those who participate in the study, as well as those who read the study, are a big part of the rationale for the study. As Paul stated in his letter to the Romans, “and be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2, King James Version). My Biblical worldview has shaped this study. I try and look at the world, including the problems and the solutions, through God’s Word. The nature of this study itself is through a biblical worldview lens as it looks at adults who maintain their faith in a very secular world.

Problem Statement

Some intellectually-gifted adults in the United States continue to embrace their faith in Jesus Christ, and this is the phenomenon I will be studying. The problem is defining the factors

and experiences that shape how and why these highly gifted adults maintain their Christian faith. There are few studies that look at intellectually-gifted, faith-driven adults in the United States. Little is known as to why or how these adults who are highly gifted continue to keep their faith.

There are very few studies examining gifted adults (Rinn & Bishop, 2015), and the most cited studies (Subotnik et al., 1989; Terman, 1959) do not look at Christian faith but rather at spirituality. The current research offers no accounting of intellectually-gifted adults who remain faithful and persistent in their beliefs regarding Jesus Christ. There is a need, as a faith-based believer, to show that there is a way to be highly intelligent and Godly at the same time. There are studies that show the negative correlation between those who have faith and those of high intellect (Subotnik et al., 1989; Terman, 1959; Zuckerman et al., 2013), but there is very limited research, thus there is no voice for this population of adults who are both brilliant and believers. The phenomenon that will be examined in this study is how and why gifted Christian adults maintain their faith.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental, phenomenological study is to explore the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist and remain true in their Christian beliefs. At this stage in the research, an intellectually-gifted adult will be generally defined as an individual over the age of 18 who has scored at least two standard deviations above the mean (minus the standard error of measure) on a standardized intelligence test (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2017) and maintains a relationship. The primary theory guiding this study will be Vygotsky's (2011) theory of cognitive development. It is appropriate for this study because it will shed light on Jesus as a possible more knowledgeable other (MKO) for gifted adults who are practicing Christians and examine the potential level of

development in a spiritual light as well as a worldly light. The secondary developmental theory guiding this study is the differentiated model of giftedness and talent (Gagné, 2015), as it sheds light on the many catalysts that may or may not have caused these gifted adults to embrace or ignore their faith.

Significance of the Study

This study will be significant to those who work with gifted adults, those who are gifted adults struggling with their faith, as well as those who, regardless of IQ, struggle with their faith, and those who are highly gifted, as it will contribute to the small knowledge base on gifted adults. The studies on adults who are gifted are few (Rinn & Bishop, 2015). This study will share experiences of these highly gifted adults. More importantly, this study will examine the lives of those highly-gifted adults who remain true to their faith in the Lord. The research on gifted adults who practice their Christian faith is not easy to find and does not specifically deal with a belief in Jesus, but rather only looks at religious affiliation. The longitudinal study of gifted students conducted by Terman (1959) and a study of gifted adults by Subotnik et al. (1989) showed that gifted adults are not practicing any religion but did not look at Christianity, and more pointedly, a belief in Jesus Christ.

By researching adults who are both gifted intellectually and Christians, new light may be shed on the issue of faith and intelligence. The study can present counter-claims to those studies (Subotnik et al., 1989; Terman, 1959; Zuckerman et al., 2013) that report the negative correlation between intelligence and faith. This study will examine counter views to Zuckerman et al.'s (2013) findings that intellectuals are generally more analytical than the religious in society. The theoretical significance of this study, especially for those who work with highly intelligent Christian adults, will be that it may lead to a different use of Vygotsky's (2011) theory of

cognitive development, including looking at Christ as an influence on not only the spiritual but intelligential being. The research may also shed light on a life-changing event in developing talent (Gagné, 2015) and accepting Christ.

This research will also provide practical significance to not only those involved but for those who are like them or those who are involved in their lives. Research in this area could provide valuable insight into the reason why some intellectually-gifted adults are able to remain faithful. The study may assist those gifted adults who are struggling to keep their beliefs and faith. Another impact this study may have is on those who struggle from loneliness. Gifted students sometimes struggle with isolation (Košir, Horvat, Aram, & Jurinec, 2016). The study may help the gifted adults who struggle with this as well as it will help affirm that there are intellectually-gifted Christian adults out there. This study may also assist church leaders to better understand and serve intellectually-gifted adults who may at time question their faith (Bengtson, 2013).

Research Questions

Upon examining Zuckerman et al.'s (2013) study, the purpose of this study is to explore and share how and why there are those who do not fit the negative correlation between intellect and religiosity. In designing the research questions, the almost oxymoronically, according to studies such Zuckerman et al. (2013), of adults who are highly gifted and who face the difficulties that being gifted can bring and also remain strong in their Christian faith was addressed. Also examined when designing the questions is the ability of these individuals to deal with the pressures, be they internal or external, based on their level of Christian faith. In looking at adults who are highly intelligent and who claim that their faith is the basis of their intelligence, not in conflict with it these questions were designed. This study should help shed light on how

and why there are those highly intellectually-gifted adults who can and do keep their faith which research seems to say is not the norm. The central research question in this study is:

CQ1: What are the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs?

This research question was selected as the wealth of research found goes directly against what these gifted adults claim. Douthat (2012) found that Americans as a whole are not willing to have the faith that these adults retain. The need for facts to maintain a belief in anything spiritual (Douthat, 2012) is an idea that these individuals, for some reason, do not believe.

My sub-questions are:

SQ1: Who serves as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) for Christian adults who are intellectually gifted?

I would like to know if research will show that, as Christians, these participants see Christ as the MKO (Vygotsky, 2011) in their lives or if there are strong Christians who have and continue to help them keep their faith and in doing so act as their MKO (Vygotsky, 2011). I am interested to see if the findings support that the individual may be a family member, as those cited in Bengtson (2013).

SQ2: How do Christian, intellectually-gifted adults experience their faith in their intellectual lives?

This question will help me understand how these gifted adults are able to reach the potential level of development (Vygotsky, 2011) as well as what influences (Gagné, 2015), if any, help them to develop. A family member or friend may indeed be the influences that have helped inspire the faith of these individuals, as shown in Barry, Prenoveau and Diehl's (2013) study.

SQ3: How do Christian, intellectually-gifted adults navigate society’s perception of Christianity?

This question seeks to understand how these adults are not part of the population who have intellect but not faith (Zuckerman et al., 2013) and how these adults accomplish what the literature states they should not (Yancey, 2014; Zuckerman et al., 2013), which is that they remain strong Christians who keep their faith and are also considered highly gifted. These adults seem to go against what has been reported as the norm—that is that intelligence is for those with little belief in God (Yancey, 2014).

Definitions

1. *Intellectually-gifted* – According to the Ohio Department of Education (2017), an intellectually-gifted individual is an individual who scores two standard deviations above the mean, minus the standard error of measurement, on a standardized intelligence test.
2. *Adult* – For the purpose of this study, the definition of an adult is any person 18 years of age or above who is out of high school.
3. *Christian* – A Christian is a person who is trusting Jesus Christ for their eternal salvation, and is seeking to follow Him in their daily life. To put it another way, “a Christian is committed to Jesus as both their Savior and their Lord” (Graham, 1984, p. 4).
4. *Practicing Christian* – A Christian who continues to grow in faith and who: reads the Bible daily; learns the secret of prayer; relies constantly on the Holy Spirit; attends church regularly; is a witnessing Christian; lets love be the ruling principle of life; is an obedient Christian; allows Christ to have first place in all the choices of life; learns how to meet temptation; is wholesome; and, lives above his/her circumstances (Graham, 1984).

5. *Born-Again Christian* – A person who has made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in his/her life today and believes that, when he/she dies, he/she will go to heaven because he/she has confessed his/her sins and accepted Jesus Christ as his/her savior (Barna Group, 2016).

Summary

The majority of research seems to point to the almost certainty that faith and high intelligence are not compatible. In an effort to shed light on the ability for those strong in faith to also be strong in intelligence, I propose this study. The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to explore the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs. I will use Vygotsky (2011) as a primary framework and Gagné (2015) and Tinto (1993) as secondary ones.

The problem with the current research is that there is little literature out there that looks at intellectually-gifted, faith-driven adults in the United States. In looking at studies of gifted adults, there are very few (Rinn & Bishop, 2015), and the most cited studies, Terman (1959) and Subotnik et al. (1989), do not look at Christian faith but rather at spirituality. In looking at the phenomenon that some intellectually-gifted adults in the United States continue to embrace their faith in Jesus Christ I hope to provide insights that address an important area not found in the literature.

The current research offers no accounting of intellectually-gifted adults who remain faithful and persistent in their beliefs of Jesus Christ. There is a need, I think, as a faith-based believer, to show that there is a way to be a genius and Godly at the same time. There is no research giving voice to this population of adults who are both brilliant and believers, which is something that I hope this study will correct.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In order to fully comprehend the current study, a review of the literature not only on gifted adults who are Christians, but of giftedness in general, Christian faith, and gifted adults, is critical. In this review, each central element of this study is investigated in an effort to fully understand the many nuances that make up a gifted adult who is and remains a practicing Christian. This chapter begins with the theoretical framework that guides the study. The work of Vygotsky (2011), Gagné (2015), and Tinto (1993) are examined and the connections to the current study are explained. Specifically, Vygotsky's (2011) emphasis of a more knowledgeable other (MKO) and his potential level of development are explained as they pertain to the current study. Likewise, Gagné's (2015) differentiating model of giftedness and talent is looked at with an emphasis on internal and external catalysts and the relationship to the current study. It is important to look at the influences of others, the external catalysts. These include, but are not limited to, other Christians in the lives of these gifted adults; their religious upbringing, if any; their relationship with Christ; and, their educational experiences as gifted students. The internal catalysts investigated will be those of faith and motivation as it pertains to Christianity and education. Tinto's (1993) Institutional Departure Model (IDM) is examined as it related to persistence. It is important to look at the reason how and why these participants persisted in their faith, and Tinto's (1993) model may help illuminate reasons why these participants were able to do so.

A discussion of related literature would be incomplete if some historical items were not present. Thus, the history of giftedness, the many definitions of giftedness, the special social and emotional needs of the gifted individual, and the different characteristics of what makes up a

gifted adult are also studied and presented. These characteristics also include the perceptions of the gifted label for the gifted individual as well as those around those individuals. Gifted education is yet another important aspect when looking at the current study, so literature on this is also addressed as it pertains to the current study. This includes the definition of gifted education, legislation concerning gifted education, and the beginning of and impact of gifted education in the United States.

Finally, this chapter discusses the connection of faith and giftedness. The literature is examined as it pertains to faith for adults in general and the definitions and meaning of Christianity. The connection of faith and the gifted individual is also inspected and connected to the current study, as well as the opinions about the correlation between faith and intelligence. The chapter ends with a summary that addresses the importance of previous literature as well as the gaps that remain in the literature thus reaffirming the importance of the current study.

Theoretical Framework

In looking at a theoretical framework to use for this study cognition, social interaction, especially as it relates to mentors and influences, and giftedness were paramount. Thus, Vygotsky's theory, Gagné's theory, and Tinto's theory were chosen.

Vygotsky's Theory

Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. Children are unable to learn and develop if they are removed from society or are forbidden to interact with it. To learn, Vygotsky (2011) emphasized the role of a teacher in cognitive development and the need to have support from a MKO. This person provides scaffolding, what Vygotsky believed is an effective way for children to reach their potential levels of development when different levels of assistance are given when required. This scaffolding is given so children can reach their

potential level of development. If children have no MKO, then they will remain in their present level of development (Vygotsky, 2011). The area between the two is the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. This ZPD is the area where students cannot do tasks on their own but can do them if given assistance by an MKO (Vygotsky, 2011). The scaffolding is the assistance given by the MKO to allow for the completion of tasks, thus allowing students to move through levels successfully (Vygotsky, 2011). An examination of Vygotsky shows that he has influenced gifted education, thus in turn gifted individuals. Vygotsky's views of mental development in relation to teaching and learning need to be examined. Vygotsky paid close attention to relative and absolute achievement in the education of children. He cited an example of students and reading fluency when looking at the difference and the importance of relative achievement (Vygotsky, 2011). In this example, he showed that the students who achieved at a higher level at the end of the study, 30 words per minute, had an overall better absolute achievement. The students in the second group read 20 words per minute at the end of the study, but their relative achievement was much higher as they began school only reading five words per minute while their counter parts in the higher group began school reading 20 words per minute (Vygotsky, 2011).

There is a connection to the current study as the possible use of Jesus as the MKO as well as any other Christians who may have influenced the lives of those in the study as it pertains to faith. Vygotsky (2011) said, "Through others we become ourselves" (p. 199). Vygotsky's (2011) MKO is an entity, or person who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. It is the role of an MKO to support the cognitive apprentice in a learning task, building their capacity by setting tasks that were neither too easy, nor too challenging (Vygotsky, 2011). In looking at the parallels of

Vygotsky's MKO and the role of Jesus in the life of a Christian, connections can be drawn. Christ does fit the role of the MKO for all Christians, as "He will not let you be tempted more than you can bear. But when you are tempted, God will also give you a way to escape that temptation. Then you will be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13, King James Version). Looking at those stronger Christians who may have served as an MKO as it pertains to faith will also be examined. The need for Christian community is well documented in the Bible and plays a vital role in keeping the Christian faith (Dibley, 2018).

In gifted education, it is vital to look at where students begin, as well as where they end. Vygotsky (2011) offered another example, this one of an adult who enters first grade, and a child who enters; the adult will score higher than the child at the end of the year, but the child will have gained more knowledge thus grown more academically so the child shows a higher relative achievement than the adult. Zambo (2009) looked at the importance of taking Vygotsky's findings and applying them to the gifted classroom and to gifted children. Zambo stated "By Vygotsky's reasoning, we are to encourage cognitive development by assessing each student's current level of ability and to create challenges within their zone of proximal development, or ZPD" (p. 274). She does not stop there. She addressed the importance of connecting meaning and challenge to learning and thus to cognitive development, something that, she stated, Vygotsky's theories insisted upon (Zambo, 2009). Zambo not only shared the importance of challenges and meaning, but shared Vygotsky's view that learning can only really take place when there are those who encourage and support the learner along the way, the MKO.

Tan (2014), expended Vygotsky's MKO in a biblical sense and examined how Christians must treat children as part of the community and how Christian adults have a responsibility to be the MKO for the young. Tan (2014) stated "The adults' help posits that the child as Christ's

follower is not child only, but child in the community of believers” (p. 31). Tan went further in looking at the need to not only address the abilities of children, but as Vygotsky states, to look at the potential of each child. Tan stated the importance of the church to look at Vygotsky’s theory to help them develop ways to build and strengthen a child’s relationship with God.

By researching the MKO of participants in this study, I hope to discover if Christ or another Christian plays this role and what importance the MKO has in helping them keep their Christian faith. The importance of spiritual guides is not a new concept. Christians need companionship; according to Bass (1998), it is a basic requirement in order to become brothers and sisters in Christ’s family and share in order to share His love with all people. The importance of other Christians in life to help keep the faith is evident: “We need one another in order to learn to tell the truth about our lives, both in praise and penitence” (Bass, 1998, p. 144). Early Christians practiced communal spiritual discernment as they sought the Holy Spirit’s view on gentile Christians (Bass, 1998).

The current study seeks to take the findings presented a step further by examining if participants see Jesus as the MKO (Vygotsky, 2011) in their lives or if there are strong Christians who have and continue to help them keep their faith. How these participants were able to meet their potential level of development will also be investigated. The added component of being a highly gifted adult may or may not also contribute to the need for an MKO who is not only a Christian, but also on the same intellectual level as the student.

Gagné’s Theory

In his differentiating model of giftedness and talent, Gagné (2015) looked at the benefits and growth that a catalyst can have on a gifted individual (see Figure 1). Gagné’s model investigated the difference between natural abilities (giftedness) and competencies (the talents)

and how gifts turn into talents after a long developmental process that includes environmental and intrapersonal catalysts as well as activities, investment, and even an event. According to Gagné (2015), “significant events (the death of a parent, winning a prize or award, suffering a major accident or illness) can influence markedly the course of talent development” (p. 4).

Further research will investigate if accepting Christ as one’s personal savior could be classified as an event that, as Gagné professed, helps turn gifts into talent. Gagné developed the model because of the two distinct realities of giftedness: “early emerging forms of giftedness with strong biological roots on the one hand, as opposed to fully developed adult forms of giftedness” (p. 8). Gagné pointed out that talents can only be developed with the assistance of outside catalysts that may include family, friends, teachers, and mentors. According to Lavin (2017), “In his DMGT model, Gagné recognized the importance of environmental and intrapersonal catalysts. Both can facilitate (or hinder) the development of gifted and talented behaviors” (p. 25).

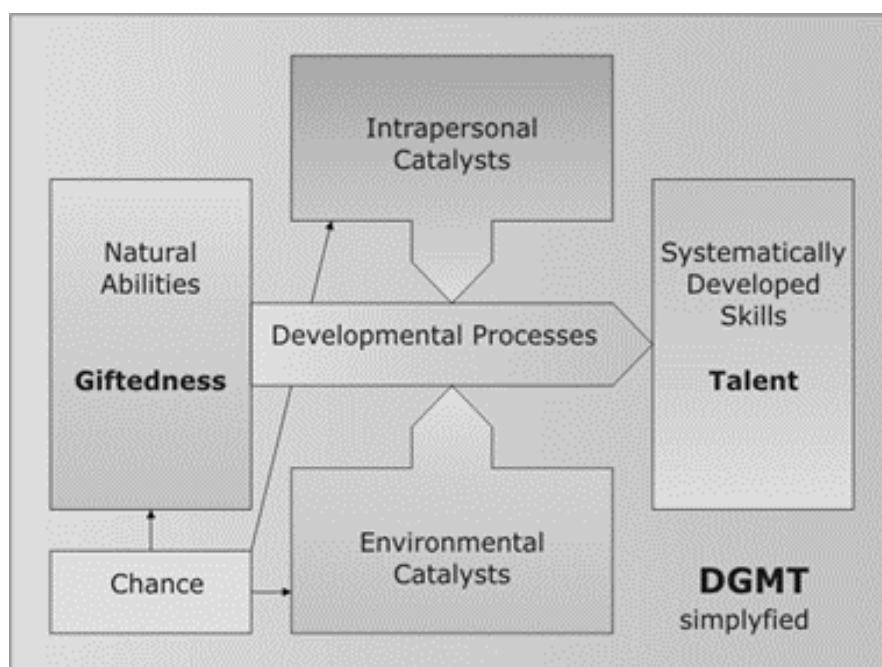


Figure 1. Differentiated model of giftedness and talent (DMGT).

The current study looks at participants and the catalysts in their lives. The study will further explore Gagné's (2015) catalysts as it examines what influences, if any, helped them to develop. The current study will explore the questions of Christ as a catalyst or of a strong Christian mentor or friend as a possible catalyst as well. Upon examination of these factors, the current study will help fill the gap in literature that looks at Christian influences as catalysts for gifted adults.

Tinto's Theory

In looking at the research subjects and maintaining their faith as highly intelligent adults, Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure will be analyzed as it relates to persistence. Although this model focuses on the reasons students drop out of college, the information on how and why students persist can shed light on the perseverance and persistence of the subjects in this research study. According to Tinto (2016), there are three major experiences that shape student motivation to stay in college and graduate. For the purposes of this study, two will be examined. These are self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Tinto, 2016). According to Tinto (2016), "self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to succeed at a particular task or in a specific situation" (para. 5). In regards to the subjects in this study their ability to succeed, especially when literature states that to be religious is illogical (Zuckerman et al. 2013), investigating the reasons for this success may shed light on their continued faith. Self-efficacy is something that is learned and can be different from situation to situation (Tinto, 2016). It is, however, like Gagné's (2015) model influenced by past experiences that can lead them to question their ability (Tinto, 2015). Once students begin to question their ability, then, Tinto (2016) states, it is imperative for these students to get vital support from others. In this way Tinto (2016) reflects the needs for an MKO of Vygotsky (2011) and the importance that another can have on success.

But self-efficacy, Tinto (2016) states, is not enough to help students persevere; a sense of belonging is also required. “Students who perceive themselves as belonging are more likely to persist because it leads not only to enhanced motivation but also a willingness to become involved with others in ways that further promote persistence” (Tinto, 2016, para 10). As Christians who maintain their faith and also are highly intelligent, Tinto’s (2016) thoughts on a sense of belonging may help explain why and if there is a need to become part of a Christian group who may or may not be classified as highly intelligent. Tinto (2016) is adamant that the key to student persistence is student motivation, but adds that in looking at student motivation, the student’s perceptions of their experience and what influences these perceptions also need to be examined. Likewise with the subjects in this study, not only does the ability to maintain faith need to be examined, the influences and perceptions about said faith also need to be explored.

Related Literature

Literature related to the topic of this study is multi-faceted as several areas must be examined. The individuals who participate are not only Christians, but highly gifted ones who maintain their faith. In looking at the current research, all areas must be investigated to try and fully understand the nuances of these individuals and what the research states about each particular nuance. Therefore, the ideas of giftedness, faith, and the combination of the two must be reviewed.

Definitions of Giftedness

The definition of giftedness is important in understanding what makes a gifted adult. In this section, the definition of giftedness is examined. Although the true meaning of giftedness and what it means to be gifted cannot be agreed upon (Carman, 2013), there are those definitions that have been used for the purposes of programs and studies, as well as laws and guidelines.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (United States Government, 2002) defined gifted and talented students as

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

The National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) (2017) defined children as gifted when their ability is significantly above the norm for their age, or, “Gifted individuals are those who demonstrate outstanding levels of aptitude (defined as an exceptional ability to reason and learn) or competence (documented performance or achievement in top 10% or rarer) in one or more domains” (p. 1).

Gagné (2015) stated, “Giftedness designates the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities or aptitudes in at least one domain that places an individual among the top 10% of age peers” (p. 5). The definitions seem endless. The professionals in the field and those who have been given the label cannot seem to agree on the definition of gifted. So much so that Carman (2013) examined the definition of gifted from 104 articles in 38 different journals over an 18-year period. According to Carman (2013), the findings showed the major discrepancies in what individual studies used to identify and what researchers deemed as gifted for participants in their studies on the gifted. The analysis of this sample of recent research found that there is no common definition of giftedness used that compares outcomes in characteristics of gifted and non-gifted individuals (Carman, 2013). Carman (2013) also reported that due to the lack of agreement on the operationalization of giftedness among the studies, the current examinations of giftedness would be difficult to

aggregate or use in a meta-analysis. Because there are no common standards for inclusion of participants, it is quite possible that one study's gifted participants would not be considered gifted in another experiment. In nine of the articles, a score of 120 on an intelligence measure would qualify an individual as gifted. However, in 21 others, an individual would need an IQ score of 130 to qualify (Carman, 2013). Needless to say, when it comes to giftedness there seems to be no universal definition. Thus, the understanding of the topic of what gifted truly is, is still developing. The current study may help address this as participants will weigh in on what giftedness truly is and what being gifted means. Their opinions as gifted adults may help define the term.

History of Gifted Education

Gifted education in the United States began more than a century ago and has its roots in Missouri (NAGC, 2017). In 1868, William Torrey Harris, superintendent of public schools for St. Louis, instituted the earliest systematic efforts in public schools to educate gifted students (NAGC, 2017). Since that time gifted education advocates have been and still try to ensure that gifted students are getting the education they deserve. Early studies of giftedness followed in the 1920s and 1930s, and the findings showed that graded schools could not adequately meet the needs of all children (NAGC, 2017). In 1922, Hollingsworth began programs and developed curriculum to address gifted students' needs (as cited in Silverman, 1995). Later, Hollingsworth researched some of the specialized needs of highly gifted children, including different educational environments involving both acceleration and enrichment, and found that the disparity between the non-typical intellectual range and age-typical social and emotional development, such as emotional vulnerability and social isolation show the need for specialized educational paths for the gifted (as cited in Olszewski-Kubilius, Subotnik, & Worrell, 2015). The

Terman (1930) study followed and remains the longest running longitudinal study of gifted children.

The 1950s brought Sputnik, which in turn brought federal dollars to identify the brightest and most talented students who would succeed in advanced math, science, and technology (NAGC, 2017). The Federal Government provided more than money for the gifted in 1958 and 1966. Rose (2016) stated, “The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 and the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 represent landmark student aid policies that have played an unheralded role in promoting greater college degree attainment among American women” (p. 62). Gifted was not officially recognized by the United States government until 1974, when the Office of the Gifted and Talented, housed within the U.S. Office of Education, was given official status (NAGC, 2017). The literature on the background of giftedness is connected to the current study as it sheds light on findings from historically significant studies (Terman, 1930; Hollingsworth, as cited in Silverman, 1995) and the federal stance of educating the nation’s gifted.

Gifted Individuals

Although there is no real agreed upon definition of giftedness, those who have been labeled such have unique academic, social, and emotional needs. In his 2015 model, Gagné examined four aptitude domains: intellectual, creative, socioaffective, and sensorimotor. According to Gagné (2015), “giftedness designates the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed superior natural abilities (called aptitudes or gifts), in at least one ability domain” (p. 281).

In looking at what it means to be gifted, it is important to look at all three areas as these are unique as the gifted individuals themselves. Trépanier (2015) stated:

Giftedness is so much more than an educational designation administered by a school system. It is brain-wiring from birth, an inborn trait that has strong emotional and social facets, not just educational behaviors. Giftedness is a degree of brain functioning one is born with, and a gifted person's above-average intellectual ability is only a part of his or her life. (p. 23)

Gifted education. According to the Office of Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education, in 2011-2012 there were approximately 3.2 million students in public schools in gifted and talented programs (NAGC, 2017). Although 6% of public-school students are identified as gifted, they are not all enrolled in any form of gifted programming (NAGC, 2017). And in looking at programming for individuals who are gifted, states vary greatly on their requirements for those working with these individuals. On the federal level, there are no mandates or laws pertaining to gifted individuals. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act extensively protects those with disabilities, but it does not protect the gifted; so, as no federal mandate for gifted children exists, individual states have jurisdiction over their education (NAGC, 2017). Although many states are now requiring special training for teachers working with these unique individuals, candidates in undergraduate programs for teacher education receive less than two clock hours of instruction on advanced learners, even though gifted students receive the bulk of their education in the regular classroom (NAGC, 2017). But, programs do not mean adequate services. In 2004, *A Nation Deceived* (Assouline, Colangelo, & Gross, 2004) hit the United States and made parents, educators, and officials look at the treatment of gifted children within America's schools. Data from Assouline et al. (2004) showed the negative effects of a one size fits all education and urged lawmakers and educators to accelerate the gifted. The follow up report, *A Nation Empowered* was released in 2015

(Assouline, Colangelo, & VanTassel-Baska, 2015) and again looked at how the United States has treated the gifted. Assouline et al. (2015) again pointed out, “When bright students are presented with curriculum developed for age-peers, they can become frustrated and disengaged from learning. Advanced curriculum in core subject matter is essential to challenge them” (p. 3). Although the outlook is better than in 2004 (Assouline et al., 2015), data showed that there is still work to be done to move past the negative assumptions that some still have about acceleration. The original report was read more than 4,000,000 times (Assouline et al., 2004), and attention was given to the fact that the nation’s brightest were not being allowed to succeed and not being given the opportunities for relative achievement (Vygotsky, 2011). The most recent data (NAGC, 2017) examined the state of gifted education within individual states. Of particular interest to the current study is the information pertaining to state-mandated programs for the gifted. This is relevant to the current study as participants’ involvement in gifted education programs may or may not influence their responses. The report found that states vary regarding identification and services for gifted and talented students, and local districts have the final say in many states (NAGC, 2017). Data shows that only 7 of the 40 states that responded have state laws that directly pertained to gifted education (NAGC, 2017). What might be even more disturbing is that even when services are mandated, the funding is not there at the federal level, and at the state level varies greatly (NAGC, 2017). Examination of the most recently reported data shows that of the 32 states with mandates related to gifted and talented education, only 4 fund programs fully, while 20 partially funded the mandate, and 8 did not fund the mandate at all (NAGC, 2017).

According to Renzulli (2002), “Indeed, one should well remember that the “Edisons and Einsteins are in our homes and classrooms today” (p. 69). Gifted education is more than

accelerating students one or two grade levels. It is about looking at the whole child (Trépanier, 2015). It may not be just pulling students from their regular classes for an hour of enrichment. The type of enrichment comes into play (Brigandi, Siegle, Weiner, Gubbins, & Little, 2016) with an emphasis on student interest as a motivating factor. Callahan, Moon, Oh, Azano, and Hailey (2015) likewise found that effective programming for gifted education services “lies in the development and the implementation of curricula and instructional strategies that will challenge and enhance learning outcomes for these students” (p. 138).

In a study that looked at gifted magnet schools and gifted programs in neighborhood schools, Young and Balli (2014) found that perspectives among students who attend neighborhood schools differed from those who attend gifted magnet schools. The majority of students who attend their neighborhood schools expressed dissatisfaction with the gifted program, and several students indicated their frustration with sitting through lessons they had already mastered along with enduring the regular disruptions in the classroom from low-achieving students (Young & Balli, 2014). Conversely, Young and Balli (2014) found that all of the students who attended the gifted magnet schools expressed satisfaction and maintained that they are sufficiently challenged. Levin (2017) stated, “Professional educators need to be trained and prepared to provide the necessary interventions to allow for the development of gifted and talented students in their care” (p. 29). The studies seem to suggest that students thrive when placed with academic, not age, peers and when their interests are taken into account. In the current study, the question of academic peers will be examined as the research will explore current and past academic relationships and the impact, if any, that these relationships have had or still have on participants.

Christian gifted education. Gifted education can be examined through many different lenses, but one is missing from the literature that has a direct bearing on the current study—that is Christian gifted programs. In an attempt to fill that gap of the literature, Badley and Dee (2010) took a look at the unique perspective of Christian talented and gifted education and offer a suggestion for gifted and talented education based on a Biblically-ethical foundation. Using the Bible as their guide, Badley and Dee outline the responsibility that Christian education has in looking at and serving students identified as gifted and to do so based on God’s Word. Respect for children throughout the Bible, the importance of justice in God’s Word, and the giving of general and special gifts throughout the Old and New Testaments shines light on the need for a Christian perspective when serving gifted students (Badley & Dee, 2010). “If the abilities of the talented and gifted come as good gifts from God, schools charged with TAG children’s education should treat their gifts accordingly” (Badley & Dee, 2010, p. 11). This unique perspective ties in with the current study as the question toward faith and giftedness cannot be asked without the influence of the gifted program, if any, that the gifted individuals attended.

Perceptions of giftedness. In looking at gifted individuals it is vital to also examine the perceptions about the gifted title and what, if any, impact these perceptions have on the individual. The label itself may often infer to others, or the individual him/herself, characteristics that may or may not be genuine and may or may not impact the way that individual is treated by others, or even the self-concept of the individual. The label of gifted may begin in early elementary school when students are pulled out for specific academic classes, or are grouped within a regular education classroom. Whenever the label is used, according to research, there are often negative connotations associated with the label. Bullying, name calling, such as nerd, and even loss of friends when a gifted label is given can occur, as well as pressure

from families, teachers, and even self to succeed academically, once the gifted label is applied (Kitsantas, Bland, & Chirinos, 2017).

The addition of the label and the subsequent possible different academic roads an individual may now take because of the label, according to Kitsantas et al. (2017), both magnify the differences between the individual and age/grade level peers, a negative experience, the researchers found, for the gifted individual. In a related study, the gifted label for individuals held for some the same negative and at times troubling stigma, while for others was one that was both hated and at the same time embraced (Meadows & Neumann, 2017). The negative opinion not only stemmed from being different from peers, but also being treated differently by teachers, which often meant, according to Meadows & Neumann, a heavier work load when it came to projects, homework, and even assessments. The label that set the students apart was one that at times met with approval by the same students because they embraced that fact that others (and themselves) were able to see things differently and able to accept and accomplish more difficult tasks (Meadows & Neumann, 2017).

Teachers' attitudes of gifted individuals can play a large role in how individuals are perceived by self and others. This can also impact the future of individuals, as the teacher perception may not only impact treatment, but also the possibility of services (Russell, 2018). Teachers' perceptions of what makes an individual gifted, and thus be recommended for gifted services and the gifted identification label, is at times tainted by such factors as race, socioeconomic status, and even academic performance (Russell, 2018). Stereotypes of gifted individuals comes into play, and thus treatment of these individuals and education of them may be a factor for the educators of these individuals. In looking at the lack of minority students in gifted programs, thus having the gifted label, across the United States, representation of minority

students is hauntingly lacking (Carman, 2011). The data is daunting when findings include that a large percentage of teachers believe that the socioeconomic status of a student is a good predictor of giftedness (Carman, 2011). Age, gender, and even if the individual wore glasses, had an impact of teachers' perceptions as to the giftedness of students, and thus a recommendations for services and in turn, the gifted label (Carman, 2011). Stereotypes aside, further research examines the actual negative attitude some educators have of their gifted students. In their study, Geake and Gross (2008) found teachers believe "that gifted students are disrespectful of authority, seen as elitist, insensitive to others, and social isolates" (p. 229). In looking at the current study, these perceptions, if any, will be addressed in how and if self and/or others' perceptions had an influence on academic pursuits, as well as future goals and faith.

Gifted social and emotional aspects. Gifted students may not always have the advantage that their non-gifted peers believe they have (Košir et al., 2016). Although gifted students have a high self-concept of their academic ability, gifted girls have a lower self-concept when it comes to self and to same sex peer relations, and for both genders findings showed that, "being labeled as gifted can be a risk factor" (Košir et al., 2016, p. 130). Positive academic self-concept can and does affect learner outcomes (Wang & Neihart, 2015), especially when students are aware not only of their strengths but of their weaknesses. Gifted individuals may have internalizing and externalizing problems due to others' misunderstandings of them (Wellisch, Brown, & Knight, 2012). Students are often, according to Wellisch et al. (2012), misunderstood by peers and by those at home and are in danger of educational indifference or neglect. These misunderstandings, according to Wellisch et al. (2012), can be from those in the family, those in society and even those in the educational setting who do not understand the gifted child's special academic needs.

The social aspects of being gifted can also not be ignored when looking at the gifted individual. Cross, Bugaj, and Mammadov (2016) note that the social aspect of giftedness, especially those peer relationships, can have a definite outcome on the academic success, or failure, of gifted students. The stigma that may be created in middle school is one that is far different from that of elementary school and can impact the way a gifted student will act and how their pursuit of success in academics may suffer (Cross et al., 2016). Cross et al. (2016) found that schools that encourage students to be part of an academic crowd, not to hide their giftedness, “may be key to social and academic harmony” (p. 52).

Gifted students are not unlike their unidentified peers when it comes to the stressors and pressures of the day. They may, however, be more acutely aware of these stressors and pressures which may magnify their emotional reactions or give them a heightened sensitivity and intensity (Hyatt & Cross, 2009). Gifted adolescents seem to be especially vulnerable as they face the usual challenges that adolescence brings, as well as the added challenges that come with being gifted (Hyatt & Cross, 2009). The coupling of the two, adolescence and giftedness, at times can be a deadly combination as the suicide rate of those teens who are gifted may indeed exceed the national average. Although there is no formal way to measure whether the suicide rate is higher for gifted teens because, as Hyatt and Cross, 2009) report, there is not a way to determine giftedness of suicide victims, data suggests that it may be the case. In the Terman study (as cited in Hyatt & Cross, 2009), 24 of the 1,528 gifted individuals committed suicide, an average of 1/55, much higher than the national average of 1/8,333 (Shneidman, as cited in Hyatt & Cross, 2009). Hyatt and Cross (2009) reported that caution is needed in looking at the data, but numerous studies they examined show that the majority of students who attempted or did commit suicide were those students who were above average intelligence or considered highly talented

individuals. Although there is no definitive evidence that gifted adolescents are more prone to suicide than other adolescents, there is data that suggests that the emotional and social needs of these adolescents may make them prone to depression and other factors that may indeed lead to suicide, and these needs, especially in gifted adolescents, should be addressed (Hyatt & Cross, 2009).

The current study will examine if participants encountered or still encounter emotional or social risks and if their relationship with Christ is in part due to these obstacles or if it allowed for or allows for help from these risks.

Gifted adults. There are very few studies that examine gifted adults (Rinn & Bishop, 2015), and the studies that do exist may be flawed due to the lack of definition of gifted, small sample sizes, and out of date studies. Even the most well-known of studies that spanned over decades (Holahan & Sears, 1996; Terman, 1930) have been criticized as participants were given letters of reference and recommendations for university and professional acceptance. The findings did not shed any great light on what happens to gifted children when they reach adulthood as most of them lived ordinary lives that showed “that intellect and achievement are far from perfectly correlated” (Terman, 1947, p. 352). However, a later study of the Terman participants and a comparison group of students from the Hunter School (Subotnik et al., 1989) found more optimistic results. The study found that in both groups, high intelligence is a useful variable in predicting productivity in academics and the professions but not the aesthetic or political arenas (Subotnik et al., 1989). According to Subotnik et al. (1989), “Yet, non-intellective factors such as motivation, flexibility, social intelligence, ethnic culture and chance play an essential role in differentiating whether or not an individual will live up to his or her

intellectual potential” (p. 141). Overall, researchers found that the adults were well-rounded and happy with their lives (Subotnik et al., 1989).

But, some gifted children do continue to display their giftedness and grow in it well into adulthood (Makel, Kell, Lubinski, Putallaz, & Benbow, 2016). Those adults who were in the top .01% as students were on a different developmental trajectory, and as adults were observed to have “qualitative differences in graduate degrees, occupations, and creative accomplishments as a function of distinct ability patterns identified by age 13” (Makel et al., 2016, p. 1016). The gap in the literature concerning gifted adults is evident (Rinn & Bishop, 2015), so the current study will help to reduce this gap by looking at gifted participants and presenting findings on their lives as adults.

Gifted Christians

The iconic *Time* cover in 1966 asked the question, “Is God Dead?” (Elson, 1966), and that question continues to spark much controversy. If the question was asked today, the attention and reaction would not be what it was 50 years ago (Rothman, 2016). Survey results showed that in 1966, 97% of Americans believed in God, but that number has been shrinking ever since. In 2014, only 63% of Americans believed in God with absolute certainty (Rothman, 2016). The question of intelligence and a belief in God has been one that has been asked and researched for decades. In a more recent study, Mercier, Kramer, and Shariff, (2018) found that the lack of a belief in God, or spiritual being, can be attributed to human evolution, as well as cognitive, social, and motivational factors. The researchers call these ultimate and proximate explanations and state that the ultimate explanations show why specific cognitive biases evolved, and that proximate explanations show how and when the biases contribute to belief in God (Mercier et al., 2018). Mercier et al. argued that environmental challenges have caused the human mind to

adapt or evolve to face these challenges. They stated that one's ancestors were prone to over perception and that "the by-product of being adaptively tuned to over perceive agency is that humans are biased toward perceiving agents—such as gods—behind natural phenomena" (Mercier et al., 2018, p. 263). Mercier et al. (2018) added that the belief in God may also be credited to proximate explanations and that when these change over time, a belief in God also changes.

According to Mercier et al. (2018), as intellect and analytical thinking grows, belief in God is less, and the need for God may indeed stem from loneliness and the need to be socially accepted if those around are also believers. But even at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was data stating that belief and faith were not compatible. Frazer (1922) offered his answer to the question of faith and intelligence by stating that as civilizations developed "the keener minds came to reject the religious theory of nature as inadequate...religion, regarded as an explanation of nature, is replaced by science" (p. 712). In a more recent study, the negative correlation between God and intelligence in 137 nations was examined (Lynn, Harvey, & Nyborg, 2009). They reported that in only 17% of the countries, 23 out of 137, does the proportion of the population who disbelieve in God rise above 20%, but that these are virtually all the higher IQ countries (Lynn et al., 2009).

When the addition of a belief in Christ, not just a belief in God, is added to the equation, the numbers are also bleak. A survey of 35,000 Americans found that the percentage of adults (ages 18 and older) who describe themselves as Christians dropped from 78.4% in 2007 to 70.6% in 2014 (Pew Research, 2015). These findings showed no significant differences based on gender, race, or educational level (Pew Research, 2015). Leaders of today also seem to be following the trend; as the research has shown, America is moving toward a more pluralistic

form of civil religion where leaders no longer talk about their Christian faith (Coe & Chenoweth, 2015). National leaders also seem to be following this trend. The findings that presidents are more inclined to emphasize Christian discourse in smaller speaking venues to more homogeneous audiences than when speaking to the nation as a whole (Coe & Chenoweth, 2015). What this may mean is that the future of the nation may be one where faith without proof is lost or at least questioned (Douthat, 2012).

Logic seems to be the key element as researchers attempt to show that there is a correlation between intelligence (the lack of) and Christianity (Subotnik et al., 1989; Winston, 2013; Yancey, 2014; Zuckerman et al., 2013). Intelligence is not something that can be found more so in the unbelieving rather than in strong Christians, as some studies have found. Yancey (2014) stated, “Belief in superior cognitive abilities in atheists, and other irreligious individuals, has found support in social science literature” (p. 17). A meta-analysis of 63 studies by Zuckerman et al. (2013) showed a significant negative association between intelligence and religiosity. In this study, Zuckerman et al. (2013) stated that one of the reasons for this negative association is that intellectuals are generally more analytical than the religious in society. Yet other findings report the inaccuracies and other reasons for these correlations in many of the studies Zuckerman et al. (2013) examined. According to Yancey (2014), “Findings suggest that previous assertions of the cognitive superiority of the nonreligious may reflect ideological bias within the testing measures instead of an innate cognitive ability difference” (p. 18). The study does not necessarily mean that those who believe in God are not smart but that more intelligent people may have less need for religion (Winston, 2013).

The findings of those involved in the Terman (1930) study supported in part the Zuckerman et al. (2013) study as the now adult participants showed a decline in religion as they

aged (McCullough, Enders, Brion, & Jain, 2005). In the Zuckerman et al. (2013) meta-analysis study, out of 63 studies, 53 showed a negative correlation between intelligence and religiosity. Zuckerman et al. (2013) added that perhaps one of the reasons for this negative association is that intellectuals are generally more analytical than the religious in society. The Terman (1930) study showed that 40% of participants had increases in religiousness until midlife and then declines in later adulthood, 41% of participants had low religiousness in early adulthood and age-related decline, and 19% of participants had high religiousness in early adulthood and age-related increases (McCullough et al., 2005). These findings may be in part due to the fact that the participants were, to begin with, less religious than the U.S. population and showed a lower religious affiliation—only 40% of the Terman participants were church members in 1941 whereas 72% of total American adults belonged to a church or synagogue (McCullough et al., 2005).

However, there are others who report that a lack of belief may also indeed be a lack of mental capabilities. According to Norenzayan, Gervais, and Trzesniewski (2012), a belief in God requires mentalizing, or the social-cognitive capacity to represent and reason. Only through mentalizing can one allow for the mental representation of God (Norenzayan et al., 2012). In their study of individuals on the autistic spectrum, they found that those who lacked the ability to mentalize, also lacked a belief in God (Norenzayan et al., 2012). Norenzayan et al. (2012) do not seem to be supporting or denying that God is alive and well, rather that a belief in Him is based on the “social-cognitive capacity to represent and reason about minds” (p. 1).

The current study will be an important addition to the literature pertaining to intelligence and faith. An examination of highly-gifted Christian adults sheds new light on the fact that there

are those who are highly intelligent and who remain faithful. The study will further investigate how these participants address the social view of giftedness and intelligence.

Christian stereotypes. Gifted Christians may encounter what Christians with a less impressive IQ do—the negative stereotype that some in American society have of what it truly means to be a Christian. Greeley and Hout (2008) looked at over 30 years of data concerning Christian stereotypes and found that, Christians, at least the conservative ones, are, “pigeonholed as Southern, uneducated gun owners who live in trailer parks” (p. 91), as well as “Bible-thumping militants and anti-intellectual zealots” (p. 1). Gun ownership and Bible thumping aside, Greeley and Hout (2008) did find that the Christians in their group were less educated, had less money, and did live in the south. But, they counter that with the fact that along with their love of NASCAR, one fifth also watch PBS each day.

One has only to watch Saturday night television or any one of the late night talk shows to see the Christian stereotype, but does it affect Christians? Some research says it does. In their study of negative Christian stereotypes, Rios, Cheng, Totton, and Shariff (2015) found disturbing results about the impact that these negative stereotypes can have on Christian adults and their decision to pursue higher education, particularly in the fields of science. The lack of Christians in the fields of science has often been attributed to a presumed lower intelligence and perhaps an incompatibility between intuitive and analytical thinking styles, or both. In their five-part study, Rios et al. (2015) found that one more reason that may deter Christians from pursuing fields in science is negative stereotypes. These stereotypes may also have a Catch-22 effect—Christians perceive the negative stereotype and therefore are not inclined to go into the science fields, thus the percentage of Christians in these fields becomes less and the stereotype is reinforced (Rios et al., 2015). Their findings not only suggest that non-Christians view Christians as less competent

in the sciences, but that these views do have an impact on their actual performance of scientific tasks as well as their choice to pursue a career in one of the science fields (Rios et al., 2015).

Barnes, Truong, and Brownell (2017) take the impact of the negative stereotype of Christians in the science fields one step further. In their study, Barnes et al. (2017) look at how a negative stereotype influences undergraduate students to pursue a major in one of the sciences, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, specifically biology. Their study concludes that a sense of belonging in biology classes is an important step in not only a successful degree completion, but in pursuing a degree in that field (Barnes et al., 2017). This feeling of belonging, Barnes et al. (2017) found, is one that students in their study reported not having; in fact, students felt a direct conflict between their Christian beliefs and biology. Further, some students sensed that being religious in biology was a disadvantage, because colleagues may not value their scientific work and they may not fit in with the biology community (Barnes et al., 2017).

Science and a Savior. There are those who shun the negative Christian stereotype and in the midst of academic and even scientific successes still cling to and more than share their very real faith in Christ. Dr. Raymond Damadian, credited with the invention of the MRI, is one such individual: “For me, my greatest single discovery in life was not a machine or a physical principle. My highest purpose was realized when I discovered I could actually know God and serve His will” (as cited in Kinley & Damadian, 2015, p. 21). Similarly, Katherine Heyhoe, is an atmospheric scientist and strong vocal Christian. Heyhoe is dedicated in her claims that Christianity is threaded through scientific issues and the responsibilities of Christians is to love Christ and one another and to take care of the world God has made (Heyhoe & Farley, 2009). Likewise, physicist Hugh Ross is a Christian who has made it his mission to not only proclaim

Christ but has created “Reasons to Believe” to formally encourage an open forum for Christianity in the sciences. Part of his mission is to foster Christian young people to pursue careers in the sciences (Bontrager, 2012). Bontrager (2012) states the following:

Christians are uniquely positioned to transform the culture for Christ as they engage it at the highest academic levels, especially in science. “Reasons to Believe” hopes to play a role in raising an army of Christian young people who are committed to developing their minds to the glory of God. (para. 2)

Intelligence versus wisdom. The individuals in this study are highly gifted and very faithful adults who have shown and continue to show their intelligence, even when faced with stereotypes and pre-conceived notions. They do not seem to fit into the world’s view of what being a Christian means or looks like, but these participants show something more than measurable intelligence. They also show the wisdom that highlights the faith and belief they have. This wisdom may be a key ingredient in their ability to remain faithful. Wisdom eludes definition, but according to Schaefer and Wright (2013), “Wisdom is both established by God and something for which God searches within creation” (p. 129). The book of Proverbs sets out to define the need for and importance of wisdom: “Wisdom is present at the beginning of creation” (Proverbs 8:22, The New King James Version). Kendall (2013) examined wisdom and stated that Christians should not only desire it but expect it. Kendall (2013) went further to state that not to do so is peril. He added this wisdom as being from God and its importance:

“Wisdom is getting God’s opinion, for true wisdom is God’s opinion” (Kendall, 2012, p. 6).

Not all agree. In a Jeste et al. (2010) study on the characteristics of wisdom, findings show that not all believe that wisdom must also include a component of faith or spirituality.

According to Jeste et al. (2010), the controversy continues regarding the role of spirituality as a necessary component of wisdom:

Religious traditions in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism stress religiosity or at least spirituality as a characteristic of wise people. Although most modern western descriptions of wisdom include prosocial behaviors and attitudes as being integral to wisdom, spirituality is often excluded from such definitions. (p. 676)

Jeste et al. (2010) did find that those involved in the study agreed that wisdom is more than cognitive expertise, and that it does involve reflective and affective personality characteristics.

Intelligence, wisdom, and faith have not always been at odds. Historically what now seems like a chasm, did not used to be. There was a time when intelligence and faith were equally-paired partners, and faith was an accepted part of scholarship. Centuries ago there were those who said that not only are faith and intelligence compatible, but that one could not exist without the other (Pinsent, 2012). Saint Thomas Aquinas' believed that "we must be enabled to make the appropriate judgement and that depends on the matter under consideration: for created things, it is the gift of knowledge; for divine things, it is wisdom; for individual actions, it is counsel" (Pinsent, 2012, p. 32).

On wisdom, Aquinas (1920) is even clearer. He stated,

He has a particular agreement with human nature, since the Word is a concept of the eternal Wisdom, from whom all man's wisdom is derived. And hence man is perfected in wisdom (which is his proper perfection, as he is rational) by participating the Word of God, as the disciple is instructed by receiving the word of his master. (p. 8)

In looking at the types of wisdom all have one thing in common—that God, or more concisely, that Christ is at the center. According to Ryan (2016), this wisdom, be it in relation to

an object or a relationship, when there is a shared stance with God, there also comes a judgement that is intuitive and a knowledge of what should be adhered to and what should not.

Faith

A recent concept analysis of faith defines the word as “an evolving pattern of believing, that grounds and guides authentic living and gives meaning in the present moment of inter-relating” (Dyess, 2011, p. 2723). In this study Dyess (2011) found that faith, for those individuals within the study, was the premise that allowed people to make sense of their world and circumstances. The Bible defines faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, King James Version). It is important to look at faith as the current study is based on the continued faith of adults. Types of faith in current literature are examined as they pertain to this study and the participants.

Christian faith. Aquinas (1920) described faith as something that resembles hearing rather than seeing. Christian faith is a belief in what is unseen and therefore, that cannot be proven by science. Literature on Christian faith in general indicates that there are those who cling to their faith through adversities and generations (Aboderin, 2014; Bengtson, 2013). Historical research by Aboderin (2014) examined American icons who have overcome adversities through faith to change the world. They are not alone. Timmons (2012) examined the part that Christian faith plays in recovery and the importance of a Christian-based recovery program in helping addicts. The study observed God as the sponsor and the success participants had (Timmons, 2012).

The literature contains studies that verify the benefits of strong beliefs (Brelsford, Fulmer, Harrison, & Xu, 2014), and faith in extreme, adverse conditions (Adedoyin et al., 2016). According to Adedoyin et al. (2016), “The importance of religiosity and the unwavering faith

associated with their beliefs provides African immigrants with initial physical and mental health benefits” (p. 97). And further, the greater life satisfaction is gained or achieved by “giving the situation up to God” (Brelsford et al., 2014, p. 33).

Family influence is yet another factor of how individuals keep their faith (Bengtson, 2013; Barry, Prenoveau & Diehl, 2013). Over 350 multigenerational families with more than 3,500 individuals were studied and found that a child is actually more likely to remain within the fold than leave it and is more likely to follow their parents’ example than to rebel (Bengtson, 2014). The most common factor found that influences the continuance of faith is the father’s warmth (Bengtson, 2014). In his study on adolescents, Freeks (2012) found that the importance of the father as a Christian mentor. In his study, Freeks found, “the Christian father as mentor is crucial and relevant in the current situation of families. Mentoring by the father is fundamental in the lives of children and should be implemented and emphasized in the family context” (p. e7). Among the themes reported by Freeks (2012), one was the fathers’ emphasis for their children to believe in God, and that God is there and will always help in times of trouble. Participants agree to the importance of the father as a mentor and the influence he has on his children concerning their belief and trust in God (Freeks, 2012).

Engagement in home-based faith activities is another positive factor in helping adults maintain their faith (Barry, Prenoveau, & Diehl, 2013) and is related to an adult’s religious practices and beliefs. Barry et al. (2013) stated, “We found that both the frequency and importance of those faith activities when emerging adults were growing up was related positively to emerging adults’ concurrently reported religious practices and beliefs” (p. 218). The current study will add to the literature by examining and adding to the aspects of continued faith that

these studies addressed. It will also explore the findings of these studies to see if family commitment or family activities are factors in their continued faith.

The influence of other Christians in keeping and strengthening a relationship with Jesus is vital and is mentioned throughout the scriptures as it pertains to the church community. Dibley (2018) stated that Christians are leaving the church today because they are unable to find the community that the church is supposed to provide, a community that is most important to keeping the faith. This community is one that Paul and other Biblical authors insist that Christians need to flourish and survive in a world that is not Christ-like (Dibley, 2018).

Being a Christian is not easy but by being part of a community and not a bystander, by being part of a Christian family, Dibley states, and being able to give and receive support, Christians are able to weather things they would not be able to weather alone. The Bible is clear on the need for Christians to bond together in love and support: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2, English Standard Version). But, times of trouble are not the only time the importance of the church community is needed. The Bible is clear about helping Christians throughout their walk, be they old or new Christians:

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10: 24-25, New King James Version).

Paul is very clear on the importance of being part of a bigger community, of being part of the body, and that Christians are stronger if they are together: “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12: 4-5, New King James Version).

This study will look at the influence of other Christians who may have helped and help these gifted, Christian adults keep their relationship with Christ.

Faith and intelligence. Although some studies (Lynn et al., 2009) produce findings that show a negative correlation between faith and intelligence, there remains research that suggests that faith is a necessary part of intelligence and that true knowledge cannot be gained without the existence of faith (Spence, 2013). “Faith is not opposed to reason; indeed, for most kinds of knowledge, faith serves as reason’s essential foundation” (Wood, 2014, p. 1). Without faith, true knowledge can never be achieved (Pappin, 2014). “If men by nature desire to know but only in some instances achieve knowledge of the highest things, most men are, in the absence of faith, left with a necessary enjoyment of inferior knowledge” (Pappin, 2014, p. 340). Faith and intelligence are not only related, but are, according to Spence (2013), required to fulfill God’s plan: “As Christian academics we of course believe that the use of the creative and intellectual faculties is part of manifesting our status as bearers of the image of the creative, all-wise God” (p. 149). Spence goes on to say that a belief in Christ does not deter learning but rather encourages it and demands it. Further, Sagatova and Zhakupbekov (2016) stated that faith is a necessity to gain true intelligence and allows the individual to have a more complete cognitive ability. Faith plays a most important role in cognition as it allows for steps of knowledge from the simple to the complex and allows for the completeness of knowledge (Sagatova & Zhakupbekov, 2016). There cannot be knowledge without faith. Faith plays a role in life that may supersede that of intelligence according to Sagatova and Zhakupbekov, “In general belief in human life plays a much bigger role than knowledge. If science bases on facts and objective analysis, faith links to the subjective experience of truth” (p. 104).

Giftedness and faith. Upon examination of the literature pertaining to Christian faith in gifted adults, studies are minimal. Lavin (2017) offered one example of a gifted adult who has kept her faith. This case study of a gifted and talented Catholic Dominican nun, Sister Albert, presented findings of a highly-gifted adult who not only continued to be faithful but has dedicated her life to her faith. According to Lavin (2017), both Sister Albert's parents strongly encouraged, expected, and nurtured academic success and also faith. As Lavin (2017) stated, "She was encouraged to practice religious virtues such as obedience, generosity of self, humility, studiousness, patience, and perseverance, and later on in life made the personal choice to consecrate herself to God in the religious life" (p. 6). This study has a direct correlation to the current study as Lavin explored environmental and intrapersonal catalysts using elements of Gagné's differentiated model of giftedness and talent. A further correlation with the current study was discovered as catalysts included religious aspects of the subject's life (Lavin, 2017). This study hopes to expand on Lavin's results as it will look at numerous participants with varying commitments of faith.

Summary

Research of the literature that directly and indirectly pertains to the current study revealed that many discrepancies and gaps exist. The area that seems to have the largest gap is the literature that pertains to Christian gifted adults. The current study will strive to add to this limited field of literature and to foster further research into this seemingly neglected topic. As there is a lack of research concerning gifted adults, there is a plethora of research on the definition of gifted, but none of the studies can seem to agree (Carman, 2013). This in itself calls into question the research on gifted as test subjects vary so greatly depending on definition (Carman, 2013). The current study may help clarify the definition as participants will define

their gifted experiences. In looking at the literature about faith, the data is more optimistic (Aboderin, 2014; Bengtson, 2013). The current study involves those adults who are highly gifted, thus the literature on gifted adults is relative but is found lacking. Although the Terman (1930) study did look at adults, it remains one of the limited studies that can be found in today's literature. The current study looks at Christian gifted adults, and the data will shed new light on gifted adults in general as non-faith-based items will also be addressed to get the complete picture and background of these individuals. This data will also include social and emotional aspects of these adults. This aspect of the current study will add to the limited research available and will look at these needs through a new lens, that of Christianity.

The biggest gap in literature and perhaps the area where the current study may be of the most value is the exploration of highly gifted adults who are practicing Christians. The existing literature is almost void of any studies that look at all these aspects and their inter-relations: highly gifted, adults, and practicing Christians. Only one study could be found that investigated all these nuances (Lavin, 2017). Although this study did address all three elements, it is a single case study and examined one Dominican nun in Australia. The current study will look at participants living in America who are male and female and are from professions that may or may not be faith-oriented, as well as students in undergraduate and post graduate studies. The importance of the current study lies in its originality to explore the lives of gifted adults who, in spite of society's views on faith (Subotnik et al., 1989; Yancey, 2014; Winston, 2013; Zuckerman et al., 2013) have not strayed from theirs. The current study hopes to prompt future studies that look at giftedness, Christianity, and the possible correlation between the two, as well as the influence and the possible importance of Christian influences on those who are gifted and the importance of such influences.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs. Little is known as to why or how these adults continue to keep their faith. The problem is defining the factors and experiences that shape how and why these highly gifted adults maintain their Christian faith. There is little literature out there that looks at intellectually-gifted, faith-driven adults in the United States. This study explored the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs. This chapter presents the design, which is a qualitative phenomenological research approach; the procedures by which the study was conducted and data collected; and, the analysis of data using the methods and procedures set forth by Moustakas (1994). The setting, participants, and situation to self will also be discussed. This chapter serves to present information that allows duplication of the proposed research study of intellectually-gifted adults who persist in their Christian beliefs.

Design

The purpose of this study was to shed light on those Christian adults who are intellectually gifted and maintain their faith and relationship with Christ. In looking at the types of research, the most appropriate to explore this topic was qualitative research. Qualitative research uses assumptions and frameworks to exam the research problems (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research, according to Creswell and Poth, addresses “the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (2018, p. 42). The researcher looks at patterns or themes and collects data in a natural setting using inductive and deductive reasoning (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Most importantly, given the nature of the research in this study, the final report that

was given includes the very voices of those involved in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A transcendental, qualitative, phenomenological design was used for this study. The qualitative method is appropriate for seeking to understand a phenomenon that has limited research (Creswell, 2013). Further, a phenomenological approach was used as it best defined the findings that the study produced. Descriptions of the essences of the experiences were formed, described, and then reported (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is defined as “a discipline that aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; a focus on people's lived experience” (Langdrige, 2007, p.4). This approach allowed for discovery of what participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology was started in Germany by Husserl (1859-1938) as a radically new way of doing philosophy, but today “is an umbrella term encompassing both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches” (Kafle, 2011, p. 181). For this study, I conducted a transcendental phenomenological study. As stated previously, I chose this as a researcher because I wanted, and had, the participants “describe the essence of a lived experience” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 81). I believe that more was learned by listening to the participants and hearing their experiences. A transcendental study was used as I was able to, as Moustakas (1994) stated, “learn to see what stands before our eyes, what we can distinguish and describe” (p. 33).

A transcendental qualitative phenomenological research approach was used for this study. Researchers who conduct transcendental phenomenology “describe the essence of a lived experience” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 81). Husserl’s (1931) principles are the basis of the transcendental phenomenology that Moustakas (1994) translated into phenomenology, which seeks to understand and present the human experience as it is lived by participants.

Phenomenology is based on the participants' experiences with no input from the researcher. In fact, bracketing (Husserl, 1931), the researcher's ability to look at the phenomenon freshly, is emphasized. Highly-gifted adults maintaining their Christian faith is a phenomenon that needed to be examined and these individuals highlighted. The idea of an intellectually advanced person keeping their Christian faith needed to be examined if only to give credence and encourage to those of faith who are highly gifted and may be struggling with their own beliefs due to what some in academia have stated about faith and God as it pertains to intelligence. In trying to discover the subjective experiences of the adults in question, those highly-gifted adults who maintain their faith, the use of the phenomenology method allowed for the greatest realization of subjective information from the participants. Further, since the idea of highly-gifted Christians seemed to be a phenomenon that has little related research, the use of this methodology allowed for those who are the closest to the phenomenon, the participants themselves, to tell about their experiences firsthand. The participants in this study had one experience in common, they were highly intelligent and still kept their faith. The transcendental qualitative phenomenological research approach was the most appropriate for this study because it allowed participants to reflect upon and share their experiences and thus allowed for a better understanding of the human experience as it related to faith and giftedness.

In this research, Moustakas (1994) laid out the groundwork that had to occur before the study took place. Moustakas stated that a phenomenon must be identified as one where the common experiences of individuals will be shared to help understand the phenomenon. The researcher can then begin to collect data. The collection of data uses specific interviewing techniques that include specific and open-ended questions. Once collected, the data analysis is very specific and includes bracketing (Husserl, 1931) or epoch, transcendental-

phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and from these, a structural definition of the essences of the experiences is formulated (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2012).

Research Questions

The central research question I explored was:

CQ: What are the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs?

The sub-questions in this study were:

SQ1: How was persistence in faith gained and how is it maintained for Christian adults who are intellectually gifted?

SQ2: Who serves as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) for Christian adults who are intellectually gifted?

SQ3: How do intellectually-gifted adults perceive or experience their Christianity in their academic lives?

SQ4: How do some intellectually-gifted adults navigate society's perception of Christianity?

Setting

All settings were within the United States just as the studies (Subotnik et al., 1989; Terman, 1959; Zuckerman et al., 2013) where faith in adults was addressed have also been conducted in the United States and data concerning religiousness was available. This study was conducted in the United States as past studies investigated and information found has been within the United States. The specific setting for this study varied with each individual as their geographical locations ranged from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Indiana, and California. The participants were adults who were over the age of 18, out of high school, and lived in the

United States. I interviewed one participant in person; the other nine participants, due to location, were interviewed online. Participants all chose the time and day of the interview.

One focus group was conducted where five participants discussed the seven focus group questions. This was also completed online as geographic locations of the participants did not allow for an in-person setting. The issue of social distancing also came into play and made an online focus group more suitable for participants.

Participants

Participants were all Christians, who were at least 18 years of age, out of high school, and had been identified as intellectually-gifted. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 72 years of age. For the purposes of this study, gifted identification of these individuals was either formal (standardized test scores at or above the second standard deviation), or informal, if the participant was enrolled in or participated in gifted education offerings. Participants ranged in age, gender, formal religious orientation (if any), nationality, location, and occupation. There were 10 participants from across the United States. The number of individuals followed the suggested guidelines by Dukes (1984) and allowed for the collection of “extensive detail about the individuals” (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). In securing other participants, snowball sampling was used with those participants that I knew, and criterion sampling was used to ensure participants met the criteria. Snowball sampling allowed others who were part of the study to suggest those who they knew and met the criteria, to also join the study allowing the information, like a snowball, to continue to grow (Patton, 2002). By criterion sampling, there was assurance that the participants met the criterion for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria for this study was that participants were adult Christians who were intellectually gifted.

For the purposes of this study, identification as a Christian was not based on any

involvement in an organized religion. Any and all mentions of any denomination was by participants themselves. Being a Christian meant that they, based on previous studies, such as Barna Group (2016), answered positively to the definition of a born-again Christian (see Appendix C). The participants were also gifted, which was based on either their participation in a gifted class or classes, or their IQ score. This was determined by a demographic survey (see Appendix B). The criterion for giftedness was based on previous studies that were examined (Carman, 2013) and showed that identification by the school to identify gifted participants was used in 61.2% of the studies and an intelligence test was used as securing gifted participants in 33.7% of the studies examined involving gifted individuals. Carman (2013) analyzed 38 journals and more than 100 articles from 1995-2010 to determine the most common methods of identifying gifted individuals in research. Before taking part in this research, participants answered a demographic survey based on the criteria for giftedness (Carman, 2013). All subjects were 18 years of age or older, as this study examined adult participants. Before taking part in the study, participants were given the Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale (Hunsberger, 1989).

Procedures

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) process was followed before conducting this study. In securing participants, I had contacted MENSA USA and was directed to the Research Review Committee. I was told that they were unable to help me secure participants due to the religious nature of the study. I contacted the National Association of Gifted Children (NAGC) to secure participants, but was told that since my study dealt with adults, they would not be able to help secure participants. I also contacted the Ohio Association of Gifted Children (OAGC) and was told that due to the religious nature of the study they would

not help with participant recruitment. I contacted those individuals I knew who met requirements to participate and had said they would participate. I then asked those participants to suggest others who were highly-gifted adults and practicing Christians. Participants were contacted by phone or e-mail once IRB permission was given. Participants were asked to and did sign and return a consent form giving me, the researcher, permission to record all conversations, both interviews and focus groups, and to publish and share findings of the study. See Appendix A for the consent form. To verify giftedness, a demographic survey based on the criteria for giftedness (Carman, 2013) was given to participants, as well as the Short Version of the Christian Orthodoxy Scale (Hunsberger, 1989), to verify Christian beliefs. See Appendices B and C for these forms.

The formation and use of a focus group was my next step. The focus group was with five individuals and was completed online. The time was scheduled at a time that was convenient for all participants.

The use of participant journaling was an ongoing step throughout the process as participants completed their entries before, during, or after the other steps. Journals were electronically sent from participants. During this study, data collection guidelines were adhered to for conducting a transcendental phenomenological study. The type of collection included the specific use of interviews and the questions that should be asked in this type of study. The steps that were used to analyze the data that was collected was followed and included bracketing (Husserl, 1931) or epoche, horizontalization, clustering, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). These were used so I was able to present textural and structural essences of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The Researcher's Role

When this study began, I established that participants had a continuing belief of and relationship with Jesus Christ through questioning before participation. Likewise, as my role of researcher, I knew that I was the primary data collector who is gifted (IQ of 140) and a Christian adult (I accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and savior in third grade) who continues my strong faith. I personally knew some of the participants and admire them. I have experienced bias against Christians, and I have struggled to keep my faith at times. I was familiar with gifted individuals as I have been involved in gifted education for almost two decades. I am an advocate for Christians and giftedness and was interested in ways to help others understand these unique individuals. I chose the phenomenological approach as my relationships and background did not hinder the research as I shared experiences and found common themes. Although qualitative research utilizes the researcher as a human instrument, that instrument through which all data is collected and analyzed, in this study I practiced bracketing (Husserl, 1931), or epoche (Moustakas, 1994) and looked at the data with a fresh view that did not take into consideration my own experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection

The data was formally collected at first in the semi-structured interviews. Follow-up interviews were not needed. Data was then collected in focus groups and then from participant journaling, which took place throughout the process. Not all of the participants were known to me, so I chose to conduct interviews first to get to know participants. After conducting the interviews, I held a focus group that allowed participants to share and reflect on items shared in the interviews. After the focus groups, participants had another opportunity to further reflect as they responded to prompts sent to them electronically. By offering these three types of data

collection, I was able to allow participants to share via a medium in which they were most comfortable. The interviews were conducted over the phone/internet; the focus group was also conducted online; and, the journaling was completed by participants electronically. The use of these different data collection types allowed for data triangulation. This allowed me to test for consistencies and inconsistencies within the data and thus allowed for “opportunities for deeper insight into the relationship between inquiry approach and the phenomenon being studied” (Patton, 2002, p. 248).

Interviews

One of the requirements of a qualitative study is that of conducting interviews. This is further a need in a phenomenological study as participant experiences are what is being studied and shared. It is how the data is collected (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews were conducted individually with each of the 10 participants online. A list of questions was developed in advance, but the interview was informal and interactive and was aimed at “evoking a comprehensive account of the person’s experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Before a question was ever asked, however, there was a social conversation that promoted a relaxing atmosphere where the research participant felt trust and comfort and was able to answer questions honestly (Moustakas, 1994).

The data collection centered around two broad, general interview questions: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? and What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? (Moustakas, 1994). Keeping this in the forefront, the interviews were semi-structured and used open-ended questions. The questions were not given to participants ahead of time and were semi-structured. After the transcription of the interviews, it was deemed that there was no need for follow-up interviews. All interviews

were scribed.

Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions Used:

- 1) Please introduce yourself to me and tell me a little bit about yourself.
- 2) Why did you agree to be a participant in this study?
- 3) Please share with me when and how you were identified as gifted.
- 4) What did that mean to you then?
- 5) What do you understand society's perception of giftedness to be?
- 6) Please share with me when and how you became a Christian.
- 7) What did that mean to you then?
- 8) What do you understand society's perception of Christianity to be?
- 9) Think about now – what does being gifted mean to you now?
- 10) Again, think about now – what does being a Christian mean to you now?
- 11) What do you believe society's perception of Christianity in the context of intellectualism to be?
- 12) What was your family life like in the religious sense?
- 13) If I came to your childhood home on a Sunday morning, what would I see?
- 14) What was your family life like in the academic sense?
- 15) In the gifted realm of your life, who would you say is or are the most influential person/people and why?
- 16) In the Christian realm of your life, who would you say is or are the most influential person/people and why?
- 17) What has influenced you to make the choices in your life that you have made as far as career/future plans?

- 18) How do you keep your Christian beliefs?
- 19) Why do you keep your Christian beliefs?
- 20) Recent research shows that there is a negative correlation between intelligence and religiosity. What is your opinion on this view?
- 21) Share with me a positive or negative experience you have had due to your giftedness related to your faith.
- 22) What were your feelings at during that experience?
- 23) What is the single most important decision you have made in your life and why?
- 24) What advice can you give to other intellectually-gifted adults who are Christians?
- Thanks so much for taking the time to sit and talk with me. One final question
- 25) What else do you think would be important for me to know about you as an intellectually-gifted adult who is a Christian?

The interview questions included all but one of the six categories suggested by Patton (2002). Questions 1, 2, and 4 were all background questions that helped me “locate the respondent in relation to other people” (Patton, 2002, p. 350). The majority of questions, 3, 5-7, 11-13, and 17, were feeling questions. These questions were designed to “tap the affective dimension of human life” (Patton, 2002, p. 350). Questions 8, 10, and 16 were experience and behavior questions. These questions were written to help the participants remember their past and the experiences that occurred at that time (Patton, 2002). Opinion and values questions were 14-15 and 19-20. These questions were constructed to help participants dig deeper into their experiences and to think about them (Patton, 2002). The final question, 22, was a sensory question and was written to “allow the interviewer to enter into the sensory apparatus of the respondent” (Patton, 2002, p. 350). There were no questions in the knowledge category as none

were needed. Each question related back to my research question as each question was designed to help the participants reflect on their gifted and Christian experiences, as well as the influences and opinions of being a Christian and gifted. The questions also fulfilled the combined timeframe of questions Patton (2002) suggested in order to help participants reflect on their experiences in all time frames, past, present, and future. These interview questions were designed while examining literature that questions Christianity and intelligence (Subotnik et al., 1989; Terman, 1959; Zuckerman et al., 2013) and furthered the investigation of the phenomenon of gifted adults.

Research questions were designed while examining current literature pertaining to giftedness, faith, and the correlation, if any, between the two. The question of giftedness and the possible stigma attached was examined in question 3 as first identified, and then in question 6, as an adulthood. When I looked at childhood giftedness, I examined literature from Košir et al. (2016) as it pertained to the risk factor that is at times associated with the label. Questions 16 and 17 were also formulated based on the Košir et al. (2016) study. Question 6 was written while looking at the research about gifted adults from past studies (Holahan & Sears, 1996; Terman, 1930). Becoming a Christian, question 5 was based on the strength of decision and how it impacts the lives of those who make it (Bengtson, 2013). Question 7 dealt with how or if that decision meant to the participant. This question, as was question 14, was formulated after examining the research on the importance of faith in participants' lives (Brelsford et al., 2014). Questions 8, 9, and 10 were formulated based on families, faith, and academics. Specifically, research conducted by Lavin (2017), whose case study showed parents who strongly encouraged, expected, and nurtured academic success and also faith in their daughter. Questions 8 and 9 were also based on literature about family religious practices and the influence of such practices

(Barry et al., 2013). Question 11 focused on the influences of others on the gifted realm of participants' lives. This question was written using DMGT (Gagné, 2013) as it focused on the catalysis that influenced gifted individual's lives. Vygotsky's (2011) MKO was the basis for question 12, in looking at who as a Christian, be it another individual or Christ Himself, influenced participants in their Christian walk. The career path taken by gifted adults was the basis for question 13 and was written using the study conducted by Makel et al. (2016) that examined the career path of gifted adults. Questions 15, 18 and 19 were based on the negative correlation presented in the literature between faith and intelligence (Subotnik et al., 1989; Winston, 2013; Yancey, 2014; Zuckerman et al.).

Focus Groups

Participants who were able participated in a focus group that was held online. The online format was used as participants were scattered across the United States, and the need for social distancing made an in public meeting not possible. By conducting focus groups, I was able to "get a variety of perspectives and increase confidence in whatever patterns emerge" (Patton, 2002, p. 385).

Focus group questions were created after reviewing interviews. The focus groups was designed to narrowly focus on a topic (Patton, 2002) so to utilize fully this group, additional questions were reviewed after interviews were conducted and themes discovered in order to narrow down topic discussion. Questions asked were:

- 1) Would you please share some information about your educational experiences as a child and what is was like once you were identified as gifted?
- 2) How did you benefit or suffer due to your gifted identification?
- 3) What memory about your education as it pertains to being gifted is the strongest for

- you and why?
- 4) Could you tell us about a time when as a gifted adult there was a time that your faith was brought into question or that you waived from your faith?
 - 5) How could you best describe your ability to keep your faith?
 - 6) What are your thoughts and/or feelings to the current literature that looks at the negative correlation between faith and intelligence?
 - 7) What guidance could you give to current gifted students who are struggling with their own faith?

These focus questions were designed to allow participants to reflect upon their persistence of faith as shown in recent literature (Yancey, 2014). Questions 1, 2, and 3 were written based on the Košir et al. (2016) study examining the label of giftedness, and studies about gifted adults (Holahan & Sears, 1996; Terman, 1930). Questions 2-7 were designed based on the negative correlations between faith and intelligence presented in many current studies (Subotnik et al., 1989; Winston, 2013; Yancey, 2014; Zuckerman et al., 2013).

Journaling

The final method of data collection I used was electronic journaling. This method was utilized to supplement my interviews and to make use of another form of data collection bringing more depth to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using journaling gave participants an opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences in writing after talking about these experiences individually as well as with a group or their peers. This also allowed participants flexibility and more time to reflect and respond to prompts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The journaling was done online and questions were given to participants on the day of their interview. They had the opportunity to answer questions throughout the data collection process with a request that was

met by all 10 participants, to return prompts one week after the focus group was conducted. Participants were given prompts to reflect upon and then write about in an electronic format.

These prompts were:

- 1) Write about a time where you felt isolated or different among peers because of your faith.
- 2) Write about your profession of faith or when you gave your heart to Christ.
- 3) Write about the person in your life who has had the most influence on you in terms of your faith.
- 4) What does giftedness mean to you and why?
- 5) What do you think the challenges are that await you in the future based on your faith?
Based on your giftedness?

These prompts were aligned with Patton's (2002) suggested question categories. Prompts 1 and 2 were in the experience category and allowed the participants to reflect on what has happened and allowed the interviewer to see what occurred (Patton, 2002). Prompts 3-5 were opinion/value prompts and allowed participants to share what they thought about their experiences (Patton, 2002). These questions were designed to allow participants to reflect upon their persistence of faith as shown in recent literature (Yancey, 2014). Questions 1 and 5 were written based on the negative correlations between faith and intelligence presented in many current studies (Subotnik et al., 1989; Winston, 2013; Yancey, 2014; Zuckerman et al., 2013). Question 2 was written while examining the profession of faith presented in the Brelsford et al. (2014) study that examined the benefits of strong beliefs. Vygotsky's (2011) MKO was examined when writing question 3. Question 4 was formulated after examining the studies on gifted adults and children, specifically those of Košir et al. (2016) and Makel et al. (2016).

Data Analysis

Data from this study was analyzed by using the methods and procedures set forth by Moustakas (1994). The data analysis portion clearly differentiated the transcendental phenomenology design from those of other phenomenological methods. In a transcendental approach, all prejudgments concerning the phenomenon are set aside by the researcher (Moustakas 1994). It is vital that the research is approached free from any preconceptions, beliefs or knowledge in order for the researcher to obtain participants' experiences in an open and naïve way (Moustakas, 1994). Another distinction that Moustakas (1994) outlined of the transcendental method was the mindful endeavor to investigate the dynamics that underlay the participants' experiences and to try and understand how certain feelings or perceptions are induced with reference to a specific experience. It is in this portion of the research study that Moustakas' (1994) view on what can and should be gained is clearly defined. Moustakas (1994) succinctly listed and defined the necessary steps by which the researcher must examine and analyze the data and by which this research analysis was conducted.

Moustakas (1994) stated that the organization of data starts when the transcribed interviews are studied, which includes regarding every horizon or statement that relates to the question and topic and placing equal value on all. From this, the meaning units are listed and then clustered into common categories or themes, removing any statements that are repetitive (Moustakas, 1994). From here, a textural description of the experience is developed from the clustered themes (Moustakas, 1994). This step is accomplished by examining the themes and statements and writing a description of the experiences of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A structural description is also included. The structural description takes into account the context and settings that influenced how the participants' experienced the phenomenon (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). From these descriptions and the textures and structures, Moustakas (1994) stated the “meanings and essences of the phenomenon are constructed” (p. 119). During the analysis of the data bracketing (Husserl, 1931), or epoche (Moustakas, 1994) is necessary. It is vital that the data is examined with a fresh view that does not take into consideration the researcher’s own experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allows the data to be analyzed and experiences set aside, except for the participants’, in order to “be completely open, receptive, and naïve” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

The essential process (Moustakas, 1994) in this study was the Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction and Imaginative Variation. These allowed me to report only those experiences shared by the participants and to develop an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The Transcendental-Phenomenological Reduction was attained by using the steps set forth by Moustakas (1994) which required the researcher to bracket topics found in the research; practice horizontalization, meaning that all statements by participants had equal value; cluster qualities into themes; and, provide individual as well as group textual descriptions. The Imaginative Variation process was followed by looking for possible meaning through different vantage points and creating a list of participants’ structural qualities of their experience (Moustakas, 1994). Once the list was comprised, themes were clustered and universal themes were used with the descriptions of individuals as well as the group examined (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

It is vital that in conducting research that it is trustworthy and that all involved are safe. In addressing credibility, dependability, and transferability, I utilized strategies that helped to ensure that participants’ identities were kept confidential while their voices were heard.

Credibility

To validate that the data I collected and shared is credible, I used the validation strategies set forth by Creswell (2016). The first step I used was triangulation of multiple data sources. These sources were the interviews, the focus group, and the journals. This method allowed me to offer corroborating evidence from multiple data sources, thus strengthening and validating my findings (Bazeley, 2013).

The next strategy I used was a member check (Creswell, 2016). I asked participants in the study to check my findings. This allowed the participants themselves to see if the findings were accurate and truly portrayed what was shared (Bazeley, 2013).

The final strategy I used to make sure that the findings were credible was that of a peer review (Creswell, 2013). In this strategy I had someone familiar with the phenomenon look at the data and question it. This allowed for an outside source to step in and give new insights by asking the hard questions (Creswell, 2013).

Dependability and Confirmability

I used the interpretive standard of evaluation to ensure the dependability and confirmability in this study (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). In this evaluation the substantive contribution, the aesthetic merit, the reflexivity, and the impact that the study has were all examined (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). This appealed to me as I believe that qualitative research has at its root the need for “creative and analytical practices to open up the text and invite interpretive responses” (Creswell, 2013, p. 43).

Transferability

Transferability was addressed by using a rich, description of participants and setting that enabled readers to determine transferability of the study (Creswell, 2013). I considered the data

rather than the subjects and determined if the content of the interviews, focus group, and journals were typical or atypical of the lives of the participants (Krefting, 1991).

Ethical Considerations

I examined all ethical considerations of this study and followed practices that helped assure confidentiality and accuracy in the study. I obtained Liberty University IRB approval before beginning any research or communication with proposed participants. Confidentiality forms were completed and signed by all participants and all participants were informed that the participation in the study was voluntary and they were able to withdraw at any time. The data was reported accurately, thoroughly, and through different perspectives. Privacy and anonymity of respondents was crucial in this study, so pseudonyms were used to assure confidentiality. The security of data was assured through password-protected files and locked files for materials not gathered electronically. Respondents participated on the basis of informed consent and only after reading and signing the informed consent letter and understanding that sufficient assurances had been given to allow participants to understand the implications of participation and to help them reach a fully informed, considered, and freely given decision about whether or not to do so, without the exercise of any pressure or coercion. Questions and prompts have been reviewed to assure that use of offensive, discriminatory, or other unacceptable language has been avoided. The acknowledgement of works of other authors used in any part of this study is done so with the use of the American Psychological Association (APA) referencing system according to the Dissertation Handbook. The Liberty University Code of Ethics was thoroughly adhered to during every phase and in every aspect of this study.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to look at the phenomenon that some intellectually-gifted adults in the United States continue to embrace their faith in Jesus Christ. The problem was that there is little literature out there that looks at intellectually-gifted, faith-driven adults in the United States. My hopes were to explore the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs. In this chapter I have looked at the procedures, research design, and the data analysis. I have also examined the need for trustworthiness and how I have assured it in my research study of intellectually-gifted adults who persist in their Christian beliefs.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This study explored how highly-gifted adults maintained their Christian faith. A lack of previous research and literature as well as the majority of current literature presenting findings that there is a negative correlation between Christian faith and intelligence led me to research this topic. Studying the reasons why and how gifted adults maintain their Christian faith and trying to understand their rationale in doing so revealed that there are numerous reasons for their strong faith and belief. A qualitative framework was used to design this study. I used those methods common to phenomenological research to guide data collection and analysis. These results are a culmination of adults from different backgrounds, professions, and demographics that share not only a high intellect, but also a deep and non-wavering faith in Christ. To study how these adults maintain their faith and to understand their giftedness and what it means to each, I established my research framework based on one central question and three sub questions:

CQ1: What are the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs?

SQ1: Who serves as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) for Christian adults who are intellectually gifted?

SQ2: How do Christian, intellectually-gifted adults experience their faith in their intellectual lives?

SQ3: How do Christian, intellectually-gifted adults navigate society's perception of Christianity?

Participants

The participants in this study were selected because of their shared experiences as Christian adults who are gifted and maintain their faith. They ranged in age from 19 years old to 72 years old. There were eight females and two males. All held some type of college degree or were pursuing a degree. All but one lived east of the Mississippi and were either employed, retired, or were in school. Seven of the participants were Protestant, while three were Roman Catholic. Any mention of religious affiliation was done by participants, not at my request. All participants' names were changed, and each name given was a pseudonym for each participant.

Albert

Albert is a 72-year-old man who came to Christ while in his 60s who now resides in Maryland. He was identified as gifted while in the fourth grade. He has a Ph.D. in biochemistry and has been a professor at New York University, University of Pittsburgh, Rutgers University, and has been a director for the National Institute of Health. He was brought up in an atheist, communist (Stalinism) home where religion was not practiced. He has written a book about his journey from atheist to Christian and says that “science brought me to faith.” He is now retired and has devoted himself to “this religious thing” as well as God in nature. He is married (for the third time) and has two grown children.

Angie

Angie is a 61-year-old woman who became a Christian while in high school. Her family was not religious when she was growing up, and she came to Christ due to friends and involvement in Christian organizations and a concert she attended. She lives in Ohio and is a retired educator who worked with gifted students. She does not know when she was identified as gifted and only discovered her gifted test scores after graduation, which she stated, “explains a

lot of my learning issues.” She is married and has a daughter who was identified as gifted, which, she said, caused her to pursue her degree and be able to work with gifted students.

Carolyn

Carolyn, 71, described herself as an “intelligent, independent woman who enjoys her life as an intelligent woman.” She was raised in an Irish Catholic home and “can’t remember a time when Christ wasn’t in my life.” She was identified as gifted while in high school and received the highest score on the given IQ test in the school’s history. She is single and lives in Ohio where she is a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. She is retired from education where she had been involved with gifted students as a teacher and coordinator for more than 30 years. She is an advocate for women because, “We have a lot to tell the world that doesn’t always get out there.”

Jean

Jean is a 67-year-old woman who has struggled with depression her entire life. She was brought up in an Italian home where she attended, she stated, Catholic masses and schools. She was identified for gifted classes while in high school, which prompted her to go to college and pursue a career in X-ray technology. “I appreciate the fact that God gave me a good brain and I was able to have three different jobs.” She is now retired and has two grown daughters and a granddaughter who will be a year old in December. She came to Christ as a child and continues to count on Him to help her with her mental health issues: “Prayer is an integral part of living and has gotten me through a lot of depression, losing my mother, and through the aches and pains of aging.”

Justin

Justin is a 27-year-old male who was raised in Ohio but now resides in California where he attends the University of California, San Diego. He is pursuing his Ph.D. in computations and neuroscience. He holds a master's degree in computations and a bachelor's in bio-medical engineering and pure math. He was identified as gifted while in first grade, a fact that allowed him to skip second grade. He was raised by a single mother who made sure he was active in church and school. He uses his Christian foundation to help him in his research: "It guides me in what I do." He has been honored by his professors and peers for his research and believes that those who don't see the connection between science and Christianity are misled. He believes that through his work he can give continue to thank the Lord. Justin stated, "We have to study things that were created by God. If we do this right, it's a way to give Him praise."

Libby

Libby is a college sophomore at Duquesne University who is 19 years old. She is majoring in music education and has played the flute and piano for 11 years and is currently learning four other instruments. She was identified as gifted in fifth grade, and as a child she was encouraged to do her best by her parents who are both educators. "My parents held me to a standard where there was no room for mediocracy," Libby stated. She enjoys music, dance, and art. Her family attended church regularly and were all involved in their congregation. Libby became a Christian as a child and thanks Christ for her successes. Libby stated, "I look at all I have every day and know that I wouldn't have this without Him."

Mary

Mary is a 55-year-old woman who lives and has lived in Pennsylvania her entire life. She is married and has two grown children. She was identified as gifted when she was in second grade and was tested because her parents thought she had a learning disability. Mary stated,

“My problem wasn’t a learning disability, it was the fact that I hated school.” Mary did not like school until college where she received her associate’s degree in applied science. She accepted Christ as a child and now works at a church and remains active there. She said that the most important decision she has made was “raising my children in the Christian faith.” She is part of an A cappella woman’s group that recently competed at the national championships in New Orleans. She remains faithful and said, “God has always been an important part of my life.”

Pam

Pam is 61 years old, retired, and now resides in Indiana, where she was raised. She has a grown daughter and a grown son. As an adult she lived in Boston, and then, for more than three decades, in a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio. She was raised as a Protestant and then became a Roman Catholic after marrying her husband of 30 years. Pam became a Christian as a child and went to church each week with her mother who she credits as being her mentor in faith and in education. Pam stated, “I was taught it was OK to be a woman and smart. My grandmother was one of the first women to attend Indiana University.” Pam was identified as gifted in second grade and as an adult was involved in science and gifted education for more than 30 years. She believes there are definite relationships between science and religion. Pam stated, “People believe if you have faith you ignore science. But you can have both, no problem.”

Renee

Renee is a 47-year-old mother of two. She has been in education, in the gifted field, and is a published author with several awards for her writing. She currently writes educational software programs and is also involved in green technology. She was born in West Virginia and then moved to rural Ohio where she was raised in a trailer by a single mother. She is married and currently lives in Columbus, Ohio. Renee made her profession of faith while as child

attending Vacation Bible School. Renee stated, “I am so inspired by our Lord Jesus Christ and don’t know how anyone could not believe.” She was identified gifted in sixth grade and credits her mother and grandmother in nurturing her educational journey: “My mom and grandma are the two most intelligent women I know and neither went to college. Formal education was not emphasized in my family but being educated was.” Renee graduated from Rio Grande where she was part of ROTC and received a bachelor’s in education. She went on to get her master’s in talent development from Ashland University.

Teri

Teri attends the Ohio State University, Newark, Ohio branch. She is 20 years old and is majoring in psychology. She was identified gifted in third grade and took part in gifted classes. When not in school, she resides in Ohio with her parents and twin sister. Teri was encouraged by her parents, as well as some high school teachers, in her academic endeavors. Teri stated, “They were always there and loved to see me learn.” She grew up in a Christian home and became a Christian as a child. Her grandfather was the pastor at her church and encouraged her in her faith. Teri volunteers at an animal shelter, is a math tutor, and is soon to be the president of her American Sign Language chapter. She stated, “I want to help people. My faith has pushed me to be a better person.”

Results

The results of this study were based on the themes that were prevalent in the interviews, journals, and focus groups. The themes were gathered from the individual themes of each participant which were then examined to find the themes that were found within each participant’s experiences.

Theme Development

The in-depth interview transcript forms the basis of the data in a phenomenological study because it is through the descriptions by the participants that the researcher can uncover the invariant structures of the phenomenon being studied. Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for data analysis and the suggested steps were followed and are presented in this chapter.

Transcription of Interviews, Focus Group, and Journals

I transcribed all the of interviews and the focus group recording in an effort to help me become even more familiar with the participants and to more clearly see/hear their experiences and their perceptions, allowing for a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Reading the transcripts and listening to the recordings allowed for repetition and for me to tune in to what was really being said by the participants and get a purer picture. For example, when discussing the fate of gifted children, Carolyn began to cry.

During this process and throughout the transcription of the focus group recording and journal transcription, I was once again able to engage in the process of epoche (Moustakas, 1994). After transcribing, I reread each interview and began to make notes in the margins of the transcripts and also used different colors to make lines in each interview when the participant changed his/her tone, subject, or description. I then followed the same steps after transcribing the focus group as well as the journal prompts.

Results for the phenomenological interviews were for the most part very positive. Many of the participants remarked that they were glad to be given an opportunity to talk about the topic of faith and intelligence. They responded that the stereotypes presented in society were false and they were happy to give credence to the fact that there are strong Christians with high IQs. Their personal, honest, and emotional responses allowed me, as a researcher, to have a much better and more comprehensive grasp of a largely untapped topic. While conducting the interviews, focus

group, and transcription of the journal prompts, I was able to listen and read with an open mind due to the use of bracketing (Moustakas, 1994).

One negative aspect of the interview process laid out by Moustakas (1994) in this study was the time constraint. Each interview lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to almost two hours. Three participants decided against being in the study based solely on the time the interviews would take.

Listing and Preliminary Grouping

Horizontalization of the data is the first step that Moustakas (1994) suggested in the reduction process. This step was linked to the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994) because I had to keep an open mind when looking at each of the participant's statements. Moustakas (1994) stated, "When we horizontalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence" (p. 95). I copied any statements that related to the phenomenon that I was studying on a separate piece of paper. These statements were what I refer to as the horizons. In order to clarify, I have included one of the participant's horizons. This horizontalization example is from the interview with Carolyn: "I am totally fearful of the anti-intelligence times, right now the worst."; "I was belittled and was told my test score wasn't valid."; "You have to be open to the mysteries of Christianity."; "None of what I have would be possible without God."; and, "Gifted doesn't mean you know everything."

Reduction and Elimination

I checked each participant's horizons and asked the questions suggested by Moustakas (1994), "Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient constitute for understanding it? (And) Is it possible to abstract and label it?" (p. 121). I also made sure there were no repeats or overlapping statements. The horizons that met these statements then

became the invariant constituents of each participant's experience. I have chosen to again use Carolyn to provide an example of the invariant constituents and to show this step in the data analysis portion of this study. Each step in this study is based on the interconnectedness set up by Moustakas (1994), as well as the use again of epoche to assure that the descriptions presented are those of the participants and not me, the researcher. This invariant constituents example is from the interview with Carolyn: "You must be willing to question, but have to open your heart up to the miracle that God is!"; "You have to meditate and invite God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit in all the time."; "None of all that I have would be possible without God."; "God gave me opportunities."; and, "We have to live like Christ and look at things the way Christ did."

Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents

After the invariant constituents were completed for each participant, the next step was to form core themes from these for each individual. These themes clearly showed in miniature the experiences of each participant. Table 1 below shows the themes for each participant in this study. As Carolyn has been used as the example in this chapter, she is listed first, and other participants are then listed alphabetically.

Table 1

Core Themes of Participants

Participants	Themes
Carolyn	Encouragement, Intelligence, Role of Women, Fear, Determination, Family, Living by example, Choice, Faith, Relationships, and Education
Albert	Faith, Science, Education, Relationships, Determination, Intelligence, and Friendships
Angie	Friendship, Faith, Intelligence, Determination, and Giftedness
Jean	Family, Faith, Mental health, Fear, Music, Relationships, Determination, and Intelligence
Justin	Relationships, Science, Family, Education, Intelligence, Determination, Dedication, and Faith
Libby	Family, Music, Creativity, Choice, Self-image, Encouragement, Relationships, Role of Women, Intelligence, Education, and Faith
Mary	Relationships, Determination, Dedication, Faith, Intelligence, Family, and Perseverance
Pam	Faith, Intelligence, Family, Science, Relationships, Determination, and Faith
Renee	Family, Tolerance, Faith, Self-esteem, Determination, Open-mindedness, Relationships, Stereotypes, Choice, and Intelligence
Teri	Education, Intelligence, Family, Community, Giving Back, Relationships, Faith, Determination, and Betterment

Individual Textural Descriptions

Writing individual textural descriptions was the next step in the data analysis process. This was completed for each participant to ensure that each one's perception of their life experiences was presented. Moustakas (1994) recommended that in this step the words of the participants be used so the unique perceptions of each individual and their view on the phenomenon of the study is presented. I have included Carolyn's text description as an example.

All other text descriptions can be found in Appendix D. All text descriptions were used in the composite textural description (presented later in this chapter) and to show an understanding of all individuals and their experiences.

Carolyn's faith remains strong because she, "truly accepts faith as part of who you are," and thanks in a large part to the influence and encouragement of her grandmother: "My grandmother showed her Christianity in her deeds. She taught me not to look at others with a 'me eye' and to spread my Christian faith in a quiet way." She was able to embrace her giftedness as well, thanks to friends along the way:

When things were difficult at home I would go to my friends, Gene and his mother Mickey. Gene encouraged me and pushed me. Told me it was ok to be smart and ok to fight back with your family when they make you feel like you are nothing.

Although she keeps her faith, and her intelligence, she is fearful for society:

When I was in school it was in an era of anti-intelligence. When I was a child, I was not allowed to have a Bible as we may misinterpret it. My aunt and grandma got together and got me one, but made me promise that if I had questions, I was to ask them, and they would ask the priest. Some were intimidated by my questions. I believe that some Christians are fearful of intellects and intellects feel churches don't allow for the interchange of ideas.

She fears that history may repeat itself: "I am totally fearful – seeing we go through periods of anti-intelligence and right now is the worse time. Giftedness is out of the norm and society doesn't want out of the norm." She fears for children today: "I think about all the gifted kids who are in the situation that I was in when younger who don't have a Mickey or a Gene, how do they survive?" She is also optimistic about the future if people will remain open to intelligence

and shed their discrimination: “First and foremost, I want to get the message out that sometimes women get left in the background. Even when they are considered ‘ordinary’ they make a contribution to the world. We have a lot to tell the world.” She hopes for openness when it pertains to faith as well:

We have to be open to the mysteries of Christianity. We must be willing to question – but open our heart up to the miracle that is God! Sometime Christians are seen as the Moral Majority, those who can decide who can be a Christian and who can’t and that’s really very un-Christian. I am Christ-guided. None of this would be possible without God!

Composite Theme Units

From the individual themes a list of common themes was generated. These themes were assimilated to form composite theme units. The common themes of the participants in this study were: Intelligence/Giftedness, Faith, Determination, Relationship of Intelligence to Faith, Family/Friendships, Society’s View on Christianity/Religion, and Society’s View on Intelligence/Giftedness. These represented a general description for all the participants interviewed for this study. A portion of the theme of Intelligence/Giftedness as experienced by some of the participants has been included to help illustrate this part of the data analysis process:

When I had trouble at home I would head over to Gene and Mickey’s house. They encouraged me and pushed me and told me it was OK to be smart. They also told me that when my family made me feel like I was nothing, it was OK to fight back. (Carolyn)

“My teachers understood how hard we all worked and how hard it can be in your mind. They found ways to help us relax” (Teri). “Being told I was gifted was an incredible boost in my confidence. It helped me know that I have brain power and I can do things!” (Renee).

“Intellectually I’ve always felt like I’ve made progress by feeling the structure of a subject rather than the outright memorization of the parts” (Justin). “I am trying to combat the fake war between science/intelligence and Christian faith” (Albert).

Determined Theme Units

Only by looking at the group as a whole can the research questions and sub-questions be answered. This is done by creating the composite textural description. Moustakas (1994) directed the researcher in this process and stated, “In formatting composite textural descriptions, the invariant meanings and themes of every co-researcher are studied in depicting the group as a whole” (pp. 137-138). For this step I returned to the individual descriptions, as well as the common themes, to come up with a narrative that sheds light on what it means to be an intellectually gifted Christian who maintains one’s faith. Each individual textural description was analyzed and then the composite textural description was written as a representation of the whole with attention given to each common theme.

Composite Textural Description

The common themes of the participants in this study were as follows: Intelligence/Giftedness, Faith, Determination, Relationship of Intelligence to Faith, Family/Friendships, Society’s View on Christianity/Religion, and Society’s View on Intelligence/Giftedness. Each of these themes helps explain the phenomenon of how intellectually gifted adults maintain their Christian faith.

Intelligence/giftedness. As this study was an attempt to look at the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults, it is not surprising that intelligence/giftedness would be a theme that was intertwined in all the participants’ stories. Although all seemed to embrace their giftedness, many also seemed humbled by such a label. Mary stated, “Being gifted does not mean anymore

to me that being born with green eyes and blonde hair. It's just who I am. I am no more special than the next person." For Carolyn, the label of gifted allowed her to aid others. She stated, "It just means that I can help people search out the areas of their strengths. It doesn't mean you know everything. You are still allowed to learn!"

This label, for some, was one that was eye-opening and allowed for opportunities as well as opened doors, be they actual or psychological. For Angie, it allowed some self-realization. She stated, "It made me understand myself better. I understood things quickly. When I was young the teachers thought I was hyperactive and wanted to put me on medicine." Likewise, for Renee it was life changing:

It was an incredible confidence boost. I was struggling with confidence. I had a parent walk out so this recognition came at a critical time. It made me feel like I could accomplish tasks. Challenges no longer scared me. I knew that I had the brain power to do things, like write books.

For others, the label came with consequences. Albert stated, "It was a terrible thing in my neighborhood. If anyone knew I would have gotten beaten up. I lied about why I was going to a different school." Libby had a bit of both. She stated,

It's a blessing and a curse. But it does give me motivation to work a little harder. I am able to develop my intelligence and feel like I have more pressure to succeed in life, which I am grateful for.

Intelligence/Giftedness was a part of each participant's life. Although participants viewed their intelligence/giftedness in different ways, all agreed that their intelligence/giftedness was germane to who they are.

Faith. A study about intellectually-gifted adults who maintain their faith would lack any credence if faith was not a theme prevalent in each participant's life. Their faith came at different times in their lives, some very early as children, while for others it was a decision made later in life. For each, however, the decision to believe was one of utmost importance. The decision for Pam has become part of the fabric of her life.

It's so very personal to develop a relationship with God. When I go to church, I re-energize my battery. My husband is one of six children so there are lots of baptisms and weddings. And for each of these there is a mass. All the important events of life begin at church.

Libby also credited her faith to all that she has. She stated, "I wouldn't be here without Christ. All I do and hear would not be possible without Him. I see Christ in all I do."

This faith also dictated the way participants treated others. Renee looked at her faith in relationship to her own life and the treatment that her family received. This brought her a better relationship with Jesus. She stated, "I just feel that the teachings of Christ imprints on how you look at people. I am the daughter of a single mom who was discriminated against. Christ preached against this. I feel a connection to him." Teri's connection was that of how she was able to treat other people due to her faith. She stated, "My faith has led me to a desire to help other people. It leads me to do what I do."

Faith, for some, although vital, is not always easy. When navigating today's society, some participants questioned their faith at one time. Justin stated, "It's tough, especially today. I have to make a continued decision to follow the teachings of Jesus and build that relationship. That's the most important and one that is continually being made." Carolyn also found a way to keep her faith. She stated, "When I struggle with my faith, I know that it's ok to question, but I

have to open up my heart to the miracle that is God.” The Word of God provided Teri with what she needed to keep her faith. She stated, “There are struggles. I see struggles in the Bible and I also see how they got through the struggle and were better people. I look at this and know that I can become a better person through the struggles.”

No matter when the decision was made, it is one that has guided them throughout life and into the future. Jean’s faith was as important as food but was also daily work. She stated, “My faith is and always will be just as important as eating. I have firsthand knowledge the He never goes away. A closeness to God is a lifelong thing to work on.” Angie agreed that God is always with her. She stated, “I look at how there is someone bigger than me talking care of me. I must always keep a servant’s heart.” Albert agreed. He stated, “I have faith, now and always, that Jesus Christ really lived, really died, and really rose. It’s all true and that makes it impossible not to worship the Trinity.” For Renee, it was not a question of believing; for her, it was a question of how one could not believe. She stated, “I will always give back to the Lord Jesus Christ. I am so inspired by him. I don’t know how anyone could not believe.”

For all the participants, faith, whether new or lifelong, whether easy or difficult, guided how they look at life, how they treat people, and how they go into the future. Even when their faith seemed to falter, they returned to it. Faith as a theme was vital to this study.

Determination. A fierce determination seemed to be part of these participants, be it related to women’s rights, or aiming for a better life; these participants tried to answer the call in their own ways. Renee, who was brought up in a trailer in rural Ohio, was determined to gain a better life. She stated, “I was determined to get out of poverty and education was a quick way out. I made a choice that I wasn’t going to be poor anymore!” For Jean, the determination allowed her to combat mental illness. She stated, “Depression is a wedge between me and God.

Depression won't allow you to experience so many emotions. I am determined to keep to the fact that I truly love God and He loves me." Pam's determination was not for herself. It was for her students. She stated,

We as a society have to see the need of our gifted children. They have a need to be creative and a need to be with other gifted kids. When schools don't see that our kids are missing out. They are not able to reach their potential.

Carolyn was also determined for others, but her goal was to make sure that women were given opportunities. She stated,

First and foremost, I want to get the message out that sometimes women get left in the background. Even if a woman is considered ordinary, she makes a contribution to the world. We have a lot to tell the world and that doesn't always get out there.

The theme of determination adds to the portrait of who these participants are and gives a richer picture of their life experiences.

Self and society's perception of the relationship of intelligence to faith. This study was completed in order to get a better understanding of those who are intellectually-gifted and Christian. This seems to be a reality that society, participants agreed, is not willing to accept. In looking at experiences of those involved in the study, the theme of intelligence and how it is related to faith, was indeed included.

Many of the participants narrowed in on science when talking about intelligence as they shared that this is where, in their experiences, the division is the greatest. Justin saw inconsistencies in the view he felt the world holds about religion and science. He stated, "Society's perception is antiquated, not rigorous, and inconsistent of what is true. This is more

than science. God allows us to learn and appreciate the world.” Carolyn also saw the gap that seems to exist between the two.

I don’t think that society believes you can be smart and be a Christian. There is such a chasm between science and religion right now it seems. We need to start looking at science and bridge the gap. Christ was an intellectual and He was rejected.

Libby, however, saw both sides. She stated, “It’s not right, but I get it. From their point of view there is no proof. For them it’s hard to look at and say it’s legitimate.”

Participants’ self-perception of the relationship was in contrast to that of society’s view. There were those participants who believed that the relationship was one that was not only acceptable, but natural. Renee was curious as to how both could not be believed. She stated, “There is so much order in the Universe, for me faith is intelligence. They go hand-in-hand. I know there has to be a God, there is so much order.” Teri believed that perhaps there was a solution. She offered this,

Society seems to believe that it’s not smart to go against science, but the more I learn in science, I see the parallels in the Bible with science. We need to compare the scriptures to science and look at them side-by-side.

Albert recalled that it was not so unusual to look at the two as working together not so long ago. He stated, “The idea of conflict between Christianity and science is relatively new. It didn’t begin until the end of the 19th century. Before that the scientists were Christians and they wrote a lot about Christianity. But that’s all being ignored.” No matter their experiences, all participants shared their belief that the view society has between the two is erroneous.

Family and friends. Family and friends played pivotal roles in the experiences of participants. Family and friends served as mentors, motivators, and supporters. They were

active in the faith area of the participants' lives. This involvement also led to the way at least one participant raised her own family. For Mary, the church not only played an important part in her life but played an important role in her children's lives as well. She stated,

My family was always active in our church. This is so important as it pertains to my own children as well. I knew that my most important decision was to make sure I raised my children in the Christian faith.

Family and friends were also there to help, according to participants, in their academic lives as well. Mothers were an important figure to some participants like Jean. Her mother viewed education as vital. Jean stated, "To my mother education was very important. She spoke only Italian and wanted to learn English so she would read the dictionary every day. She was so very intelligent." According to Pam, her mother and grandmother were educational leaders for her as she grew up.

My mom was salutatorian, so I knew I needed to be smart as well. I became valedictorian. I was encouraged to do well. My grandmother was one of the first women to ever attend Indiana University. The stories I heard always showed me that it was OK for women to be smart.

In the absence of family, others stepped in to provide needed support. Carolyn was encouraged to pursue her intelligence, although this encouragement came from friends. She stated, "When things were tough at my house I would go to Gene and Mickey's. Gene encouraged me and pushed me. He told me it was OK to be smart." Carolyn shared another instance when a friend stood in when family did not.

I was a cheerleader in high school. On Parents' Day my freshman year and I asked my mom to come and she said that she didn't know if she would. I kept looking for her.

Then there were announcing the players and cheerleaders and my mom wasn't there.

Then one of the coaches stepped up and took my arm and walked me out. He did that for me every year. It meant a lot.

In some instances, family may have played a more negative role in faith. In the case of Albert, family may have been there, but not for support.

My religious combination was atheism and Stalinism. We didn't celebrate Christmas, we celebrated New Years and our presents were given then. I never went to a church until I was in my 40s. Now I friends who keep me strong in my faith. Francis Collins is truly inspirational and a brilliant Christian.

The role of family and friends heavily influenced the experiences of all participants. Their stories varied vastly, but all had in common that without the support of others, choices made and life experiences would have been very different.

Society's view on Christianity. In the experiences shared by participants, society's view of Christians is one that is not correct. Renee shared her belief that this view may be one that is stereotypical. She stated, "They think that we're all a bunch of narrow-minded hypocrites. It's a shame because that's turned some people against Jesus who was the most open-minded, non-judgmental being ever." Pam's view was even more concise about perhaps the why of society's perceived view. She stated,

Christianity has a bad rap on so many levels. They see televangelists wanting money.

We are viewed as judgmental, especially against homosexuality and other hot topics. I'm a Catholic and everything that's going on with the priests. People are dubious about what it means to be a Christian.

Mary took that point further as she stated, “They believe that we are hypocrites. We go to church on Sundays, hear the Word of God, and then go into the world and do whatever we please because we are saved just because we went to church.”

For one participant, that view was even more personal. Albert lost friends because of their view about Christians.

At first I didn’t tell anyone I was a Christian. It was a secret. Then I wrote my book. I had 600 Facebook friends, when I announced the book, only about 200 remained, the rest wrote me off. Society, especially the advanced gifted society, think a scientist who is a Christian is a rarity and they look down on you.

This view, some participants believed, is one whose burden must be shared by Christians themselves. This view, some thought, was due to the way some in the Christian faith treat others. They added that in order to change the perception, Christians too would need to change. Teri shared that she wanted Christians to share the responsibility of breaking the stereotype:

I think there are some who are very outspoken and not very nice about others being Christians. I think this can change, but we have to be careful. I see extremes and what people have done in the name of Christianity in the past. Society needs to look at us in a different light.

Carolyn agreed:

They think of us as the Moral Majority. They look at us and ask, “How can people who say that the LGBT can’t live in society, how is that OK?” We today have churches that are almost cultish, and they believe that they have the right to decide who can go to church and who can be a Christian, how is that right? Today it seems like they believe they have the right to tell God who He can and can’t be.

In looking at this theme, the experiences from the participants are in agreement, albeit for different reasons, that there is a negative view pertaining to society and Christians.

Society's view on intelligence/giftedness. The final theme examined sheds light on how, as intelligent adults, the participants saw others' views about them. Participants shared concern about society's perception of intelligence/giftedness. Participants shared images that ranged from Einstein to Bill Gates when asked about society's view of intellectuals—a view, that Pam shared, was false. She stated, “Society thinks – Bill Gates, or Albert Einstein, but those are really rare. They think of gifted as the outliers.” This did not seem to be the only falsehood that participants believed society had about giftedness. For Justin, the myth may be associated with fear. He stated, “I think they use it as a defense, as a label so they don't have to try. They say, ‘Well so and so is a genius, I'm not.’ But they don't know until they try.” Carolyn shared her fear of what this may mean for the future. She stated, “I am totally fearful. We go through times of anti-intelligence in this country and right now I think it is the worse time. Giftedness is out of the norm and society doesn't want out of the norm.” For one participant, Teri, the view was seen in a bit more optimistic way. She stated, “I think some of society is better with it now. Growing up there were those who picked on me, but also those who pushed me to do my best.” Participants looked at society's perception of giftedness through different lenses, but all agreed that society is misguided.

Research Question Responses

This research study had one central question which was: What are the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs? (CQ1). These experiences were vast. They ranged from family members' influences to the lack of such. In examining this question, participants shared the aspects that help make them who they are—

their giftedness and their faith. All participants were labeled or attended gifted classes. Each shared how their intelligence helped shape their identities. Teri summed it up by stating, “The word doesn’t really mean anything but being labeled has prompted me to be who I am today. As a kid, especially, it was very impactful on how I looked at what I could and couldn’t do.”

Justin’s experience added to his existence as well, as his experience prompted him to pursue a career in science. He stated, “Giftedness means sensitivity and awareness. I’ve always felt like I’ve made progress by feeling the structure of a subject, rather than the outright memorization of all of the parts.” Albert’s experience was a similar one and led him to lifelong career in science. He stated, “The main thing is the idea of wanting to know. To understand drives a lot of science. Truth really matters. It’s motivation to try and understand the truth and where it leads.” He added that his gift was one God granted. He stated, “I am gifted in some ways and ungifted in others. I don’t think I am really special. We borrow all our gifts from God, and we are supposed to use what we have.”

All participants in this study signed a profession of faith, which means that they have accepted Christ as their personal Lord and savior. So it stands that faith is the other experience that participants shared pertaining to their lives. These experiences ranged from early Sunday mornings getting ready for church, to silent times in the choir loft where God became more real. Participants shared childhood memories and faith-based decisions that allowed them to cling to their faith in all situations. Renee shared her memory of becoming a Christian, one that rang true with all participants, the fact that Jesus never fails:

I remember going up front and asking the Lord to come into my heart. The next week I went up again. The pastor pulled me aside and told me I only had to do it once, that once

I asked, I never had to ask again. This was very powerful. My dad had left us and here was this guy that was never going to leave me.

All participants shared times when their faith made moving forward possible. Jean put it this way: “I couldn’t have lived without my beliefs. I have suffered from depression since a child. I remember going to my mother telling her something bad was going to happen. I need these beliefs. With them, life is good.”

Faith does not stop at belief, but rather in sharing those beliefs. All participants shared experiences that showed the importance of not only keeping the faith, but in sharing it as well. This ranged from the quiet, as well as the more outward. For Carolyn, faith was an action, not just a word.

I wake up and ask what the Lord wants me to do today. It can just be smiling at someone. My grandma would always say to me, ‘Smile, it doesn’t cost a dime, but it could give someone God.’ I try and spread my Christian faith in a quiet way.

Sub-question 1 response. Sub-question 1 asked: Who serves as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) for Christian adults who are intellectually gifted? This question looked at the spiritual influence, as well as the academic one. In looking at the influences on faith, this question was asked as I was curious to see if Jesus would be the MKO for these adults. Out of all participants, only one claimed that Jesus has had the most influence in her life. Renee shared this, “I think the most influence is the Lord Jesus Christ. I am compelled by his teachings and try to think about He would look at the issues and people.”

For all but three other participants, this faith influence was from family members. Mothers and grandmothers were the most credited, but one participant claimed her grandfather was the one who influenced her life. Teri stated, “My grandpa was the pastor of our church. He

was always showing me how to be a better Christian. I can remember him giving out \$2 bills and telling people they were special just like that bill.”

Lacking family influence, three participants claimed that others who were strong in their faith helped them keep true to their beliefs. Libby stated this, “The wife of the youth pastor at our church showed me how to be a strong Christian woman. Society sees you as meek. She showed me a different role for a Christian woman.”

In the academic sense, all participants credited family members with influencing their intellectual pursuits. Here, teachers, professors, and academic colleagues were mentioned as well, but only after family. Here again, mothers and grandmothers were the frontrunners. For Renee, this held true. She stated, “My mother and my grandma are the two most intelligent people I ever met and neither went to college. For us, formal education wasn’t really emphasized, but being educated was.” Libby agreed but credited both parents as her influence. She stated, “My parents held me to a certain standard. Mediocrity wasn’t an option. From first grade when they realized my potential, my parents didn’t let up. A lot of times I wasn’t grateful for that. Now I am so thankful.” All participants agreed on the fact that they, in both the faith and the academic portions of their lives, were able to maintain their faith and their intelligence due to others.

Sub-question 2 response. Sub-question 2 asked: How do Christian intellectually-gifted adults experience their faith in their intellectual lives? The overall responses to this question were not *how* they were able to do this, but more so *how they could not* have faith and intelligence as they, for participants, went hand-in-hand. Albert’s response to the question summed up participant responses:

You don't have to give up all you know as a scientist. Some people think if you're really smart you have to give up your faith. That's not true. That's a distortion of reality. It doesn't bother me, I know how they feel, it's how I used to feel. It's my job now to explain. They're misguided.

Mary summed it up this way:

I believe that it is important for people to realize that you can have a strong belief in the Christian faith while still having a strong belief in science. To me there is no conflict. All we have learned and all there is still to learn is a gift from God.

Some participants saw their faith becoming even stronger the more they were able to learn. Justin put it this way, "Over the years it becomes clearer and clearer that to pursue the truth means rejecting a lot of things in the world in favor of things not in the world." Albert, the oldest participant in the study and the one who came to his faith the latest in life, agreed with this and stated, "It feels natural and right. I searched a long time to come to this and with a lot of experiences. I am totally convinced this is true. The more I learn, the more solid it is." These participants all shared the experience that faith and intelligence are almost equal, but all agreed that faith is the driving force in their lives. They agreed that faith has a very real and a very realistic part in their intellectual lives and that it has added to their pursuit of knowledge.

Sub-question 3 response. Sub-question 3 asked: How do Christian intellectually-gifted adults navigate society's perception of Christianity? In this question there was the unanimous agreement among the participants. All have seen negative views concerning Christians. This view is compounded when the question of intelligence is added to the equation. Teri put it this way, "Society has us afraid to be both intelligent and a Christian. We can't allow our

intelligence to make us lose faith. My intelligence will give me opportunities and these opportunities will give me a chance to share my faith.”

The negative views for most participants do not cause them to question their faith, but to be steadfast in it. Justin shared that his faith becomes stronger when questioned. He stated, “Academia is full of both expansive bureaucracies and people hostile to the Christian faith. I won’t back down from the ultimate truth. Whatever happens to me, God wins in the end. I want to be on the winning team.” Likewise, Albert saw the negative perception society has as almost a line in the sand. He stated, “The main thing is that I am trying to combat the fake war between science/intelligence and the Christian faith.”

Many of the participants shared that when navigating through society’s negative perception, there also came a concern for those whose view is, participants felt, so false. Justin, saw this as a loss for those who do not believe:

Deep down everyone knows there’s more to reality than meets the eye. But people aren’t comfortable confronting Christians. The current order in society, they have sacraments, things that echo what the church supplies. They substitute something for Christ, because they can’t believe in Christ, to their own detriment.

Each participant shared like experiences when responding to this question and that being that faith was again the answer for all participants.

Summary

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate how data were collected and analyzed. The data analysis was modeled after Moustakas (1994), and the steps of his outlined process were followed. Precise examples were given to further illustrate the analysis process, which included: transcription of interviews, journals, and focus group recording; horizontalization; reduction and

elimination; clustering and thematizing; core themes; individual textural descriptions; themes; composite thematic units; and, composite textural descriptions. I have presented a composite of themes and what these mean in helping to answer all the central research question and sub-questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This qualitative study addressed the need to describe and better understand the events and influences that are shared by intellectually-gifted adults who remain strong in their Christian faith. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs. The conclusion was established by looking at the descriptive voices of the participants that were used to clarify how the findings of this study relate to the literature framework in Chapter Two and the findings presented in Chapter Four. In addition to this overview section, this chapter consists of a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings and the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory, a practical implications section, an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Results of the data analysis included the identification of seven shared themes among all participants. These themes were: Intelligence/Giftedness, Faith, Determination, Relationship of Intelligence to Faith, Family/Friendships, Society's View on Christianity/Religion, and Society's View on Intelligence/Giftedness.

This study had one central research question: What are the life experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian faith? The lived experiences of participants had several things in common as shown in the common themes. These experiences all included the support of other strong Christians, be they family or friends, as well as the embracing of their giftedness and their strong faith. These traits came for some very early in life, while other participants came to their beliefs later in their lives. All

participants questioned their faith at one point or another, and, as previously discussed, through the support of others, as well as the use of God's Word and prayer, helped establish their determination to keep their faith. Encouragement and self-awareness were evident in their intellectual lives as well, as all participants credited their identification as gifted as a now positive experience.

This study also included sub-questions. The first was: Who serves as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) for Christian adults who are intellectually gifted? This question yielded results that I did not expect. This sub-question was included to see if participants would credit Jesus as their MKO. In answering this question, only two participants listed Jesus as their MKO, and they added him to a list of others. For six participants, family members (especially mothers and grandmothers) were the ones who encouraged their giftedness and supported their faith. The last two participants listed close friends as their MKOs when it came to the faith portion of their lives, as their families were not religious, or were anti-religious. All participants stated that without these influences in their lives, their faith and their intelligence would not have remained strong.

The second sub-question was: How do Christian, intellectually-gifted adults experience faith in their intellectual lives? This question brought interesting results as six of the participants turned the question around to ask how there can be intelligence without faith. These participants specifically looked at science and were adamant that science makes no sense without the inclusion of God. All participants credited their faith with helping them look at the world intellectually. Participants stated that their intellectual life would be unfulfilled without the addition of faith.

The final sub-question was: How do Christian, intellectually-gifted adults navigate society's perception of Christianity? All participants agreed that society as a whole perceives Christianity and intelligence as an oxymoron. All participants agreed that this perception is false. Four of the participants stated that they felt sorry for those who believe this. Two participants have taken this as a challenge and are formally striving to break this perception. Seven of the participants stated that they understand why this perception exists and believe that Christians need to be more open to what science has to offer.

Discussion

The foundation of this study was established due to the empirical literature and theoretical framework. This section provides a discussion of the study findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature. The empirical literature on giftedness, gifted education, perceptions of giftedness, Christianity, intelligence, faith, and family in relation to the current study is examined. The theoretical frameworks for this study, Vygotsky's (2011) theory of cognitive development, Gange's (2015) DMGT, and Tinto's (1993) IDM, in relation to the findings, are also discussed.

Empirical Literature

The literature on the topic of intelligence and Christianity is vastly overwhelming in presenting a negative correlation between the two. In looking at Christian adults who are gifted, the literature pertaining to giftedness and all its facets was examined to gain a better understanding of who these adults may be and what characteristics they may possess. Likewise, the literature pertaining to the role of Christianity in life and what that means to believers was also examined to get a more accurate view of what this may mean to participants and how relationships may hamper or help life choices. There is a gap in the literature as it pertains to

intellectually-gifted adults who keep their Christian beliefs well into adulthood, although, as stated, there is a vast amount of literature stating the opposite, that intelligent adults are not those who have a set belief in Jesus.

Giftedness. The definition of giftedness and what it means to be gifted remains an anomaly. Neither the definition nor the meaning can be agreed upon by the experts (Carman, 2013) so it was with the participants in this study. All participants were labeled gifted, but these labels varied greatly depending on the year, the school system, the test, and the state guideline, if any. Participants ranged in IQ scores (the highest being 170), to being placed in a gifted program due to teacher recommendation. All participants did fall under the guideline set by the NAGC (2017) who defined giftedness as having ability to be significantly above the norm. When it came to gifted education, participants again varied due to many factors. Gifted education was not recognized by the United States government until 1974 (NAGC, 2017), and there is no national mandate for states or districts to maintain a gifted program for students. Participants in this study had diverse educational experiences. Albert was sent to an entirely different school based on his gifted label, while several participants were not given an opportunity to take classes for gifted but were put into advanced classes with those who were college bound, but no gifted label was needed for admittance. The educational experiences varied as much as the participants, but all did come to a gifted label, albeit through different channels.

Perception of giftedness. Pressure and negative connotations can occur when an individual is told they are gifted (Kitsantas et al., 2017). Participants in this study agreed that this was indeed accurate. Albert, who was made to go to a different school, stated that he lied to friends in his neighborhood about where he was going to school for fear of getting beat up.

Likewise, Carolyn stated that she was raised in an “anti-intelligence era” and that being a woman and smart was not encouraged. Another participant, Teri, also feared her label. She stated that she feared she would be picked on because she was different. An added pressure that may come with the label (Kitsantas et al., 2017) was also commonplace for participants. Libby called the label both a blessing and a curse because it brought an added pressure from parents and teachers. She stated, “Once they found out, that was it, no mercy.”

There are, however, benefits to the label as well. The label allowed students to see things in a different way, as well as accept and accomplish more difficult tasks (Meadows & Neumann, 2017). For Justin, this was definitely the case. He stated, “I have a sensitivity and an awareness. I feel that thanks to my intelligence I have made progress by feeling the structure of a subject rather than the outright memorization of its parts.” Renee stated that her gifted label gave her the self confidence that she had been lacking since her father had left her family.

In looking at how others view giftedness, the views of those teaching the gifted are extremely important. According to Russell (2018), teacher perception not only can impact the treatment of a student but also the services that student receives. For participants in this study, teacher attitude was positive for all but one. Nine of the participants credited teachers with helping them along their academic and gifted path. For Carolyn, however, teachers helped and hurt. She recalled a teacher who was biased against her because of her gender, a fact that is not uncommon. According to Košir et al. (2016), gifted girls often have a lower self-concept and that being gifted is a risk-factor. However, for that one negative teacher, Carolyn said she had others who encouraged and pushed her as well.

Gifted adults. The literature on gifted adults is lacking according to Rinn and Bishop (2015). In the few that do exist, the participants in this study were parallel to other participants

pertaining to growth. According to Makel et al. (2016), gifted children they studied grew in to adults who continued to show their giftedness into adulthood. The participants in this study all have continued to embrace and use their giftedness as adults. Three of the participants in this study chose gifted education as their life career, and all participants agreed that continuing to learn and question allows them to grow and enjoy life. This also supports a study by Subotnik et al. (1989) that found that gifted adults are well-rounded and happy with their lives.

Christianity. Aquinas (1920) summed up the opinions of this study's participants when he described faith as something that resembles hearing rather than seeing. Participants spoke of faith as being that which was felt that the evidence was in the believing, not the seeing. Jason spoke of the ability of the faithful to believe even when there are none of the hard facts available. Something he stated was not accepted by others: "They (society) just rely on dogma as any religion, they are blind to their own dogma much more that people with faith."

For all the participants, faith is the thing that allows them to continue and to make the most of their intelligence. For Justin, this means not being able to understand science without the existence of God. For Albert, those who cling to science alone are misguided. For all participants, it is as Dyess (2011) found when studying the faithful; faith was the premise that allowed people to make sense of their world circumstances. Even in the most adverse of circumstances, Aboderin (2014) and Bengtson (2013) found in their studies that people have been able to overcome adversities due to their faith. Timmons (2012) as well found out that Christian faith played an important role in helping recovering addicts meet with success. For participants in this study, faith indeed helped them overcome. For Renee, faith helped her through the broken home and poverty she faced as a child. For Jean, who has battled with depression since a child, faith has helped her make it through each day. And for Carolyn, faith

helped her leave a hostile environment. The participants in this study benefited through their faith as those in a study by Brelsford et al. (2014), where participants had a greater life satisfaction by “giving the situation up to God” (p. 33).

Faith is not something that one finds and keeps alone. Family and friends are forces who help others maintain their faith through all situations (Bengtson, 2013; Barry, Prenoveau & Diehl, 2013). As these studies showed the faith of those around an individual help build and grow that faith of the individual. For all the participants in this study, this holds very true. All participants credited a family member or close friend for helping them not only seek Christ, but also to stay with Christ through all life’s obstacles. Staying with Christ in a world that today may not be Christ-like is in part due to the support of a Christian community (Dibley, 2018). Participants in this study all agreed that the faith of their Christian friends and family allowed them to question and cling to their beliefs.

Christianity and giftedness. Participants in this study did not find the stereotype of Christians that Greeley and Hout (2008) found, calling at least conservative Christians “uneducated gun owners who live in trailer parks” (p. 91), as well as “Bible-thumping militants” (p. 1). But, when looking at intellectuals as Christians, they found that society as a whole believed they do not exist. This is a belief that research studies have been quick to point out. In their 2018 study, Mercier et al. claimed that as intellect and analytical thinking grows, belief in God is less and the need for God lessens. The concept is not new. Frazer (1922) presented his belief that science replaced the idea of God as humans became more intelligent. The idea has grown to more recent studies. According to Lynn et al. (2009), the belief in God is most high in countries with the lowest IQ scores. A correlation between intelligence and unbelief was the basis of a study by Zuckerman et al. (2013) that found that there is a negative correlation

between intelligence and religion. Other studies have found the same (Terman, 1930; Winston, 2013; Yancey, 2014). These studies are in direct contrast to what participants in this study have found and were the basis of why I chose the topic of intelligent Christians. All participants have stated that their belief grows just as their intelligence does. As stated previously, there are those participants (Albert and Justin) who cannot conceive of a belief in science without a belief in God.

Albert and Justin are not alone in their thoughts. There are those studies where the beliefs held by the current participants are shared. Kinley and Damadian (2015) shared the story of Dr. Raymond Damadian, inventor of the MRI, who stated that there was no greater discovery in his life than that of knowing and serving God. Likewise, Heyhoe and Farley (2009) presented the findings that Christianity is threaded throughout science. This thought was shared and encouraged by Bontrager (2012) whose mission is to raise an army of Christian young people who believe in God and science.

All participants in this study agreed that there cannot be intelligence without faith. Renee stated that it was something that she could not fathom because of all the order found in the world. There are studies that continue to agree. Spence (2013) found that faith is a necessary part of intelligence. Wood (2014) agreed and stated that faith serves as “reason’s essential foundation” (p. 1). Pappin (2014) held that same belief and stated that the highest knowledge cannot be obtained without faith. Likewise, Sagatova and Zhakupbekov (2016) found that faith is necessary to gain true intelligence. For each of the participants in this study, denomination, age of belief, gifted identification, and socioeconomic background all varied, but for them the notion that intelligence and faith are not compatible is unrealistic. For these participants, at least in their lives, there cannot be one without the other as each adds to and grows from the other.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks for this study were Vygotsky's (2011) theory of cognitive development, Gagné's (2015) differentiated model of giftedness and talent, and Tinto's (1993) institutional departure model. These were chosen because of their relation to cognition, social interaction, giftedness, and determination.

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development. This theory was chosen in part because of the role a MKO plays in an individual's development. An MKO, according to Vygotsky (2011), provides scaffolding and allows children to reach their potential; without this MKO, children will remain at their current level of development and will not grow. In looking at Christian adults, the question of Christian growth and the need for a Christian MKO was investigated. For all participants in this study, the need for one or more MKOs was evident. All participants stated that they have and continue to look for guidance and the opportunity to grow not only in intelligence, but in their Christian faith. For some participants, their MKO for faith and intelligence is the same person. For others, they are different.

Two participants said that their faith MKO was Jesus, who guides them each and every day. All shared Vygotsky's (2011) definition of an MKO, and that is one who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner. For each participant this was the case. All stated that they relied on someone more knowledgeable than themselves, whether it be in faith or intelligence. They also agreed that without this MKO their growth would be stagnant. The MKO for all participants also changed over time and need. Vygotsky stated that for children an MKO allows them to move through different levels. For the participants in this study these MKOs have changed as they reach certain milestones in their faith and in their intellect. At the beginning of their journey, all but two had family members who helped them reach different

levels of faith and intelligence. As the participants grew, so did their need for others to become their MKOs.

Gagné's differentiated model of giftedness and talent. Gagné's DMGT theory mirrors Vygotsky's theory of MKO in a way as it also looks at influences from others on the growth of an individual. This theory also adds environmental and intrapersonal catalysts, such as people or events, as important developmental factors. According to Gagné (2015), gifts cannot be turned into talents without these influences. This theory was chosen to see if Christ was a catalyst that allowed participants to develop. As with Vygotsky's (2011) theory, all participants cited others as influences in their lives. Some participants cited events, such as the loss of a parent, or the fear of poverty, as events that also made them embrace their faith and their intelligence. For all participants, the event of accepting Christ was indeed a catalyst that shaped their lives. Each participant stated that their life was forever changed when they made the commitment to Jesus. This was an event, that all stated, that has made them follow the path they have chosen. It was an event that had allowed them, they stated, to face adversities with faith and strength. It was an event that has allowed them, they stated, to face each day knowing that it may not be trouble-free, but that they can get through any day with Christ in the lead.

Tinto's institutional departure model. Tinto's (1993) IDM deals with the need for persistence. In this study, one of the themes that all participants shared was that of determination. All participants faced obstacles, be they external or internal, and all were determined and able to overcome these obstacles. According to Tinto (2016), there are three reasons that students remain in college. In looking at this study, two were chosen in which to look at participants. These are self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Tinto, 2016). This theory was chosen to see if the participants in this study were able to succeed in light of society's view

of intelligent Christians and why they were able to succeed in their faith. It was also chosen to see if a sense of belonging was needed to help these participants maintain their faith and embrace their intelligence.

In the previous theories, outside influences came highly into play when looking at success. Tinto (2016) examined self-efficacy as the ability a person has in himself to succeed in a certain task or in a situation. In looking at this ability with this study's participants, the belief was there in all, but it was not a belief in self that prevailed, it was always a belief in Christ. All participants mentioned the importance of prayer and going to God when facing even what seems as the simplest of tasks or situations. For Carolyn, it was even a simple closeness to God in a quiet choir loft.

The sense of belonging that Tinto (2016) stated is paramount to success was indeed shared by the participants. Academically, all those participants who took part in gifted classes stated the importance of belonging to a group where they did not feel different and where they could be themselves. For Carolyn and Pam, the need for this belonging led them to choosing a career in gifted education. Each was adamant in the belief that a place for gifted students to feel as they belonged was vital to the future of education, and the country. Although not all participants attend an organized place of religion each week, all agreed that fellowship with other Christians in a small or large group was needed to help them remain strong in their faith.

Implications

The findings of this study have theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. In this section the findings of these implications are discussed.

Theoretical Implications

Vygotsky's (2011) theory of cognitive development, Gagné's (2015) DMGT, and Tinto's (1993) IDM were all used as the theoretical framework. Vygotsky's (2011) use of a MKO was examined through a Christian lens in this study. The need for Christians to have those who can help them grow in their faith was examined. Biblically the need to grow as a Christian is outlined:

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. (Ephesians 4:13-15, King James Version)

Christian adults in this study all agreed that the need for this MKO, one who was stronger in their faith, was vital to each keeping the faith all through daily life. The implication for Christians is to understand that the need to grow in faith is ordained by God. The need for every Christian to seek out others who are stronger in their faith is something that all participants embrace and may help those who struggle with their faith to seek out a MKO to help them in their growth. The recommendations here, participants agreed, would be that new Christians, or those struggling with their faith, be they gifted or not formally identified, is to seek out a stronger, more knowledgeable Christian to help them grow in their faith and their walk with Christ.

Gagné's (2015) DMGT was also looked at through not only an academic lens, as intended, but also a Christian one. The use of catalysts in life and the need for such in development, takes on a different hue when the catalyst is the acceptance of Christ. Each

participant shared that this event forever changed their life and still influences choices and treatment of others. The implication here is that all catalysts have the ability to alter lives and change choices. When the main catalyst is the acceptance of Christ, then all other catalysts are secondary. The recommendation for this implication is to look at any negative catalysts along the way and cling to the acceptance of Christ as a true change agent that allows Christians to overcome any catalyst that occurs. Participants' life experiences were varied, but many, such as Carolyn and Jean, overcame such catalysts by clinging to their unwavering faith in Jesus Christ.

Tinto's (1993) IDM was used to examine self-efficacy and a need for belonging.

Participants knew that they would succeed but also knew if they did not they could go on, in this study that was not due to self, but to Christ. This again is examined with a Christian lens and the implication is that a true belief in self may not fully exist without a belief in Christ. The need for belonging was examined both in the intellectual light and the Christian light. Participants agreed that belonging and finding a group was needed in both areas in order to grow and move forward. The implication for this is that a sense of belonging is needed to grow in all areas of life, not only academically. The recommendation for this implication is that fellowship is needed for continued Christian growth and Christian, no matter their faith level, need to seek this fellowship out to maintain faith. As shown by participants, the relationships with other Christians, be they family or friends, was heralded as a pivotal key in keeping their faith.

Empirical Implications

This study was undertaken as the research about Christian intellectually-gifted adults was almost non-existent. In addition, the existing studies for the most part showed a negative correlation between intelligence and Christianity. This study furthers the empirical research on the topic of highly intelligent adults maintaining their faith in Christ. This study sheds new light

on a topic that has seldom been researched in the past and contributes to research on giftedness and faith.

The empirical research on intelligence and faith has long been controversial. The now almost famous question “Is God Dead?” (Elson, 1966) that graced the cover of *Time Magazine* got a reaction that would be different today, according to Rothman (2016) who stated that then 97% of Americans believed in God, compared to the 63% who believed in 2014. The thought that a belief in God and especially in Christ is quite unintelligent is the basis of several research studies. Decades ago, Frazer (1922) stated that civilization, as it matured, no longer needed religion. Likewise, Mercier et al. (2018) stated that evolution made the belief in God unnecessary. In the study presented here, the belief in evolution, for one participant, is one that is completely compatible with his Christian beliefs. In looking at this participant and sharing his views, the implication is clear—that at least for a very learned scientist and former atheist, evolution is not a reason to shun Christian beliefs.

On a wider scale, surveys about faith and the lack of were shared. Although a survey (Pew Research, 2015) did show a majority of American adults, 70.6%, did still consider themselves Christians in 2014, this number had dropped from the 78.4% in 2008. The numbers decline not only for the general public, but for the leaders as well. Coe and Chenoweth (2015) found that more recent presidents of the United States were not as willing to mention their Christian beliefs as their forefathers. Perhaps the most detrimental study in light of intelligent Christian adults was a meta-analysis of 63 studies presented by Zuckerman et al. (2013) that showed a significant negative association between intelligence and religiosity. The implication for the current study is that it sheds light on the fact some of the participants in the study are very

strong Christians, but not religious. The current study hopes to support the fact that Christianity and religion are not the same thing.

The Christian stereotype is another topic found in empirical research. This stereotype may affect those of any intellectual level who believe in Christ. Greeley and Hout (2008) examined data over 30 years and found that Christians are thought of as gun carrying and Bible thumping. They found that they are thought to watch NASCAR, not PBS, and have less money than their non-believing counterparts (Greely & Hout, 2008). In the current study, all participants were Christians, and some may watch NASCAR, but all were highly intelligent, and all have pursued higher education. The implications of this study may help dispel the myth about Christians. The myth needs to be dispelled as it has negative connotations on young Christians. According to Rios et al. (2015), the impact of these negative stereotypes can dissuade students from pursuing higher education, especially in the science fields. The current study does much to help reduce this stereotype by presenting participants who are scientists. The implications of the current study can help dismiss these stereotypes for what they are – stereotypes. Showing participants who are successful in the science fields, those with PhDs in science fields, can present a different and encouraging view to young Christians.

There are implications for the current study to add to the research that exists and support those studies that do present a positive correlation between intelligence and Christianity, such as Kinley and Damadian (2015), Bontrager (2012), and Schaefer and Wright (2013). The implication of the current study is that it helps to fill the gap of literature available that shows highly intelligent adults as strong Christians. The recommendations for these implications are to further study these unique individuals and what allows them to maintain their faith.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide stakeholders with new information that may encourage and enlighten stakeholders in the Christian and gifted fields. In this section the implications for ministers, families, teachers, and gifted Christians are discussed as well as recommendations.

Ministers. When counseling those questioning their faith, or new to faith, the addition of giftedness may add new issues for ministers. In this study, participants were open with their questions about faith and their ability to turn to Christ even when society may have told them not to do so. In looking at the participants in this study, ministers may be able to better understand that a belief in those things that some churches may perceive as not Christian should not be judged. As participants shared a tolerance for others and a love for those whose views differ should not be taken as non-Christian.

Families. Parents/guardians can look at participants' experiences to learn that pressure can be a blessing and a curse. They can see that participants always valued the encouragement they were given. They can learn that a gifted student may see things in a different light and that there may be labels that others may not always admire about their child. Families can learn that a gifted child may learn in a different way and at a different pace. They can learn that a gifted child, may question God, not to be disrespectful but to learn, as participants stated. The study findings should shed light on what it means to be gifted and a Christian.

Teachers. The effects of how a teacher treats a gifted child have been presented and the negative impact that this can have has also been shown. Participants shared the many encouraging moments that teachers gave them and the impact it has had on their lives even into adulthood. Teachers can see how this can better a child as they grow. Teachers can also see the negative impact that can be felt by what the participants shared. The implication for teachers is

for them to understand that a gifted child may have different social and emotional needs and that they will not know everything.

Gifted Christians. The implications for this group are numerous. Advice has been shared with those who are struggling with their faith, participants have offered advice and encouragement to help with doubts. There are also implications for the new Christians, as participants have shared their faith stories in the midst of great obstacles and their ability to turn to Christ in all situations. The gifted Christian can take much from the participants' stories, for all have shared the connection they see between faith and intelligence. The experiences shared in this study can help gifted Christians build a strong foundation of faith.

Recommendations. Recommendations for these implications are for all to be more aware of the unique nuances that gifted individuals present. Ministers and counselors owe those gifted individuals in their care more awareness of the perceptions that are prevalent in the literature and what Christian gifted individuals may be facing. These individuals need to understand the added pressures that these unique individuals may be facing. They need to be able to intelligently identify the struggles that those who are gifted may be facing as they look at and sometimes question their faith. The social and emotional needs, as well as the perception that society may have of gifted individuals, as well as what participants believe is society's view of gifted Christians, should be considered when working with or counseling gifted Christians.

Teachers and administrators need to also be aware of the chasm that seems to exist when it comes to the perception of intelligence and Christianity. Assumptions of belief and intellect cannot be made when serving gifted individuals.

Families and friends should be aware not only of the pressure that may be felt by gifted individuals, but also of the added pressures of the perceptions of faith and intelligence. Families

should be well versed in open communication, support, and understanding of these pressures and misdemeanors that can and are felt of gifted Christians.

Finally, the gifted Christian, when self-analyzing, should take comfort in the fact that they are not alone in what they may sometimes feel. They are able to cling to Christ fully, but they are also able to know that the perceptions are out there, but they can grow and strengthen their faith and their intellect knowing that there are others who are strong in their faith and highly intelligent. Gifted groups with Christ as the basis should be formed so these individuals can continue to flourish in all aspects of their lives.

Delimitations and Limitations

Specific delimitations were made in this study to allow for a more concise focus on the collected data and to ensure that it aligned with the purpose of the study. Restrictions were established as a way to focus the study more specifically on the experiences of intellectually-gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian faith. Boundaries were defined through a purposeful recruitment of gifted adults who maintain their Christian faith. The purpose of these delimitations was to ensure the collected data could provide specific results for intellectually-gifted Christian adults and how they maintain their faith. The rationale to look at only adults is that life experiences for adults yield more information and therefore a more accurate picture of these life experiences. The use of Christians is evident as the purpose of this study was to look at how these adults keep their faith. The statement of faith that participants signed was specifically free of any denominational information, as for the purpose of this study Christianity is not isolated to any one denomination or on the frequency of church attendance.

The limitations of the study for the most part lay in the recruitment of participants. I found this extremely difficult as many roadblocks were encountered due to the religious nature

of the study. When asking for help in recruitment, two of the three organizations asked, OAGC and Mensa, refused to help recruit based on what they stated was a religious study and what they said was their commitment not to share any items that contained religious content with their members. The NAGC stated they could not help recruit as their organization was specifically for children and the study dealt with adults. These limitations lead to further limitations as I had to find participants from the participants who were already a part of the study. Although participants came from many diverse socio-economic and professional backgrounds, these limitations made for a smaller geographical area, as well as a study that contained only two male participants and no real diverse ethnicity. The label of gifted was given to all participants, but varied greatly among each dependent on school districts.

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, it is recommended that future studies of this nature look at adults throughout the United States. This study provided only experiences shared by adults living east of the Mississippi. Including adults from all regions would provide a more nationally-accurate picture. Participants in this study came from all socio-economic areas and were raised in single and double parent homes, but all participants were Caucasian, with only one, who is Russian, being loosely classified as a minority. Therefore, it would present more detailed research of this topic and present a more accurate picture if minority adults are included in future studies. The gifted identification varied greatly. In the future, it may yield more congruent results if a single gifted determination was used. On a global scale, it would be interesting to see if gifted, Christian adults around the world share any life experiences with those in the United States, therefore, an international study could be employed. Adults in this study ranged in age from 18-72, but future

studies looking at smaller age ranges may provide more specific details. A more accurate picture of these life experiences could be obtained in the future if a longitudinal study was applied to the research questions. This research could provide the changes, if any, over participants' lives and thus their experiences as intellectually-gifted adults who maintain their faith.

Summary

The preponderance of literature showing that intelligence and Christianity are at cross purposes, and the gap in literature showing that there are indeed highly intelligent adults who remain steadfast in their Christian faith was the basis of this study. This research strove to give credence to those highly intelligent adults who believe strongly in Jesus Christ. The rich experiences shared by participants gave voice to the proof that highly intelligent Christians do exist. These experiences that were shared also perhaps shed light on the fact that the intelligence Christian so-called battle does not need to be black and white; it is not a trade, one for the other. Both, participants shared, can be embraced and believed. As Albert stated, "My main goal now is to try and combat the fake war between science/intelligence and Christian faith. If you study deeply you will find God! I say, come to Christ and see where He is."

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APPENDIX A: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

KEEPING THE FAITH: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY EXPLORING INTELLECTUALLY GIFTED ADULTS WHO REMAIN PRACTICING CHRISTIANS

Deborah Glynn
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study that explores the lives of gifted adults who remain true to their Christian faith. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a gifted, Christian adult. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Deborah Glynn, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to examine the life experiences of intellectually gifted adults in the United States who persist in their Christian beliefs.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Take part in a one-to-one interview either in person or via video chat. This interview will be recorded for the purpose of data collection.
2. Take part in a focus group consisting of two to three other participants either in person or via video chat. This focus group will be recorded for the purpose of data collection.
3. Take part in electronic journaling by answering at least 5 prompts before, during and after your interview.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are an ability to share life experiences and to reflect on and strengthen Christian faith.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.] Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time [without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Deborah Glynn. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 513-250-5481 or dglynn@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Rebecca Lunde at rmfitch@liberty.edu

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX B: Gifted Identification Survey

Gifted Identification Survey

Name: _____

Age: _____ State of Residence: _____ State of Birth: _____

Formal Gifted Identification

Test given for identification: _____

Score: _____ Grade level, or age if not in school, when given: _____

If test was not given, or scores are unknown, please answer the following:

Did you participate in a gifted class or classes (these were specifically for students who were labeled gifted): YES NO

If Yes, at what grade level(s) did you participate _____

What criteria was used for attendance in gifted classes: (Please circle all that apply)

A. Test Score

B. Grades

C. Teacher Recommendation

D. Other (please note): _____

Name and city/state of school: _____

All information is true and accurate to the best of my recollection. I understand that all information will be kept confidential and will be used solely for the purpose of determination of eligibility for the Glynn Research Study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C: Profession of Christian Faith Questionnaire

Profession of Christian Faith Questionnaire

Name: _____

1. I have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in my life today and believe that, when I die, I will go to heaven because I have confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my savior.

YES

NO

APPENDIX D: Individual Text Descriptions

Individual Text Descriptions

Albert. It could be said that Albert is an example of better late than never in his giftedness. “I was considered a slow learner all through 3rd grade. Then in fourth grade my IQ jumped up enough points that I was transferred to the school with gifted classes. This is something I lied about in our New York neighborhood because I would have gotten beat up.” And in his faith. “I didn’t come to be a Christian all at once. I was in my 60s. I was an atheist, then an agnostic, and then thinking in general, ‘Is there a God?’ This brought me to church and then I cracked open the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew – it was amazing. Then in my 50s I started thinking but didn’t take the final step. Then had an experience with the Holy Spirit and I knew I was a Christian. It changed my life.” Life before had been void of all religion. “Growing up my religious combo was Atheism and Stalinism. Religion in my house – zero. We didn’t celebrate Christmas, we celebrated New Years and got our presents then.” Albert, a university professor and director at the National Institute of Health, was not immediate in sharing his faith. “At first I didn’t tell anyone. It was a secret. Then I wrote a book about my journey. Before I had 600 Facebook friends. I announced my book and only 200 Facebook friends remained. The others wrote me off. Society, especially the advanced, gifted society thinks you’re a rarity and looks down at you. But I know hundreds of scientists who are Christians.” One such scientist who has had a significant influence on all aspects of his life is Dr. Francis Collins who authored, *The Language of God*. “His book was a real eye-opener. I didn’t know you could be a Christian and still be in science. You don’t have to give up all you know as a scientist. Some think you have to give up your faith is you are really smart. That is not true. It’s a distortion of reality.” Albert faces those who believe this with determination. “There has always been skepticism. It’s not

surprising. It doesn't surprise me; I know how they feel. It is my job to explain to them that they are misguided." This is a job that Albert takes very seriously. "I am trying to combat the fake war between science/intelligence and Christian faith. There is a very strong and organized anti-theology movement out there and they are on a real campaign to convince everybody that there is a connection between atheists, science, and intelligence. It's propaganda. It's simply fake science and wrong. Before the 19th century all the scientists were Christians, but this is ignored by the atheists." He is dedicated to this "battle" because of his faith. "Jesus Christ is real. I searched a long time to come to this and with a lot of experiences. I am totally convinced this is true. The more I learn, the more solid this is."

Angie. Angie's giftedness and faith came later in her life. "I didn't even know I was gifted. It does help me understand myself better. After I graduated I found test scores that showed I was gifted. When I was little, I was told I was hyperactive and the teachers wanted to put me on medicine. As far as faith, my decision to come to Christ was after attending a high school youth group, involvement in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and a concert." Although giftedness was not known, her family was very supportive in education, but not in faith. "My family was very supportive in my education and involved. They were not very religious. On Sundays you could find us sleeping in or watching television." Angie counts on her friends to help strengthen her faith. "My friend Jude knows a lot about the Bible and is a mentor. She has been by my side through difficult times." Angie, whose own daughter is gifted, calls on other gifted friends to talk through gifted issues. "At times I feel like an outsider and am insecure and impatient. Friends have helped me learn to split things into smaller pieces so I can help people see what is obvious to me." She also calls on her faith. "I struggle with retaliating against those who are aggressive and deceitful. This is hard when dealing with the pain their

actions sometimes have caused. I rely in my friends to talk me through.” These friends also help Angie look at the view society has, she says, of gifted and Christians. “They think of gifted as Sheldon on ‘The Big Bang Theory.’ They think of Christians as very judgmental. They think that Christianity and intelligence do not intersect.” Angie still maintains her faith. “There is life after this one. We have to have a servant’s heart. We have to understand grace and give it.”

Jean. Depression has been a part of Jean’s life for as long as she can remember. “Depression is a wedge between me and God. Depression does not allow you to experience so many emotions. I can remember going to my mom when I was little and telling her that I felt like something bad was going to happen. My father, I sadly found out when I was an adult, had some mental health issues and spent time in a mental hospital. As I struggled with depression in my own life, I now realize it was bad for him. I think he loves us, but he was not affectionate. I was not close to him. I see God as a father figure and wonder if perhaps that is why I found it hard at times to get close to Him.” But she carries on due to her Christian beliefs, as these have also been part of her life. “I was born into it. Church every Sunday – my mom insisted. I believe in the power of prayer. I start each day with devotions and prayer. Faith is as important as eating! Good for my spiritual health. I have first-hand knowledge that He never goes away when things don’t go the way they should. Prayer is an integral part of living. It has gotten me thorough a lot of depression, the loss of my mother, and the aches and pains of aging.” Jean believes that others should follow suit. “People struggle right now. They are getting away from the church and turning their backs on religion. We all need prayer as individuals. How can a nation survive without prayer? There is strength in numbers – we all need to pray.” There is also strength in education to Jean. “I am a firm believer in education. And I believe that you need to work hard. My mother was a firm believer in education. She spoke only Italian and

would teach herself English by reading the dictionary every day. I appreciate the fact that God gave me a good brain. Am that I'm smart enough to be able to say, 'I don't know, but I'll find out.' I am proud that I had brains to learn." Jean is not finished growing in her faith either. "A closeness to God is a life-long thing to work on. You have to truly love and adore God."

Justin. Justin, a Christian since childhood, sees the relationship of science and Christianity everywhere "The relationship with science and religion meet a lot. Deep down everyone knows there's more to reality than meets the eye. My work is grounded on the ancient Christian writers. I work on a project in a different way. I study neurological activity in a philosophical way. We need a willingness to go outside the comfort zone of knowledge. He is amazed that others in the science field do not make the connections. "In science seems to be an atmosphere that Christian beliefs are childish, ancient, and wrong. I get push back for my religion. I wish they could see more of what's going on." To Justin, those in science are not the only ones with the negative view. "Society's perception of Christianity is antiquated, it is not rigorous and is inconsistent. They can't admit it because they are too invested. They can't believe unless they see. They are measuring intelligence and religion in ways that get them the results they want." Justin does feel that society wants to believe but can't. "They want it. In the current order of society, they have their own sacrament, things that echo what the church supplies. They substitute something for Christ because they can't believe in Christ, to their own detriment." Justin is able to cling to his faith while being immersed in science due to a strong foundation. "I was always diligent about going to church. Always part of my life. Lately I am reaching out to those on Twitter as this is not necessarily a friendly bunch in academia, especially my generation, but on Twitter I have found many very smart Christians that help me learn." Before Twitter there were those who sparked Justin's interest in faith and science. "My

mother was always very supportive. She did all she could to help me learn all I wanted to learn. And as for faith, she was also a model to me of sacrifice because she would always do the right thing whether it was easy or not.” Justin is also making some hard decisions but is dedicated to doing what he believes is right. “I won’t back down from the ultimate truth. Whatever happens to me, God wins. Why do I believe, because it’s true! It’s true whether I believe it or not. It’s like trying to give up breathing, it just doesn’t compute, at least not for me.” Justin believes that truth can be found in nature, created by God. “I understand truth and nature and reality. The Heavens declare the glory of God! I realize that most of what people consider meaningful these days is anything but. Miraculous things, truly meaningful things, and truly beautiful things actually only exist because of the Creator.” Justin will remain steadfast in what he knows to be the truth. “Over the years it has become clearer and clearer to me that to pursue the truth mean rejecting a lot of things in the world in favor of things not in the world. Faith is the continued decision to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and build on that relationship.”

Libby. From an early age Libby has been held to high standards in her academics. “My parents held me to a standard, there was no room for mediocracy. It wasn’t an option. There was no mercy. But it was the biggest blessing to have that force. At the time I didn’t think so, but now I am so thankful!” Likewise, in her Christian faith, she was held accountable. “We were always in church. I always believed, always part of my life and important to me. I have a solid foundation of faith. At the beginning, I didn’t have a choice. Even when I got older, we were going to church, we didn’t have a say in it.” As she grew older, she realized that her faith was a choice she had to make on her own. “Later, this wasn’t something that I had to do. It was my choice. I am choosing to have that. Every day it is constant, always there. “At times this was not an easy choice to make. “I was my own personal control monkey, and this means I am not

completely in control of everything and that's hard for me. It meant that I have to give up control and rely on this outside thing." It is also a choice that she encourages other to cling to, but question. "We shouldn't look down on others because of faith. I've seen this in every religion, and we are perceived as judgmental. This is a relationship. It is a choice, not a business deal. We should question our faith, but not have it shaken by outside influences. When things occur that are not good, we need to look at bigger picture and the future. We need to shift our focus." Libby does look at the bigger picture as she pursues her studies in music and maintains her faith. She remembers some of the influences who helped and continue to help her along the way. "My dad went above and beyond to push me. Musically he drove me insane! He pushed me because he knew I could do better." She also draws upon the past. "Our youth pastor's wife was an influential and independent woman. She taught me, that even as a Christian woman I can still stick up for what I believe in and what I want. I don't have to follow the meek stereotype. She changed my perception and role as a Christian woman." This stereotype is not the only one she has confronted. "People think if you're gifted, you're always the smartest person in the room. But need to look at creativity as well. And people think of Christians in a different way too. They see us as having square, not full circle faith! We don't fit that intellectual mold. From their point of view there is no proof. They find it hard to look at and say it's legitimate." Despite this, Libby continues to cling to her faith. "I wouldn't be here without His guidance. I look at this every day and think, 'Wow! This is my life!' When you come to Christ you have a relationship with Christ. Christ stuck up for me, He is always there."

Mary. Mary has always been dedicated to her faith. This is a dedication that would play heavily in her family life as a child and then as a mother herself. "We were always very active in our church. I was raised in a Christian home. I was very blessed to be raised in such a loving

environment. And raising my own children in the Christian faith - that was extremely important to me.” Having children also strengthened Mary’s own faith. “God has always been an important part of my life. Like a lot of youth, I did at one time question God. I found my way back. When I gave birth, that was a turning point in my faith.” Mary has a faith that she is determined to keep strong in World that doesn’t always agree. “I don’t get it. I understand that there are people, especially in the science world, who feel that people who are religious must be lacking intelligence to believe in the supernatural. I do think that we can have a strong belief in the Christian faith while still having a strong belief in science. To me there is no conflict. All we have, all we learned, and all there is still yet to learn about science is a gift from God. We should embrace it all.” She also sees another view. “Then there are some who see us as hypocrites. They see us going to church on Sunday and then go out the rest of the week doing whatever we please. That’s so wrong! We should go to church to hear the Word of God so we can learn to be better people.” Her determination is helped by those she has met. “I have met some amazing people over the course of my life who have influenced me spiritually. They have hearts of gold and are ones who I look up to and try to emulate in their dealings with life’s bumps in the road. They have a smile on their face and lead a Christian life and help those in need.” The advice seems to be taken as Mary strives to persevere in her faith. “I strive to live a Christian life. I try to follow Jesus’ teachings. Do I always succeed? Not by a long shot. But I continue to try and be a better person. I know that God forgives my shortcomings. I try to lead a life of compassion and caring, where is the downside of being a Christian?”

Pam. Pam was identified gifted and took honors’ classes in junior high and high school. “I remember my family always told me to do my best. On my high school transcripts, it had my I.Q. as 135. She was baptized at 12. “It felt very special. I’m saved. It was a feeling that things

were going to be OK.” Giftedness and faith mean even more to her now than when she was a child. “I married someone gifted and we still like to learn. Even as adults we build our curiosity. As I get older my faith means even more. I have elderly parents and I know if something happens to them, they will be Heaven and that helps. It also has shown me to live a caring life.” Her family, especially her mother, has nurtured her in both fields. “My mom was the salutatorian, so I knew I had to be good in school. I became our valedictorian. I was taught that it was OK to be a woman and be smart. My grandmother was one of the first women to attend Indiana University. My mom took us to church each week and this allowed me to feel very close to God.” Family involvement still remains. “My husband comes from a family with six children. So, there are a lot of baptisms and weddings and these are all masses. So, every important event in life starts at church. So faith is important.” This is a feeling that society may not share Pam feels. “Christianity has a bad rap on so many levels. It’s a product of the world. People see the televangelists who want money and in the Catholic Church the whole thing with the priests. People feel we are very judgmental. They are very dubious about what it means to be a Christian.” When Pam throws in her science background, even more skepticism is evident. “I can remember being out and saying something about church and another teacher said to me, ‘I didn’t think you were religious; you teach science.’ Society thinks Christians believe in faith, not science, that these are two different things. They think if you have faith you ignore science and science people chalk up Christians because they love credibility. In reality we can have both, no problem.” Pam does maintain her science and her faith. “You can’t be afraid to have both! Why would my faith go away? I still attend church each week. This is a way to keep my faith, it’s very personal to develop a relationship with God. I go to church to re-energize my battery, that’s what’s important in life.”

Renee. Renee's view on faith as a gifted adult is based on her belief that science and God are not at odds with one another. "There is so much order to the Universe, for me faith and intelligence go hand-in-hand. I know there has to be a God because there is so much order." Her faith stays strong in part because of her belief in the Word of God, "The Bible has been around a long time and has stood the test of time. I go back to that." She has also been influenced in all aspects of her life, intellectually and as a Christian, due to her relationship with Jesus Christ, "I am so inspired by Him (Jesus Christ), I don't know how anyone could not believe." Renee's faith in the Lord came at a volatile time in her life as her father had walked out on the family. "I went up a second time to profess my faith at church and the pastor took me aside and said that I only had to do it once. This was very powerful, here my dad left, and this guy was never going to leave me!" Likewise, her identification as gifted came at a time when her confidence was lacking, "This was an incredible confidence boost. I was struggling with confidence, I had a parent walk out, so this recognition came at a critical time." Renee says she maintains her life with a simple philosophy, "Know yourself and know your beliefs. Maintain your beliefs and have confidence in them."

Teri. Teri has always called on her faith and her giftedness and says that they both make her who she is today. "My faith and has pushed me to be a better person and my giftedness allows me to interact with others and help them. I try not to lose sight of either. I don't let my intelligence make me lose sight of my Christianity and I don't allow my academics to falter. My academics help me with opportunities and these opportunities are where I can share my faith. They have shaped my character and made me, me." Her faith has been fostered since childhood by family members. "My grandpa was the pastor of our church. He was always there and pushing me to be a better Christian. Going to church always meant a lot, it was a community."

Likewise, her intelligence. “Being identified gifted allowed me to explore more. In high school I had some wonderful teachers who were always there and loved to see me learn. They pushed me to do better. They understood how hard it can be on the mind and they found ways to help me relax.” Teri, in college now, has found that not all her teachers are as accommodating. “There are some professors who are open to others’ beliefs. But I have one professor who tries to push his beliefs on others and is not nice. He is not open to Christian beliefs or people sharing them. At times I am afraid I will not be taken seriously because of my religion.” Teri tries to understand. “I do see the extremes and I have seen what has been done in the name of Christianity in the past. Christians need to be looked at in a different light.” She is afraid that the view is skewed. “Society as a whole, sees a difference between Christianity and intelligence. They think if you grow up with a Christian background you can’t be smart. They don’t see that the two can coincide.” This is truer when it comes to science. “Society says you can’t be smart if you go against science. But a lot of things in the Bible parallel science! Compare the scriptures to science and look at them side-by-side. But very few people want to understand and find out.” Teri draws on the scriptures as they add to who she is and how she continues in her faith and academics. “I see people in the Bible struggle and become better people. So, you can struggle and be better. Why don’t people believe? It can make you a better person. It’s embedded in who I am. It is part of me.”