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## Experiences of Credibility: Female Instructors of Color at Faith Based Universities

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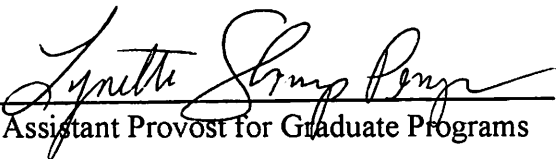
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## ABSTRACT

Research shows that the credibility of instructors of color is often questioned by White students, while other studies prove that male instructors are also perceived as more credible than female instructors (Hendrix, 1997; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). When these two findings are coupled, it seems that there might be a significant barrier to overcome for female instructors of color in their everyday instruction. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore perceived credibility for female instructors of color at faith-based universities, namely, Evangelical Christian universities. Based on my analysis of the interview data, these six female instructors of color at faith-based universities perceive their experiences as positive ones, and although they must often overcome barriers to gaining credibility involving student attitudes and a negotiation of their credibility among those students, many experience open-mindedness and change in their students over the course of the semester. Five core themes emergent in this study include: 1) Perceptions of university culture; 2) Faith integration; 3) Student attitudes; 4) Instructor attitudes and behaviors; 5) Instructor self-concepts. This discussion of this study aims to describe how the Christian university culture can facilitate credibility building for female instructors of color. Furthermore, it discusses how the concept of homophily can simultaneously be helpful and harmful for female instructors of color as it relates to the way they integrate faith in the classroom. It describes the standpoint from which female instructors of color describe their

underrepresentation and tokenism. Finally, the discussion of this study raises important questions about how female instructors of color can facilitate more diversity and inclusion on their university campuses, which is often a vital mission of faith-based PWIs.

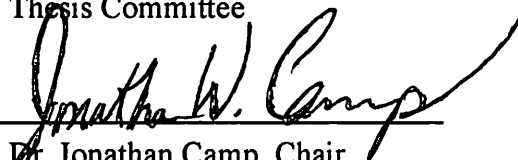
This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

  
Assistant Provost for Graduate Programs


Date

12-1-2016

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Experiences of Credibility:  
Female Instructors of Color at Faith Based Universities

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Communication

By

Jamilah L. Spears

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Statement of Problem.....	3
	Purpose of Study.....	4
	Significance of Study.....	6
	Phenomenological Perspective .....	7
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
	Instructor Argumentativeness .....	10
	Instructor Bias.....	12
	Instructor Standpoint.....	14
	Instructor Intersectionality/Multiple Marginality .....	16
	Representation of Female Instructors of Color.....	17
	Instructor Immediacy and Homophily .....	18
	Summary.....	21
III.	RESEARCH METHDOLOGY .....	23
	Research Design.....	24

Research Setting and Access .....	25
Sample and Sampling Procedure .....	27
Data Collection Procedure .....	28
Data Analysis .....	29
Research Validity .....	30
Ethical Considerations .....	31
IV. FINDINGS .....	34
Perceptions of University Culture.....	35
Supportive, Whole-Person Focused Community.....	35
Comparison to Other Universities .....	38
Low Diversity .....	40
Religious Uniformity and Traditionalism.....	42
Faith Integration.....	45
Divine calling to teach .....	45
Seamless Integration of Faith in the Course .....	48
Challenges Related to Integrating Faith.....	50
Student Attitudes.....	54
Students Bring Assumption and Bias .....	55



Intimidation.....	57
Discomfort .....	58
Perspective and Attitude Change .....	59
Instructor Attitudes and Behavior.....	61
Allowing Students Their Own Perspectives .....	62
Challenging Students’ Perspectives.....	65
Teaching/Learning Opportunities .....	72
Self-concepts.....	73
Intersectionality.....	74
Self-Doubt.....	75
Self-Confidence .....	76
V. DISCUSSION.....	81
Advantages of the Faith-Based University for Building Credibility .....	82
Challenges of the Faith Based University for Building Credibility.....	85
Underrepresentation and Tokenism .....	90
Welcoming the Standpoint of Female Instructors of Color .....	91
Conclusion .....	95
REFERENCES .....	97

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval .....	106
APPENDIX B: Participant Recruitment Letter .....	107
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent .....	108
APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol.....	109

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

It was my second semester as the instructor of record in our basic public speaking course. In preparation for my first day, I reminded myself of past training that taught me how to effectively establish my credibility as a young instructor. I thought to myself - *I can say I am a graduate student, but I don't need to disclose the fact that this is only my second semester teaching the course. If I establish course expectations early and refer to the syllabus often, I will be able to avoid being pressured into giving extra credit or accepting late work.* These were all helpful plans I used to walk through the first few weeks of my semester. I trod carefully through our first speech assignment, grouping students together based on the similarity of topics they selected. I sat staring at topic sheets piled one on top of the other and began sifting through what would be the speech topics of the our first assignment. I soon noticed the only Black students in my class, who did not know each other at the time, happened to select similar topics. These topics reflected issues that affect, primarily, Black Americans, having to do with police brutality, the penal system, race in American, etc. It would make sense to group them together, but I was faced with the dilemma of being an instructor who is Black, grouping together Black students, to discuss Black issues. My sensitivity to this issue might have been heightened due to the fact that this was my first time having such a high number of Black students (four, if you can imagine that) in one section in both my previous semester as instructor of record and earlier semesters as an assistant. Looking back on that time, I

realize my awareness of the issue might have likewise been heightened because I considered this situation the exact area of research I would unpack in this study. I was concerned about maintaining whatever credibility the class perceived I had after already being identified as a young instructor. What is more, I had to maintain credibility as a young instructor who presumably promotes her own interests in a basic public speaking course. Time passed and began to feel more comfortable in my decision. Reflecting back on that experience, I was glad that both Black and White students were represented in both groups that seemed to focus on Black issues.

I realized early that establishing credibility might be challenge for me because my identification as a young female instructor of color marginalizes me in a number of ways. However, like much of what I explore in this study, credibility challenges often come in nuance. Not many students would outright challenge my credibility to teach on a particular topic, but in any situation where they do not perceive me to be competent, they would instead let me know by questioning a grade, challenging the material I present, or disputing my method of instruction. In my brief experience as an instructor, I acknowledge that I experienced only a taste of what other female instructors of color might experience in their faith-based universities.

Credibility in higher education is a concept that has in the past contributed and continues to contribute a great deal to qualitative inquiry. A fascinating aspect of qualitative research is its social nature and the ability of researchers who engage to explore many social issues. Because of its social nature, qualitative research regularly discovers unique ways to explore experience and bridge gaps among societal difference. Scholars who study in the area of instructor credibility work regularly to develop tools so

that instructors might improve their perceived credibility. One of those tools that instructors use to build credibility is rapport building, which includes sharing in casual conversation and inquiring about students' personal interests (Goodboy & Myers, 2009; LeFebvre & Allen, 2014; Miller, Katt, Brown, & Sivo, 2014; Velez & Cano, 2008; Witt, Schrodt, Wheelless, & Bryand, 2014). Students learn better from their instructors when they believe the information they are receiving is relevant and true (Myers & Bryant, 2004). This makes trust an integral piece of perceived credibility as well. A final influential factor of credibility is the concept of homophily, the belief that students' and instructors' beliefs and attitudes are the same or similar (Myers & Huebner, 2011). Research also informs areas such as bias, standpoint theory, intersectionality, and the role these dynamics play in the experiences of female instructors of color (Adler & Jermier, 2005; Closson, Bowman, & Merriweather, 2014; Cook & Williams, 2015; Glascock & Ruggiero, 2006; Hendrix, 1997; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). While this is not an exhaustive list of the factors that influence credibility, the literature review in this study purposes to explore these few elements of credibility as they relate to instructors of color at Christian universities. This qualitative study explores the experiences of women of color who serve as face-to-face instructors at predominantly White, faith-based universities.

### **Statement of Problem**

Research shows that the credibility of instructors of color is often questioned by White students, while other studies prove that male instructors are also perceived more credible than female instructors (Hendrix, 1997; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). When these two findings are coupled, it seems that there might be a significant

barrier to overcome for female instructors of color in everyday instruction. This study's literature review is formatted to discuss, first, what traits are necessary for an instructor to be perceived as credible in the classroom, then goes on to discuss the identity intersections of female instructors of color and how those intersections at times produce "multiple marginality" for them. In recognizing various components of credibility and the barriers that exist for a female instructor of color, I go on to identify a problem to explore in this study. Female instructors of color are expected to be experts in their field, build rapport, and be homophilous to increase student motivation and learning; however, standpoint unawareness (for both instructor and student) makes instruction problematic when overcoming barriers to credibility at their faith-based universities. To address this problem, I ask the following question: How do Black female instructors perceive their experience of gaining credibility in the faith-based university classroom? While people of color encompass a wide range of individuals from various ethnic backgrounds including Asian, Hispanic, Indian, and more, "female instructors of color" will refer Black women for the purpose of this study as the women represented in this study identify as African American/Black or biracial including African American.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore perceived credibility for female instructors of color at faith-based universities. Faith-based universities in this study can be specified as Evangelical Christian universities. A great number of identifiers characterize Evangelical Christianity including the stance that Jesus Christ is the one who brought atonement through death on the cross. Evangelical Christians also believe in the imperative that people be converted from sin to salvation. Evangelical Christians commit

themselves to partnering with God and his mission to reconcile the people back to him. But, finally, and more importantly for this study, Evangelicals believe the Bible to be the inspired word of God and final authority for Christian faith and practice (Anderson & Stetzer, 2016, p. 53). Evangelical Christianity and its commitment to the Bible as the sole Word of God is significant to this study because it gives this research more context for complex themes dealing with gender and leadership in this study.

Perceived credibility can be defined as a receiver-based evaluation or “the attitude of a receiver which references the degree to which a source is seen to be believable” (McCroskey, 1998, p. 80). If those in the academe grasp the construct of perceived credibility homophily, as compared to their students, they might likewise recognize “othering” language and/or behaviors from their students and those they interact with on campus (Vargas, 1999). Another construct of credibility, standpoint theory, points to the collection of knowledge people possess when having gone through a struggle of deprivation or lack of privilege (Kronsell, 2005). Because standpoint theory is closely related to the concept of bias, it might be challenging for students to distinguish the difference. Students might be confronted with a competent female instructor of color, but in some contexts might confuse their standpoint for bias. My study will aim to point out the distinction between these concepts and the challenges that might arise before distinguishing the two. With an awareness of standpoint theory and its close relationship to instructor bias, both students and instructors will have a better grasp on how these concepts play a significant role in perceived credibility. What will differentiate this study from previously conducted research is the focus on the faith-based university. The faith-based university setting is rich in differentiating characteristics of the overall culture,

values, and faith integration in both casual dialogue and course content. In a close exploration of the Evangelical Christian university, I attempt to reveal barriers to credibility for female instructors of color as well as present ways female instructors of color continue to overcome those barriers at their university.

### **Significance of Study**

Exposing the complexities of perceived credibility proves its importance as research describes credibility to be a receiver phenomenon having little, if anything, to do with the speaker's preparedness or expertise. This study looks to uncover how a female instructor of color might improve her perceived credibility when many aspects of credibility are not in her control. Additionally, it is important to address and counter perception bias because it is natural for students to let perception become their complete understanding when processing information from class to class. A considerable amount of research discusses the experiences of female faculty of color in predominantly White institutions (PWI) and focuses on "authority, teaching competency, and scholarly expertise" (Pittman, 2010). Throughout my study I reference the work of Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, and Frey (2009), López and Johnson (2014), Pittman (2010), Patton (1999), Hendrix (1997), and many others. These scholars have conducted a significant amount of research within the field of instructor credibility and work to expose those barriers their research participants overcome. The societal contribution I hope this study makes is two-fold. First, I aim to improve academicians' concept of the multifaceted nature of perceived credibility. Second, I hope to address and counter perception biases for female instructors of color in the classroom. Studying the evangelical university adds another layer of depth, providing instructors with a repertoire of tools to use when their



perceived credibility is challenged in the classroom. Whether the instructors participating in my study have an end goal of better understanding credibility, classroom bias, or a related topic, I hope these instructors find some level of value throughout this research process as they offer many of their experiences to better inform educators to come.

### **Phenomenological Perspective**

Considered the philosophy of experience, phenomenology will operate as the theoretical perspective for understanding the experiences of female instructors of color and their perceived credibility (Stoller, 2009). Two defining aspects of phenomenon as offered by Creswell (2013) include first, an emphasis on a singular concept or idea. “Perceived credibility” works as the focus of this study; however, a spectrum of concepts exist for phenomenological analysis including “guilt,” “depression,” “surviving cancer,” etc. To illustrate, researchers often use phenomenological analysis as a framework to study the healthcare industry, exploring the experiences of both patients and family members coping with medical trauma. Creswell then establishes the need to study a heterogenous group who has experienced the same phenomenon. For example, health researchers Sallis and Birkin (2014) studied the effects depression has on a person’s work attendance. Based on their collection of experiences, they found that health and work beliefs influence a person’s “sickness absence decisions.” Participants contributed personal accounts of this phenomenon to establish results and implications of this study. Phenomenology works for this study as researchers in this type of inquiry collect accounts of those experiencing that particular phenomenon (depression) and provide those accounts to a population who is unfamiliar with it. Phenomenological analysis of the experiences of female instructors of color will work to achieve a similar goal.

Creswell (2013) explains psychological phenomenological framework as “less focused on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of participants” (p. 80). Additionally, he describes Husserl’s (1859 - 1938) ideas on bracketing where researchers allow themselves to deliberately and intentionally take a “fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (p. 80). In his application of the scientific method for examining conscious experience, Edmond Husserl developed the study of phenomena and groups who experience them similarly. Phenomenology tries to explore a shared phenomenon experienced by a group as it blurs the lines between objectivity and subjectivity. One school of thought in this area of research rejects the idea of objectivity, premising this goal unreachable. In the same manner as Husserl, Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) rejects the need or possibility of objectivity, believing the world around us shapes our understanding far more than we are regularly conscious of. Bringing this concept to life in *Truth and Method* (1960), he discusses hermeneutical experience, or the belief that our many experiences challenge our assumptions and “if we are open to what is going on, our awareness expands and our understanding [ . . . ] evolves” (Craig & Muller, 2007, p. 220). Phenomenological analysis is an appropriate lens to study perceived credibility of female faculty of color. The need to be perceived as credible is essential for instructors, can be challenging to obtain for a female instructor, and can be exceptionally challenging for female instructors of color. Because this circumstance is unique to those experiencing it, it creates a prime framework through which to conduct this study.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Perceived credibility can be defined as the receiver-based evaluation. Perceived credibility can be defined as the receiver-based evaluation or “the attitude of a receiver which references the degree to which a source is seen to be believable” (McCroskey, 1998, p. 80). When instructors “know the part, act the part, and look the part” they have increased credibility in the classroom (Obermiller, Ruppert, & Atwood, 2012, p. 153). Instructors value being perceived as credible sources, as reports of high credibility are seen to have a positive impact on student performance outcomes (Goodboy & Myers, 2009; LeFebvre & Allen, 2014; Velez & Cano, 2008; Miller, Katt, Brown, & Sivo, 2014; Witt, Schrodt, Wheelless, & Bryand, 2014). Instructors who prove themselves credible will be more trustworthy from the learner’s perspective and as a result, perform better believing they are receiving relevant and true information from their instructors (Myers & Bryant, 2004). Over the past several years, researchers have developed findings on many of the factors that influence an instructor’s credibility. Some of this research points to instructors demonstrating their savvy, knowledge, or content expertise of the field in which he or she is instructing (Myers & Bryant, 2004). One of the ways an instructor proves her expertise is by balancing instructor argumentativeness as opposed to aggressiveness (Myers & Rocca, 2001). This section outlines argumentativeness versus

aggressiveness and complexities that arise in distinguishing the two. Similarly to this important distinction, many researchers argue the importance for an instructor to demonstrate fairness and lack of bias when confronting subjects such as race and diversity (Morgan Consoll & Marin, 2016). This review argues for the overlooked complexity of bias and its association with standpoint theory. Furthermore, it engages a conversation about intersectionality and how a woman of color has multiple identifiers that marginalize her in the classroom. I discuss how such marginalization is exacerbated due to lack of representation on campus. Some of this research points to affective (relating to mood, feelings, and attitudes) behaviors and the immediacy a professor might demonstrate with their students. I conclude by discussing a final, related concept to instructor immediacy— instructor homophily, or commonality students perceive to have with their instructors as it relates to beliefs and attitudes (Myers & Huebner, 2011, p. 85). I go on to discuss the perceived difference between instructor and student that might be present due to lack of homophily. A study conducted to gather concepts of the "ideal professor" found gender differences in students' perceptions. The survey in this study showed that the ideal professor "places great emphasis on the integration of faith and learning," which is a large part of what this study unfolds (Woods, Badzinski, Fritz, & Yeates, 2012, p. 11). While this is not an exhaustive list of the influential areas of credibility, each theme discusses an aspect worth exploring as it relates to my specific study of credibility and female instructors of color in the faith-based university.

### **Instructor Argumentativeness**

Observing ways students evaluate an instructor's competence, Myers and Bryant (2004) emphasize the idea of "content expertise" (p. 24). They describe how instructors

who are effective in “providing examples, having a command of the material, having experience with the material, answering and encouraging student questions, demonstrating knowledge beyond the textbook, and providing ‘real world’ examples,” to name a few features (p. 24). Turocy (2015) compares expert teachers to novice teachers, describing primary differences in their instruction patterns and states, “expert teachers have deep foundations of factual and theoretical knowledge, understanding the facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and action” (p. 329). Demonstrating levels of argumentativeness as opposed to aggressiveness is how instructors improve their perceived credibility among students. Hendrix (1997) posed that to be a credible professor, instructors should be knowledgeable but should also be “able and willing to share knowledge with others in a respectful, challenging, and fun way” (p. 257). Argumentativeness reflects the “challenging” aspect of the description Hendrix provides, encouraging instructors to respectfully disagree with a student’s perspective. In this way, pedagogical research makes a distinction between instructor argumentativeness and instructor aggressiveness. Myers and Rocca (2001) explain instructor argumentativeness as a significant tool in improving student motivation, while aggressiveness discourages student state motivation and “negatively contributes to student perceptions of classroom climate” (p. 131). Edwards and Myers (2007) indicate that students appreciate argumentative instructors who are able to “refute another person’s position, with the locus of attack centered on the individual’s position on an issue” as opposed to ad hominem attack (or attack on the person) (p. 47). Argumentative students perceive this arguing as an “exciting intellectual challenge” and an opportunity for competition (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 73).

Research clearly defines classroom argument as a positive classroom behavior, but some instructors attribute value to what might be seen as aggressive behaviors. Brown (2002) overviews her experience at Georgetown University, and describes the usefulness of anger to approach challenging discussions on diversity, gender, race, and violence. She argues for the space to express anger in the classroom. For those who have experienced oppression in this country as she talks about “the usefulness of anger by converting the discomfort found in moments where we discuss sensitive issues to opportunities for radical pedagogy” (p. 89). And it is Black Feminist Autoethnography (BFA) that similarly makes a case for why rage and anger is imperative to the discussion to “critically narrate the pride and pain of Black womanhood” (Griffin, 2012, p. 138). However, a significant issue does arise for Black female instructors who decide to use anger in pursuit of radical pedagogy. Historically, Black women have been stereotyped in U.S. mainstream culture as “aggressive, ill tempered, illogical, overbearing, hostile,” and the list continues (Ashley, 2014, p. 27). When aggressiveness or anger is a tool for conversations involving race, diversity, power, oppression, etc., Black female instructors simultaneously and consciously fight against prevalent stereotypes of Black women in the U.S. While instructor argumentativeness can be seen as a positive and more constructive trait, lines between argumentativeness and aggressiveness are likely blurred for the female instructor of color as she looks to argue in her predominantly White classroom.

### **Instructor Bias**

The assumption of bias is just one of many considerations for female instructors of color in their predominately White universities and currently research does not address

the perception of credibility for a female instructor of color arguing in a faith-based university context. What the research does show is that women of color face a particular questioning about the bias they bring into the classroom (Mottet, Parker-Raley, Beebe, & Cunningham, 2007; Glascock & Ruggiero, 2006; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009; Closson, Bowman, & Merriweather, 2014; Hendrix, 1997; Schueths, Gladney, Crawford, Bass, & Moore, 2013; Anderson & Smith (2005)). A 2013 study found female instructors of color named “more biased than their White, male counterparts teaching a similar curriculum” (Schueths et. al., p. 1271). In a related study, female instructors of color recount their experiences of being assumed biased in their area of instruction, especially and specifically when the course relates to diversity (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wong, 2011). Based on perceptions of student evaluators, Smith and Anderson (2005) discussed a finding that women who teach courses on gender experience skepticism from their students, believing their instructor aims to promote their own political agenda. Knowing the way they position themselves affects the classroom culture, female instructors constantly “question their position,” while the question remains, “Do instructors of color position themselves on the inside, outside, or the periphery of both the inside and the outside simultaneously?” (Closson, Bowman, & Merriweather, 2014, p. 86). A student perceiving that an instructor of color has not carefully considered his or her perspective is likely to perceive that instructor as biased and in turn see that instructor as not credible. Additionally, instructors are likely to face “resistance to the material, defensiveness, managing differing student expectations and responses, and low course ratings” (Morgan Consoll & Marin, 2016, p. 146). Furthermore, Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, and Frey (2009) note that due to this

speculation of bias the student will be resistant to learning in some departments or programs. A great deal of research establishes bias as a construct that one cannot completely eliminate, only go to great lengths to reduce. However, deliberately reducing bias is problematic for the instructor who needs her bias to be effective and credible in her subject matter. Research points back to standpoint theory to determine how that necessary bias manifests.

### **Instructor Standpoint**

Standpoint theory is a framework through which to study perspectives of those who are systemically oppressed or have a history of being systemically oppressed (Crasnow, 2009). This framework allows for analysis of a person's life and situation, which bring them to their understanding of the world, especially their current context, society, and environment. In his study of standpoint theory, Rouse (2009) emphasizes power relations from one's specific standpoint and offers a description stating that "the exercise of power and the maintenance of relatively stable alignments of power relations affects which aspects of the world are visible" (p. 203). Studying a person's worldview is an essential component of standpoint theory, and many scholars find it effective to study social groups fighting through a struggle of some sort. Solomon (2009) emphasizes the necessary and implicit activity of standpoint arguing, "standpoint is something that knowers do, actively, rather than something knowers have, that describes their (passive) epistemic situation" (p. 232). She then emphasizes political awareness of power relationships between social groups and claims that through this awareness and action, arises "political resistance or political challenge" (Solomon, 2009, p. 232). Feminist perspectives are often applied to standpoint theory. Political scientist Kronsell (2005)



offers a crucial and relevant facet of standpoint theory as it is the “argument that important knowledge is generated through the struggle of the deprived and less privileged; it is produced through the dynamics of the experience of being oppressed” (p. 288). Adler and Jermier (2005) further this discussion that the “view from below” allows for more comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge (p. 943). Dougherty (2002) discusses the need for diversity courses to be taught by those who “live the experience,” such as instructors of color (p. 63). Similarly Closson, Bowman, and Merriweather (2014) emphasize students’ expectation that race-based courses be taught by instructors of color. From this perspective, instructors of color might be perceived as more credible, considering their “outsider-within” perspective developed in Black feminist literature. In his discussion of standpoint theory, Rolin (2009) considers the outsider’s value as “unprivileged with respect to their social positions, [but] likely [. . .] privileged with respect to gaining knowledge of social reality” (p. 219). While this conceptualization puts a positive perspective on bias and its relationship to standpoint theory, it births a challenge for the female instructor of color deciding whether or not to expose bias, introduce her perspective, and incite a thoughtful and challenging argument in the classroom. And although the expectation is that she teaches diversity or related courses and utilizes her credibility building standpoint, she risks losing credibility and being seen as biased when she discusses these matters. Standpoint theory causes critical theorists to look through the lens of a marginalized society to understand worldviews from this perspective, but how does that questioning play out for a classroom that perceives an instructor’s bias before her standpoint? Standpoint theory also challenges researchers to

examine how oppression occurs and exposes how oppression is undermined in settings such as the classroom.

### **Instructor Intersectionality/Multiple Marginality**

Crenshaw (1991) was the first to conceptualize intersectionality and its ability to identify limitations of the “either/or binary” regarding the way “societal values foster the creation of social hierarchies that privilege some and marginalize others” (Cook & Williams, 2015, p. 60). Researchers describe the way intersectionality confronts multiple inequalities and defines the areas where these inequalities meet (MacKinnon, 2013). Turner, Gonzales, and Wong (2011) also emphasize “multiple marginality” as the cause of women having their stories and experiences untold in research, while women instructors of color face feelings of “isolation, marginalization, and resistance” by White faculty and White students (Turner, Gonzales, & Wong, 2011, p. 200). Research identifies marginalized status is a variable that causes female educators of color to be perceived as less credible by their students (Russ, Simmonds, & Hunt, 2002). With these findings, I argue that female instructors of color face two barriers in being both a person of color and being a woman. Turner (2002) discusses the effects of gender and race, [a university’s] ability to cause more pressure in the work environment for female faculty of color, believing that “being both minority and female hampers their success as faculty members” (p. 79). Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, and Frey (2009) continue a discussion of the reality for instructors of color as having distinct worldviews and social standpoints as a result of holding multiple oppressed social statuses and experiencing feelings of physical and intellectual isolation. Physical and intellectual isolation, I argue, is not the result of being a part of what we identify as a marginalized group in the United States,

but instead this isolation is the result of being a part of the numerical minority in a PWI, the Evangelical Christian university.

### **Representation of Female Instructors of Color**

Another finding related to instructor credibility has to do with representation of female instructors of color at their faith-based university. Female instructors of color are experience vast underrepresentation on two accounts. First, female instructors of color experience underrepresentation in the academy as whole. Wilder, Osborne-Lampkin, and Jackson (2015) refer to it as “the most segregated professions of employment.” They note that in 2007,

77% of full-time faculty members nationwide were White (American Council on Education [ACE], 2010) a number comparable to the broader White population.

While Blacks make up roughly 13% of the total U.S. population, they represented only 5% of all full-time faculty at degree-granting institutions in 2007.

Furthermore, in a critique of race in the academy, Alex-Assensoh (2003) emphasized the underrepresentation of faculty of color at PWI reporting that “Black, Latino, and Asian faculty are more likely to hold positions at community colleges and historically Black colleges and universities” (p. 5). Even with the increased representation of graduate and undergraduate students of color, the amount of faculty has remained largely unchanged (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009). Understanding the fact that faculty of color are less likely be found in higher educations gives way to understanding how female faculty of color are less likely to be found in the faith-based university system as it is a more specific and more niche educational preference, with less diversity and inclusion when compared to a public university without faith affiliation. Kissell (2014) discusses

underrepresentation of female faculty of color, explaining that when compared to the racially and ethnically diverse U.S. workforce, still “Christian colleges and universities more specifically have continued to be predominately White institutions that employ White men and women” (p. 8). Research has shown that disproportionate representation and unequal treatment of female faculty of color decreases student perception of the instructor’s credibility. In an overview of Black female faculty at predominantly White institutions, Harley (2007) describes how Black women at PWIs deal with “race fatigue as a result of being over extended and undervalued” (p. 19). In evaluating Christian Colleges and universities, Joeckel and Chesnes (2009) found female professors less likely to agree that female faculty and students are treated equally to male faculty and students (p. 115). Relating specifically to the Asian-American experience, Kim, Anderson, Lewis Hall, and Willingham(2010) describe discrimination and Christianity and the correlations found between religious piety and “ethnocentrism, dogmatism, rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, and specific forms of prejudice” (p. 455). Being undervalued and treated unequally make it nearly impossible for female instructors of color to attain improved credibility as the numerical minority at her Christian university. This undervaluing and unequal treatment might be explained by looking at the concept of homophily and in-group bias.

### **Instructor Immediacy and Homophily**

Instructor immediacy is defined as a demonstration of verbal and nonverbal cues an instructor uses to create a feeling of closeness with his or her students. This immediacy occurs as a result of students being drawn toward “things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer” (Goodboy & Myers, 2009; LeFebvre & Allen, 2014). Students of

immediate instructors are said to have higher affective and cognitive learning, increased motivation, increased willingness to participate in class discussions, improved behavior outcomes, and a greater likelihood of completing their schooling (Goodboy & Myers, 2009; LeFebvre & Allen, 2014; Velez & Cano, 2008; Miller, Katt, Brown, & Sivo, 2014; Witt, Schrodt, Wheelless, & Bryand, 2014). Additionally, immediate instructors are perceived as caring and demonstrate warmth behaviors toward their students (Teven & Gorham, 1998; Teven & McCroskey, 1997; Velez & Cano, 2008). Studying experiences of international teaching assistants, Zhang (2014) argues that the key to establishing credibility is to first establish rapport with students. In her research, she found that building rapport has four focus areas: “understanding, openness, role modeling, and communication space” (p. 31). With the purpose of identifying what caring/warmth behaviors instructors must demonstrate, Gorham (1988) found that both verbal and nonverbal behaviors had an impact on students’ perceptions of instructor immediacy as well as student learning. Additionally, Mottet, Parker-Raley, Beebe, & Cunningham (2007) found in their research that “students who experience a highly immediate instructor also perceive the instructor to be more competent than students who experience a non-immediate instructor, regardless of course-workload demands” (p. 156).

Another concept related to instructor immediacy is the idea of instructor homophily, defined as “the extent to which students consider their instructors to share similar attitudes (i.e., shared beliefs, attitudes, and values) and backgrounds” (Myers & Huebner, 2011, p. 85). Additionally, homophily describes a person’s tendency to “interact with similar others” (Currarini & Mengel, 2016, p. 1). Rogers and Bhowmik (1971) indicated that a rise in homophily causes a subsequent increase in successfully

interpreted messages. Brann, Edwards, & Myers (2005) suggest that an instructor's teaching philosophy also affects student perceptions of their instructor credibility. This is because an instructor's teaching philosophy is manifested in their instruction methods. If the student perceives the instruction method to be effective, that might also cause an increase in successfully interpreted messages. Sorenson and Christophel (1992) propose that a similarity between instructor attitudes and student attitudes produces a greater probability instructors have of influencing attitudes, values, and behavior. Wheelless, Witt, Maresh, Bryand, and Schrodt (2011) discuss the relationship between student and instructor, arguing that when students perceive similarity between themselves and the instructor in background and attitude, students are more likely to “participate in class discussions, complete their homework, engage with peers, show teachers respect, and give teachers greater attention” (p. 318). Their research goes on to demonstrate that students who report a lower degree of homophily more often perceive their teacher to have less credibility, which may decrease student motivation (Wheelless, Witt, Maresh, Bryand, & Schrodt, 2011). In studying the implications of teacher diversity in higher education, Vargas (1999) explains that instructors of color face a particular challenge demonstrating immediacy with students from a White middle-class background. This challenge arises from instructors of color being perceived as “other,” a concept explored in this research describing any instructor who is perceived to have values, beliefs, and background that differs from student. It is this “otherness” that might make it difficult for instructors of color to engage in the same immediacy behaviors that a student might expect, as immediacy is “culturally anchored” (p. 365). In support of this notion, McCroskey and Richmond (1992) argue that a great of immediacy is established in

cultural behaviors as people have norms that influence different cultures. If a discrepancy exists between how a student perceives the instructor's immediacy behaviors, instruction method, and personhood versus how the instructor perceives her immediacy behaviors, instruction method, and personhood, the instructor is at risk for being perceived as less credible by her students. Not only might the instructor face decreased credibility, but the student also misses the opportunity obtain course content and instruction, believing homophilous difference exists in the classroom. The potential barrier represented here demonstrates how lack of homophily makes for a challenge in the faith-based university classroom for female instructors of color.

### **Summary**

This literature review serves as a framing of the questions considered for the study and an argument for why a qualitative study on the experience of gaining credibility is necessary. Researchers have studied credibility on numerous occasions. In a few cases, credibility for females of color have been examined. But only in very limited cases has research thoroughly and thoughtfully explored the female instructor of color and her experience gaining credibility in a faith-based university context. This literature review opened with a discussion of instructor argumentativeness as opposed to instructor aggressiveness. And while a vast amount of research poses the preference of argumentative behavior, other studies value anger and find it necessary for topics that warrant it, such as diversity, power, and oppression. An emergent challenge from that ideal is persuading a class that such a tone of anger is helpful and possibly necessary for the subject matter. Many female instructors of color instead balance tensions that result from controversial conversations, while simultaneously protecting her credibility. The tensions that exist include perceiving the instructor as biased in her instruction and unfair

in her facilitation of class discussion. The review continued with a conversation about standpoint theory and its relationship to bias, establishing how 1. Bias is a construct that one cannot eliminate fully and 2. Standpoint is necessary for the female instructor of color, specifically and especially if she is teaching a course or lesson on diversity, oppression, etc. I pose the question of how an instructor might effectively balance her standpoint and the bias she brings into the classroom. I ask the question – How much perspective is a female instructor of color expected to bring into her classroom and how much is she expected to leave at the door? The literature review then focuses on the multiple marginality of the female instructor of color and how this marginality plays out in a university setting in which she is not well represented. With a description of immediacy and homophily, I make an argument for how lack of representation actually devalues her presence on the faith-based university campus. I bring these findings together to not only address a gap in the literature, but construct a framework which serves as an initial step to understanding the experiences of female instructors of color gaining credibility at her faith-based university.



## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in an earlier section of the introduction, research shows that female instructors of color are often asked more exacting questions of their credentials, making credibility gain a unique challenge for many of them. These findings led me to the following research question: How do Black female instructors perceive their experience of gaining credibility in the faith-based university classroom? This research methodology section overviews the focal point of this research method: interviews with instructors who participated in this study. Here I also describe how phenomenology works as an appropriate framework in exploring the experiences of female instructors of color at their faith-based university, more specifically, Evangelical Christian universities. I discuss the research setting that I selected for this study and describe how I gained access given my affiliation with my current university. I go on to explain the sample, female instructors of color, and the sampling procedure. I utilized to recruit participants into this study. Next, I overview my process for data analysis, which was inserting the data in the NVivo software, and then assigning meaning to interview data. Verifying that my findings are representative of participants' accounts is another vital step that I go on to describe in this section. Finally, I conclude this section by discussing measures I took to ensure that all research was conducted ethically.

## Research Design

Research design for this qualitative inquiry included preliminary consideration calling me to review methodological congruence (Morse & Richards, 2002). Methodological congruence ensures that research methods are “interconnected and interrelated so that the study appears as a cohesive whole rather than as fragmented, isolated parts” (Creswell, 2013, p. 50). The literature review was conducted early in the study as a way to “document the importance of the research problem” and meet the needs of methodological congruence. The review included concepts of instructor credibility, considerations for female instructors of color, and concepts of the faith-based university. All preliminary considerations led to the research problem of female instructors of color gaining credibility in the faith-based university classroom. Other parts of this research design included my own reflection on my experiences gaining credibility in the faith-based university classroom. Reflexivity was an essential component of this study as it is a method to becoming "self-aware and thus able to see any influences that could affect data collection or analysis" (Clancy, 2013, p. 12). As a graduate teaching assistant at my current university, I had to separate my experiences from that of a participant instructor. My personal history allows me to research this topic, but careful consideration allows me to study it by accounting for my own assumptions separately from those of my participants.

Research shows that there is great value in developing a phenomenological perspective through dialogue and conversation as the primary way of learning more about an experience. Philosopher Buber discusses the purpose of dialogue and its significance to the study of phenomenology describing the “direct, mutual awareness and openness to

one another as unique beings” (Craig & Muller, 2007, p. 217). Procedures for conducting phenomenological research as offered by Creswell (2013) include first determining if the research problem “is best examined using a phenomenological approach” (p. 81). He offers Table 4.1 Contrasting Characteristics of Five Qualitative Approaches to distinguish varying methods (Creswell, 2013, p. 104 - 105). The type of problem best suited for this design is the need to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon. In this case the lived phenomenon is gaining credibility. Because this particular study focused on the essence of experience, a phenomenological approach worked most appropriately as I opened myself to the experiences of female instructors of color. This form of data collection allows me to explore these experiences in depth.

### **Research Setting and Access**

Because this study explores instructors’ experiences gaining credibility in the Christian university classroom, this was the setting for my study. As mentioned previously, faith-based university can be specified as Evangelical Christian university. A total of three universities were included in this study and for confidentiality purposes in line with Institutional Review Board ethical considerations, those universities will not be named. The three universities are located in both the southern and southwestern U.S. regions and are small to medium-sized, 4-year, private institutions identifying as Christian universities. I focused my search on universities that welcome students who sought out their university based on its Christian values and practices, e.i. university-hosted chapel, in class prayer time, required Bible courses, and a general acceptance and promotion of Evangelical Christian values and principles. I made this choice in an attempt to make a distinction between credibility gaining for female instructors of color

in this environment as opposed to credibility gaining experiences at a public university, for example. Participants who expressed interest in the study were included based on their interests; thus, their university was included in the study.

In some cases, gaining access to universities was a challenge because there was no relationship between that university and myself. That is, there was no network with which to connect us. If there was no network to connect that university and myself, my email solicitation went without response or the response was that no instructor in that university met my research criteria. None of those universities or instructors were represented in the study. In other cases, knowing someone or knowing someone who knows someone in the university served as a connecting network. Where there was a connecting network, there was an instructor who was able to participate in the study. These universities and instructors are represented in the study. In one case, a faculty member offered to publish a request for my study on a Facebook group that she was a part of. This solicitation allowed instructors to be a part of my study based solely on their interests. Qualifying instructors who expressed interest were able to be a part of the study. To garner interest in this study, potential participants received an information sheet explaining my study and its rationale. After the instructor agreed to learn more about the study, they received an informed consent document, which informed them of the format as well potential risks of the study. Although gaining access was a challenge as the study began, the relationship between these three Christian universities made them more accessible to me as I utilized an already existing network to request participation. Full recruitment materials can be found in Appendix B.

### **Sampling and Sampling Procedure**

A total of six participants were included in this study. All participants identified as African-American or biracial (including African-American) with three or more years of full-time teaching experience. They instruct from social science disciplines including Social Work, Public Relations, Business Management, and Conflict Resolution. It is important to mention how women participating in this study all teach from disciplines that value themes such as whole-person growth and community, which are themes in this studied, to be discussed in the findings. Additionally, it is important to mention that these women instruct from the types of disciplines that make them more vulnerable to assumptions of bias and credibility challenges. The social nature of these disciplines leave more gray area for discussion, ambiguity, argument, and disagreement than that of hard sciences and mathematics. Creswell (2013) argues the importance of making three considerations as researchers decide their method of sampling: participants in the sample, types of sampling, and sample size. Included in this study was a mixed method for sampling which included first, snowball or chain sampling. Because female instructors of color are limited in the faith-based university system, I reached out to few specific individuals that were referred to me through this snowball recruiting. This type of recruitment identifies “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (p. 158). In one interview case, a participant linked me via e-mail with several other instructors who shared similar experiences at their Christian university. The second method used in this study included criterion sampling, which deals with “cases that meet some criterion and is useful for quality assurance (Creswell, p. 158).” Through criterion sampling, I ensured that all members of my study meet the

following criteria: a woman, an instructor (adjunct, teaching assistant, or faculty), and a person of color. As a result of the specific nature of this study, it was imperative that I use a weeding-out process to negate participation of any non-persons of color and males for “quality assurance” (Creswell, 2013, p. 158). Considered the norm for qualitative research, small participant research was used for this study for deeper understanding and thoughtful data analysis.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

I conducted all interviews in a semi-structured format, beginning with general, or grand tour, questions and continuing with more in-depth questions based on the study’s focus. Four interviews were conducted face-to-face, two interviews were conducted via video conference, and one interview was conducted over the phone. Each interview ranged from 50-75 minutes and each loosely followed the same interview guide. Creswell (2013) writes on the process of collecting data from a phenomenological perspective, which asks broad questions including, “What have you experienced in terms of [being a female instructor of color at a predominately White faith-based university?]” and “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of [instructing in this university setting?]” (p. 79). The absence of a value language in each of these questions allows the participant to take the conversation in the direction of their choosing. After the first few grand tour questions, I asked other questions regarding instructor’s experiences: 1. How do you build rapport with your students? 2. How do you demonstrate liking/warmth behavior with your students? 3. Describe the courses you instruct. 4. Describe the courses you have instructed dealing with race, politics diversity, culture, etc. 5. Have you ever been challenged in class or outside of class? 6. What has

been your experience with students challenging your expertise in class or outside of class? 7. Describe your feelings after being challenged in your instruction. At times, it was appropriate to veer away from the interview guide. I followed up with all answers given to draw more conversation based on what the participant wanted to discuss further. All conversations were recorded on iPhone's Voice Memo application and uploaded to NVivo for transcription. Full interview protocol can be found in Appendix D.

### **Data Analysis**

After transcribing all seven participant interviews, I analyzed these interviews utilizing the same method, which included finding significant statements, meaning units, textural/structural description, and the description of essence. The initial analysis step, finding significant statements, allowed me to include nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements. Assigning significant statements or codes to interview data allowed me to clearly understand what the participant was describing. This allowed me to categorize and organize these codes in a latter part of the analysis process. Using the NVivo software, I organized these codes and began grouping them into broader meaning units, which became key themes in the study. Analysis continued as I created a textural/structural description of what participants experienced. I wrote a description of "what" the participants in the study experienced with the phenomenon ("textural description" of the experience) (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). This served as an opportunity to describe what the instructor experienced and here, I also included verbatim examples. Creswell suggests researchers create a description of how the experience happened, or what he refers to as a "structural description" (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). This structural description worked as a tool for reflection upon the setting and context of the questioned

credibility. Using NVivo to organize ideas in this step of the process, I considered participant experiences, providing a description of how the experience happened. Many of this study's key themes have NVivo notes that include a structural description of participant experiences – How they come to experience what they do. The final step in this phenomenological analysis was to write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. Bringing both the textural and structural descriptions to the larger meaning units, or themes, allowed for a better grasp of what is considered the essence of the experience of participant instructors.

### **Research Validity**

This study included four methods to ensure validity – verbatim transcriptions, external auditing, member checking, and bracketing. A focus on verbatim transcriptions is important for this qualitative study as I gathered the specific and unique experiences from my participants. Using NVivo software, I slowed each interview down to 25% of its regular speed, which allowed me to accurately type and record participant experiences they described in each interview. Before I attributed any meaning to the experiences they described, I recorded their words, laughter, and long pauses. Because the next few parts of the analysis process allowed me to attribute meaning to participant statements, the next validity-building method, member checking is a significant and crucial step in this qualitative research. I developed a composite description of the participants' experiences, or key themes, and then I used member checking to verify that findings closely resonated with instructors' experiences. To do this, I organized a bulleted list of key themes and emailed this list to three of the seven participants in my study, who were selected at random. These participants reviewed the bulleted list and confirmed that the



findings closely reflected both the conversations we had in the interview and their own experiences in the classroom. Another validity building method was the external audit conducted by the faculty advisor overseeing my research. For this external audit, my advisor evaluated and critiqued my coding method, directing me to eliminate and/or combine themes. This allowed for better continuity as I processed mutually exclusive codes and developed clear themes for the study. A final validity building method was bracketing, a technique to become more aware of my own assumptions and biases in this subject. By writing a full description of my experiences as a female instructor of color in my university, I was able to differentiate my experiences from that of my participant instructors. While I did see some overlap regarding those experiences, I worked to distinguish which experiences were my own and which the instructor who participated in this study described in the interview.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations included an expedited review from my university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before beginning this study. As a process of recruiting participants, I gave an initial research request via e-mail and attached an informed consent document as approved by the IRB (Approval letter in Appendix A). This informed consent document included the purpose of the study, a statement of the limited and minimal risks of participating in the study, assurance of confidentiality for the participant, and a notice of recruit's voluntary participation. Risks for participating in the study were minimal for participants. One risk included possible feelings of discomfort about events in the past or anxiety about teaching situations in the future. The informed consent document also included a statement of the participant's option to end the

interview at any time or withdrawal from her participation in the study, should she feel the need. Another risk included breach of confidentiality. To ensure as much confidentiality as possible, I removed all personally identifiable information from transcripts and reports that resulted from the interviews and kept all interview transcripts and recordings on a password protected computer, where only I have access capabilities. Portions of my transcriptions were shared with my primary research advisor during face-to-face coding analysis meetings only after removing personally identifiable information.

Phenomenology is a significant framework with which to study female instructors of color and their experience of gaining credibility in the Evangelical Christian university classroom. It is the discursive, conversational approach that made phenomenological analysis fitting for this qualitative study. These instructors shared a similar experience in their respective universities, and these experiences came together to provide data that adds a richer, more in-depth understanding of this experience. The setting for this study was unique as each university included in this study prides itself on its ability to distinguish itself from other universities via its Christian affiliation. Because of this related affiliation, I was able to gain access to these universities and draw conclusions based on similarities that instructors revealed in each interview. For this study's sampling method, I considered the participants in the sample, which included seven female instructors of color. I also took the types of sample into account by including only women who have experience in a Evangelical Christian university setting. And finally, I took into account the sample size, which was limited. This allowed me to go into further depth in the analysis. Data collection procedures included interviews that were conducted in a semi-structured format, which gave me structure to collect the same data, but flexibility

to gather more information than what I initiated in this study. Data collection was completed after a full transcription of all interview conversations. Analysis of the interview data encompassed finding significant statements, meaning units, and developing a textural/structural descriptions. Validity building included verbatim transcriptions, external auditing, member checking, and bracketing. Finally, ethical considerations were made through an IRB review. This review ensured that the research conducted serves my population. Together, the research design, setting, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and validity building worked together to bring forth sound results and key themes for this research study. Informed consent document can be found in Appendix C.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Based on my analysis of the interview data, these seven female instructors of color at their Christian universities perceive their experiences as positive ones, and although they often have barriers to gaining credibility involving student attitudes and a negotiation of their credibility among those students, many experience open-mindedness and change in their students over the course of the semester. I will elaborate on this by discussing five core themes that emerged through my data analysis process: 1) Perceptions of university culture; 2) Faith integration; 3) Student attitudes; 4) Instructor attitudes and behaviors; 5) Instructor self-concepts. Within the first theme, Perceptions of university culture, are four sub-themes having to do with the a) supportive community, b) comparison to other university, c) low diversity, and d) religious uniformity and traditionalism. Within the second theme, faith integration, emerged three sub-themes – a) a divine calling to teach, b) seamless integration of faith in the course, and c) challenges integrating faith in the course. In the third theme, student attitudes, emerged four sub-themes including a) students bring assumption and bias, b) intimidation, c) discomfort, and d) open-mindedness. In the fourth theme, instructor attitudes and behavior, there were three sub-themes – a) allowing students their own perspectives b) challenging students' perspectives, and c) identifying teaching opportunities. Then, from the fifth and final theme of self-concepts emerged the subthemes a) intersectionality, b) self-doubt, c) self-confidence. All five of these themes overviewed instructors' experiences gaining

credibility at their faith-based university. Throughout this section, I describe in detail how these themes relate to each instructor's experience gaining credibility in their university's classroom. All quotes included in this section were from personal communication between myself and the instructor during our research interview.

### **Perceptions of University Culture**

When describing how female instructors of color perceive credibility gaining in their faith-based university classroom, a reasonable place to begin is with a description of their university, as university culture plays a large part in the classroom experience. What the university says in both overt and covert ways about female instructors of color and their credibility is apparent in the universities culture. Likewise, there are situations based on the university's culture that promote credibility gaining as well as negate credibility gaining. In this theme of university culture, instructors described their perception of their university as well as situations they have experienced at their university. In this major theme, I discovered four sub-themes including supportive community, comparison language to other universities, low diversity, and religious uniformity and traditionalism. In many descriptions of these sub-themes was a subsequent emphasis on the credibility gaining problems associated with them. Each interview began with a grand tour question. I asked, "What is it like to teach at your university?" To answer this question, many instructors described the culture of their university.

#### **Supportive, Whole-Person Focused Community**

In this theme, instructors pointed to a "supportive community," which was detailed through several descriptions found in the interviews. Some instructors painted their university as supportive in the way administration encourages collaboration and creativity in their instructors. Instructor 3 noted the "academic and departmental

freedom” she experiences because she was never pressured by “a lot of over-arching cultural similarities.” That is to say that she did not feel bound by many expectations of the university – cultural, religious, or otherwise. Another instructor, Instructor 5, discussed the freedom she felt in being “flexible.” In her experience with her university, she enjoyed not being “micromanaged” in her workplace, but possessing the ability to “bring hip hop in the classroom,” and genuinely “be herself.”

Instructor 4 talked of her university’s culture as being very “peaceful, kind, and conscious.” She described the divine calling that is upon her and all who attend her university.

It's a great place to teach. The community/culture here is very peaceful, very kind, and very conscious of what the call is for Christians and how we are to behave, how we are to interact with each other. It's a very kind, peaceful type culture.

In reflection of her experience instructing at her Christian university, Instructor 5 defined the campus culture as being supportive because of her ability to participate with other organizations. In various ways, she valued the campus culture as being one of support and collaboration stating, “From an instructor’s perspective, I felt community, I felt supported, I felt flexibility to fully participate in different organizations and collaborate with others. The culture was just . . . I keep saying ‘community’ so it's that.” Instructor 1 echoed a comparable sentiment of Instructor 5 in an earlier passage. She discussed how the university possesses a unique family feel as encouraged by the university administration. To describe the administration-promoted “family” feel, Instructor 1 explained the process of how this comes about:

It's the plan that administration come up with to guide the next five years, for example, or the next ten or twenty years. Because everything is intentional.

While the authenticity of the university might be called into question given their intentionality of achieving a “family feel,” it is clear that this feeling is valuable for a number of these Instructors and their students. From a slightly different perspective, Instructor 3 also talked of her experience specifically in the classroom as having contributed to her overall experience with her university. Because Instructor 3 is able to engage in a sharing with her class and encourages her class to share their experiences with one another, she emphasized the value in having this type of community.

In the social work field, students are coming in and saying ‘I had to call CPS about this kid’s family’ or ‘my client died.’ I have a student right now who is at hospice so she is having clients die regularly. They’re experiencing some really meaningful things together. At the end of that class, I typically provide all the food for the students. I have them say their favorite things and I’ll provide one thing that everyone likes. They’ll come together and do what I call moments of excellence.

Another finding pairs well with the concept of the supportive, familial community and that is the concept of whole-person growth. Many instructors not only feel the need to teach their students the course content, but to fulfill a number of roles for their student. Some instructors described that in filling many roles, the student becomes a well-rounded person. Instructor 5 explained her faculty experience, as she was involved in a spiritual development group for new faculty on campus. This points to the university’s belief in whole person growth, not only for the student, but for the instructor as well. Instructor 4 expounded upon this idea.

I think in this environment, the mentoring is from a holistic standpoint. I'm not only supposed to be in a role where I am teaching you and giving you education, but I'm also giving you empowerment. In addition to empowerment as a mentor, I'm more concerned about your personal and spiritual well-being.

She continued to discuss her concept of holistic development for the student and reiterated her university's focus on "relationships with students through prayer." Furthermore, she stated, "I try to make sure I ask students questions so they know that I am concerned about them as an individual." In this way, Instructor 3 noted a final finding regarding the campus culture as a supportive community and its emphasis on whole-person growth.

No matter where they're from, what they have been taught, how they feel, what they may have experienced, is that they are in an environment here at [this university] where they can learn how to be whole.

### **Comparison to Other Universities**

In a similar way, Instructor 1 described her campus culture as a valuable place to be when challenged with something because "people come together and help." This instructor explained her faith-based university in comparison to other universities in which she has taught. She continued by noting that in her university "there's probably a lot less competition [within] departments."

In other organizations, other universities, faculty members will compete and here we really don't have that much competition. People are generally supportive.

Instructor 4 also discussed her university by way of comparison to the general culture of other universities. She described the community feeling and the warmth she presents to her student. She said displaying this warmth is "a part of [her] job" especially on her



faith-based campus. She noted that because “you can get cold and distant anywhere else,” one her roles is to be a support in the way she relates to her students. Another participant, Instructor 2, described her university in comparison to other universities.

I was going to say that I don't have a real comparison. I do since I did teach at a [state university] for a while. It is as different as you would think it would be [from] a public university especially considering [the other university] is a research institution, so it's large and it has a focus. This is the first liberal arts type of environment that I've taught in. It's different because your focus is on developing the whole person. This was not the focus at [the other state university]. Not that one is bad and one is good, I just think every institution has to define its market.

She continued with the differences between her faith-based university and the other public, research-based university by describing the competing values found in the culture of her university. She explained the negotiation process between understanding the values of the university and understanding the values of academia asking, “how do you make sure that you are faithful in your service [to your university] considering that there is this culture?” Through this she pointed out her “contesting of the academic process.” She said there is a “culture here with a long heritage that is somehow part of another culture” and further described a “community beyond academics.” She continued with a unique definition of “ownership” that she recognizes at her university.

Ownership is something that I haven't yet quite determined why. Other than the fact that I hear a lot of "our school." I'm thinking about, ‘What is that,’ because I didn't hear that when I was at a larger institution. It was more like, ‘This institution resides and then I come and I operate under an existing institution.’ I

hear students say our school, our institution as though they have owned it for a long time, and so I guess I was thrown the first time I heard that. I actually thought I had been here longer than the student had [laughter], but there was something about the ownership of that student even before they arrived.

Instructors were able to describe the culture of their university when they had another university to compare it to. In many cases, the instructor did have experiences at public state universities so they could accurately describe those differences. Another facet of their university that many instructors went on to describe talked about the demographics of their university.

### **Low Diversity**

Many instructors described their university as lacking ethnic diversity in the areas of faculty and student representation on campus. While religious uniformity might also fit into this sub-theme, instructors described that frequently enough to be further explored within its own sub-theme for areas related to instructor credibility. Many participants in this study noted the low diversity found in their university. After noting this fact, many went on to describe the challenges they face as a result of the lack of diversity.

To begin, Instructor 3 described her faith-based university as having “not a lot of racial diversity.” Other instructors defined why that is problematic not only in their instruction, but more primarily in the context of larger university situations (such as events, meetings, etc.). Instructor 6 reflected on her experience being “roped into” a racial conversation at her university where she was made the “token for the months of January and February.” She recalled being called to attend a number of conversations involving race and be the expert on race issues.

There was at least one or more times when I didn't do it, felt bad about it. It would cause me to become emotionally rattled in ways that I was not comfortable with and it seemed to compromise my ability to be professional. I was asked by a dear colleague to come address students and I should have been paying attention, but it was February and you know how that went. I walked into the room, there were maybe 15 or 16 [students] because this is a small cohort. Maybe three women in the room, maybe two African American individuals, one male and one female. They were all there and it was kind of . . . 'Tell me about your experience here. What is it like to be African American and teaching?' I started answering it and getting angry and I'm like, 'OK, with whom am I angry? Am I angry at my colleague? Am I angry because once again I'm sitting here as the Black woman schooling you. Why don't you open a book? I know what it's like to be White because I read your literature, watch your T.V. shows, I walk among you, why can't you do the reverse?' So, instead of having all this self-talk, I think, 'Huh, those are things that I can actually put out and say so that I won't be put in that position.' So now, when I'm asked to speak, first off all, I have a rule: I don't speak from January 15 to the end of February. If you have never asked me to guest lecture in your class before, if you want me to guest lecture about race, I will not do it from January 15 to the end of February.

Instructor 1 went on to describe her position as one of the few faculty of color as she is called to partner in a number of projects with both faculty and students. She noted that instructors of color are often tasked with more responsibilities.

I think that people of color are often are busier on campuses like this, where there are not very many faculty and staff of color because a lot of the committees want

representation, they want diversity on the committee and so the few Black and Hispanic and Asian faculty members kind of get spread out to these different committees. Then the other part of it is students of color, whether they're in your department or not, go to the professors that they identify with. When students of color for example do a [...] project, a lot of times they want a professor of color to be their mentor but I don't know that the general population in administration realize how much more is demanded of faculty of color men and women.

Instructor 5 also addressed not having a very diverse population of students in her classes stating that her experience in the faith-based university was the “first time ever in all of [her] teaching where she did not have an African American student in her classroom.” Another instructor also talked about her navigation through a class without very much diversity.

I use other students a lot of the time. That's where it's a bummer when you don't have a very diverse sense of students. In whatever level you're talking about whether it's racially or gender or age or whatever.

Ethnic diversity was not the only prevalent sub-theme when it comes to the Christian university culture. Mentioned previously, lack of diversity is also seen in another form on some faith-based university campuses through religious uniformity and traditionalism.

### **Religious Uniformity and Traditionalism**

Religious uniformity and traditionalism is another emergent theme from the instructors' interview responses. Instructor 3 explained how “there was of course shared faith.” And while she said there was “a conservative way of experiencing and policy-ing faith,” she did not indicate any over-arching cultural similarities, which might mean she

does not feel tied down to religious expectations at her university. However, another instructor suggested more rigid expectations as she has observed at her university.

One of the things that I first experienced is just the cultural dissonance of being in an environment that is very strictly tied to a sort of dogmatic and theological view that I don't necessarily share.

While Instructor 6 spoke of overarching cultural expectations at her university, she explained how her identity intersections make the experience at her university “stimulating and rewarding.” She described her experience of “infusing [her] curricular opportunities to expand consciousness, then learning.”

From the sub-theme of religious uniformity, Instructor 4 discussed the caution instructors must exercise in order to be effective in their role, knowing that religious uniformity is becoming a thing of the past at her university.

It also comes with a little bit of challenge because you have to be very cognizant of the sensitivities [that] certain students may have. There's this consistent discussion about faith, Christianity, God, etc. I've seen our student body evolve over the past five years that I've been here into less students who have that kind of background or they don't always fit into the traditional model [...]. Constantly aware that the culture and environment is growing and you have to adapt to those students levels of understanding spiritually.

Finally, the concept of religious traditionalism is discussed in a few of the interviews.

Religious traditionalism points to instructors' descriptions of their university holding onto values that separate the roles of men from women. One instructor described how traditionalism plays out in the communication interactions between male and female faculty members.

There are some challenges with traditionalism and thinking that... it shouldn't be this way, but there is still unconscious bias about what women should be doing. And how important women are and how smart women are. That probably goes with race a little bit too maybe, I don't know. There's that traditionalism that is still here. [That] traditionalism that can be sometimes challenging. It's just that it's very implicit. It's hard to detect.

When it was once inappropriate for a woman to pray, lead worship, or speak in a public setting, some Evangelical Christian institutions are generally more accepting of this.

However, a number of institutions still hold to this traditionalism.

I think gender does have a lot to do with [traditionalism] in this faith-based setting. In this setting, we believe in roles, we believe in male and female gender roles as it connects to the Bible. We reinforce these roles; we see these roles enforced in this workspace.

In sum, the university culture plays a great deal into an instructor's overall experience in the classroom and with the university. Based on the provided data, instructors have positive feelings toward their university, as even challenges allow them to be stimulated toward successfully navigating their experiences. Many instructors described their university as promoting a community of support and one that might resemble a family. Additionally, participant instructors described the lack of diversity both in faculty and student population. On both ends, they discuss uncomfortable and compromising situations they have been in due to the lack of ethnic diversity. This can be a troubling factor in their gaining credibility – they will have to step forward with their own standpoint or speak to perspective that is not represented in their classroom. In any of these cases, their credibility might be questioned and seen as biased.

Lack of diversity is observed through another lens and that is through religious diversity. Religious diversity allows for varying viewpoints, but without it, instructors find themselves navigating through what some termed as “traditionalism” in their university. However, one response suggested that there are changes to this traditionalism as instructors and administration recognize students who attend their university who are not tied to “dogmatic” religious traditionalism. Faith plays more than a few roles in this study’s overall findings. Not only does it manifest here in university culture, it also takes manifests in a separate area as instructors describe faith as key and influential in their instruction.

### **Faith Integration**

Faith plays a significant role in the way these female instructors of color experience gaining credibility in the classroom. Instructors decide how to integrate faith into their course and sometimes experience challenges based on their method of including faith in their course discussion. Instructors described their divine calling to teach, various areas where faith is related to class content, and challenges instructors face when integrating faith with course content. For this particular interview area, I asked participants (a) What is your experience talking about faith in your discipline? (b) Was there ever a time you felt uncomfortable talking about faith in your discipline? Most sub-themes emerged from these pointed questions, however a few sub-themes emerged from answers given in response of other interview questions.

### **Divine Calling to Teach**

An emergent sub-theme in this faith integration theme describes instructors’ divine calling to their profession. Instructor 6 described teaching as one of her few “talents” and expressed her desire to teach as best as she can.

Then this is probably where my faith comes in. Lord knows that He gave some 5-10 talents, maybe he only gave me 1.5 and I'm cool with that. I just want him to know that I didn't bury that 1.5 and I went out and I tried to do as much as I could with it as possible. My spiritual side gives me that blessed assurance that as long as I come out here swinging with whatever I've been given, He'll cover the rest, and it'll be alright.

Similarly, Instructor 5 reflected on her decision to teach at her faith-based university. She described the conflict she felt within herself and with God. She spoke on her decision to teach at a faith-based university and how that came to be purposeful and significant in the end.

I remember saying 'Lord, why I am I going to this school where they get to talk about Jesus? They don't need me there, they need me somewhere else.' What I learned at [this university] is that just because it's an institution that is Christian and faith-based does not mean that everybody is a Christian and it doesn't even mean that everyone who says they are a Christian believes. It was very interesting, the conversations I've had with students who say, 'I'm not saved and I'm not really sure I believe this.' So in the classroom setting, at times I would encourage students to pray. I would talk about my prayer quiet time, life and when it was going well, or when it wasn't. A lot of those conversations would happen one on one. One student, praise God, came to know the Lord through an organic conversation we had. And other students said, 'I don't really know about my belief, I'm just here because it's a good school.' It wasn't for me to tell them they were wrong, but for me just to hear them and be able to freely pray with someone.



She talked of her experience as not only being a divine calling to teach students, but as enrichment in her own spiritual life. She emphasized prayer at her university and compared that to other universities where prayer is not encouraged as regularly.

[My] purpose is not only to teach, but to be at this faith-based university. In the class or in the office or organizational meetings, ‘Would you mind if I pray for you?’ Praying before staff meetings did not happen at the other institutions where I would work. I was a part of a spiritual development group for new faculty. That was different.

Echoing this notion is Instructor 4 as she explained the questioning she went through in understanding her role as a teacher. Coming as a public relations professional from outside of the university setting, she reflected on the success she might have by staying in that field. But she recalled a truth and told herself, “You know God has placed you here for a reason, you asked to be in this position, so you're here. It's not like you're not going to have challenges. You just go through it and deal with it.” She explained that sometimes she is lead to feelings of doubt knowing that she “could be making more money somewhere else,” but stays in this position as she feels called by God. Instructor 2 continued with a comparable narrative and illustrated the divine nature of God’s presence in all things. Instructor 2 experienced a student believing that her ability to teach at this university was due to Affirmative Action, as opposed to the belief that this instructor was competent and qualified to be in this position. From what this instructor identified as a “Christian perspective,” she realized that one comment that a student made was an excellent teaching opportunity about God.

God brings people to work for his purposes for his benefit and part of his plan, is a more wholesome view for person to have than to enlist the government in order to define purpose in anybody. I saw it as a learning opportunity to be able to mold and shape and help people to understand that there are bigger pictures than government and business and other areas that are kind of looked at to be competing here.

She described situations when students have returned to tell her about the impact she has made in her teaching and sharing. Thus, explaining why she values her work as a professor.

Often, I prayed for students in my office about specific things. Some of them come back and they'll say is that that made a difference. Just a conversation that we have had made a difference on the outcome [...] I've had students come back years later and email me and say I didn't understand it then but now I understand and I appreciate it and so there are those connections that exist always, but I think that's why I'm here.

Finally, she explained the purpose that she fulfills as an instructor by encouraging her students to understand “God’s provision” in this same way.

But I think that's why I'm here. I tell them that's why they're here. Because it's a provision in God for them to be sitting where they are at this time. You don't want to miss that. Laying the groundwork for God's working today is important.

### **Seamless Integration of Faith in the Course**

Some instructors find it very easy to integrate faith into their course content. In reflection of past experiences teaching at her Christian university, Instructor 5 found it refreshing to be able to talk about Jesus in class, “[This university] being a private

institution, one [positive] thing, I was openly able to talk about Jesus in the classroom.” Furthermore, she talked of not only “wearing the hat of the professor, but also a sister in Christ. A believer.” She reflected on enjoying the stories she could share with her students knowing they have a similar faith background. When students ask questions of integrating faith, many instructors are enthusiastic to do it. They help the students think through steps in integrating their faith in their field. One instructor said it was “liberating” to integrate faith in her field. For many years in a previous profession, she recognized the separation of church and state, but as an instructor at a faith-based university, Instructor 6 experiences something new.

If we wanted to take Micah and say what does it really mean to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God? And line this up against some of the [cases] we're seeing in conflict resolution, then that is just fantastically easy to do. We have a whole section on apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation [...]. There are secular ways to parse all of that, but, oh my goodness, it is so much easier when we can throw in the theology of grace on top of it. And what does it mean when you as a practitioner are holding that option on. If you have the opportunity and permission to be in a professional space where you can bring that out, how might that actually help the people who are in conflict trying to move through this to a transformed future? I have found speaking of faith in my work, in the academy nothing but a positive. There is no barrier. That's been all good.

Another instructor talked about the effortless connection between God's omnipresence in her field of business as well.

That was another thing that I was surprised about - the view that government competes with business. In teaching, I have to make sure they understand the

complementary nature of economies and how those things should work together, can work together. Our part is making sure they work together because God sends his servants, so we serve. We need to understand that. How do we serve in a way that is faithful as opposed to ways that pretty much promote the ways of man.

Another prominent way integrating faith and course content is seen in the field of social work. Instructor 5 is a social work professor and described her experience discussing faith integration with her students and encourages them in being fully themselves, fully Christian, and being a fully competent social work professional.

‘But what if I work for an agency where I can’t talk about my faith?’ That question would come up very often. My encouragement would be ‘You don’t turn off who you are. While you might not be able to have a full Bible study with your clients, you might be the only Bible [your clients’ experience]. Still be who you are. You show and display who God is through you. If you’re ever led to pray with someone, my opinion is that you be obedient and do that.’

What might be considered opposite advice, on the other end of the spectrum would be some instructors who guide their students to be “blank” as it relates to providing social services. Many social work professors find it imperative to instruct their students through this type of thinking. One participant, Instructor 3 faces a unique challenge with her students and in our interview, she explained the concept of being “blank” as practitioners.

### **Challenges Related to Integrating Faith**

While it can be easy for some instructors to integrate faith into their conversations based on course content, theological differences between instructor and student might call the instructor’s faith practices into question. In a previously discussed theme, Instructor 2 describes her conversation integrating faith and business asserting that God is present in

all business, all economy, and all government functions as they operate together. She described the pushback she received from a student who argued that God did not create economies.

The other day, just Monday I think, I was trying to describe the business environment as stewardship and so therefore if we are not faithful stewards, it's sin. Sin. One of the students challenged me. He didn't like that use of the word 'sin.' He said that he did not believe that God created economies. We talked about how economies are different. I tried to make sure that it was a global response. I didn't want to get into a one on one with him because I knew he didn't understand, so that's a learning opportunity. In the response I talked about the recognition of God having a design in place. The more we learn what that looks like within a certain context [the better]. This is business. What does it look like? That's when we can be faithful to the design. Overall, we had a conversation. It was a class conversation. But he came back today, this was a guy who had been out of it. Quiet, not saying a word. He was on his toes today. He was involved in the discussion and [it] was just like something had fallen. What I did in that situation is recognizing that it was a lack of information. Even relating to the scriptures and that somehow he identified [it as] something personal. What happens is that students will take something personally that was not personally intended but that's God working on their heart and He does that. For it to have pricked his heart was an opportunity. I made sure that I supported him where he was because that's all he had. That's all I have. I put it back in terms of - you can only say what you've been given and what we say should honor God.

In some cases, instructors described the intermingling of their faith with their understanding of the course they are in, their discipline, and their future careers.

Instructors 1 and 4, overviewed the challenges students face when “they have never had the opportunity to allow their social work values and their Christian values to clash.”

Traditional Christians have issues with gay rights. We have those kinds of things.

We recently in one of our classes talked about abortion. Whereas the social work stance is more pro-choice, often the Christian stance is more pro-life. Instructor 1

Often, students are confused about ways to process their faith with their social work practice. Instructor 5 continued with a frame of reference for her students in “being Christlike.” In the case that a student looks upon a client or situation with judgement, Instructor 5 looks to redirect them in a way that allows them to reflect on and re-evaluate their judgements.

“Well, I don't want to work with anyone who is addicted, who had an affair, or who's gay.” Well, you don't want to help anybody, that's what it is. And working through it, even that statement is unchristlike. Even in that. [That's a] big thing that always comes up.

Where differences between instructor and student come into play, as previously seen with Instructor 1, Instructor 3 frequently talked of how she experiences push back as a result of her instructing her students to be “blank.”

I feel very comfortable with how I integrate faith and practice. I will say sometimes it occurs to me that for some students, some of the time, they might think that I'm not really Christian or something because a lot of my push back is ‘we need to be blank,’ we need to listen to where the clients are, we need to put biases and our traditions aside when we're with the client.

She recalled navigating social work and Christianity from when she was college-aged and remembered sharing the same sentiment as some of her current students. This provided just one example of an instructor who is challenged in areas relating to faith integration, or in this case, not integrating faith for the protection of the client. Although Instructor 4 received pushback, she remained confident in her faith integration in her field of social work. She directed students to see their clients as spiritual beings if that is how they choose to identify.

If we just throw [their spirituality] out the window and discredit it, we're doing the client a disservice because we're not pulling from a resources they can use. Maybe their church can help them with some of the needs they have. [When we ignore their spirituality] we're not speaking a language that might make sense to them [...] How do we see our clients as spiritual beings if they choose to identify as that way and how do we promote that as a strength? So we talk about it a lot.

Much like Instructor 3's experience, Instructor 1 described teaching evaluations as a way to gauge how students perceive faith integration. From students' perception, sometimes they do not believe the instructor possesses strong Christ-like characteristics and will scale them lower on that question to indicate this.

Some of the comments from students about women might be that we're not nice or that we snapped at a student, that we're less of a Christian example. Men rarely get that. They rarely get that in their evaluations.

When confronted with challenges to her faith integration, one instructor is sure to deploy a strategy very specific to her teaching style. She is clear in describing the simple fact that "knowledge is not her own." She described leading students to an "understanding of truth" and defining truth by what God has given us in his word.

Putting them in the shoes that I've walked in, which has to do with being humble before an almighty God so that creates a sense of that – I don't own knowledge, I don't create knowledge [...] There's a whole lot that I don't do because I'm not the creator. It's that I'm subject. I am lacking in knowledge always. In bringing them to the point of where all of us work best has been probably more beneficial than anything.

Because faith plays such an integral role in the way female instructors of color are perceived in the classroom, it made a fascinating finding for this study. This finding is unique to the study of the Christian university as instructors described their calling to teach, their integration of faith in the course, and challenges they experienced as they discussed faith in their course. It might seem that there is likely to be a seamless integration of faith with the course content, but when there is a discrepancy in how that should be done, an instructor's perception of credibility might be at risk. Other facets that might call the instructor's credibility into question has to do with the attitudes a student might bring into the classroom. This was another significant finding in this study as female instructors of color described their experiences gaining credibility.

### **Student Attitudes**

Some students' attitudes exhibited assumptions and biases that had not yet been explored before the class. Student attitudes have a direct connection to the way instructors experience credibility gaining. In some cases, students challenge instructors by fact checking information, openly disagreeing with their instruction methods, and negating qualifications of the competent instructor. In this sub-theme, instructors described their experiences of student assumptions as well as their experience helping students confront those assumptions. Additionally, in a second sub-theme, instructors



described students' feelings of intimidation. Instructors offered an explanation of what they believe might be the cause of this intimidation. Discomfort as a third sub-theme, is distinguished from the theme of intimidation. While they are similar, the sub-theme discomfort explains a student's apprehension to engage in class discussion. The fourth sub-theme describes instructors' descriptions of their students reaching open-mindedness or a changed perspective over time.

### **Students Bring Assumption and Bias**

Instructor interviewees described the assumption and bias students bring into the classroom settings. This sub-theme is not to suggest that only students have assumptions/bias, as all people do. Rather, in this theme, instructors explained the difficulty they face in helping their students acknowledge bias. Explained in an earlier theme, Instructor 1 described a conversation with a student who had assumed that her faculty position was the result of Affirmative Action. While this example of assumption was not a conversational interaction between professor and student, it accurately displayed the sense-making that many instructors experience as a result of conversational interactions.

One of the surprises was in regards to students truly thinking that I was here because of Affirmative Action. It wasn't that I was credentialed. It was that I was hired. As though something happened in the past that I didn't know about where all of a sudden people were planted here because of a government mandate [...] I do think that people sometimes, when they're young especially, they're impressionable so often they're repeating things.

Instructor 2 described herself as a credentialed faculty member of her university and contrasted that concept with her students' understanding of her, which is that she was

hired in her position to meet Affirmative Action standards. In recalling this event, she concluded that students are impressionable, adopting beliefs, values, and assumptions from their parents. In a latter part of the interview, Instructor 1 suggested that a student's youth makes them more likely to cling to these assumptions. She states that, "The outcome is the same because students are young and they hold the values of the family." Assumption and bias becomes a large part of what might be considered a barrier to a student learning from the instructor and likewise, a barrier for the instructor in her pursuit in gaining credibility. In another interview, Instructor 3 pointed to this same finding and agreed that often, students have yet to formulate their own opinions regarding controversial matters. Instructor 4 also referenced assumptions that students have. One of her assignments tasked her students with constructing personal responses to current U.S. events.

They've never had to come up with their own opinion. If they do have their own opinion, their opinion has never been tested or challenged. And they've never been put in a position where they have to think about something in a different way.

Similar to the examples above, Instructor 3 recognized assumptions one student has relating to research, or what this student believed to be research. Instructor 3 pointed to the family as well as news (or news-like media) as having significant impact on what this student believed.

It's a feeling. It's something that they've heard from their family. Maybe it's something they heard on some sort of news-ish program, but it doesn't mean that it's true.

In this way, instructors are keenly aware of students' values, beliefs, and perspectives that are heavily influenced by family and/or prior learning. Often assumption, bias, and what people believe to be true will breed fear based on lack of knowledge and/or information. In this next sub-theme, I describe other barriers to learning that students and instructors might experience in the classroom setting.

### **Intimidation**

The fear or intimidation barrier can also cause students to have a skewed perception of the instructor as described in the section above. Fear and intimidation is an emergent sub-theme that outlines students' feelings of intimidation in the classroom setting. Instructors described students' inability to learn while holding this overarching emotion. In one interview, Instructor 2 described this phenomenon.

She truly had been taught something that wasn't healthy regarding African Americans and we have conversations in the office to try to figure out because it came out in kind of an animosity. I asked her to come see me. I could tell she was just afraid but she said that I don't think you can teach me anything. It came from fear and prior teaching.

Instructor 4 continued with a similar sentiment and described a sense of fear in her classroom. This is one example of student fear that acts as a barrier to learning from the instructor.

I didn't realize there was this level of intimidation or this level of fear that was hindering them from having discussions with me, let alone, being afraid to ask a question in class [...]

While Instructor 4 described power dynamics as a reasonable distancing factor between instructor and student, she understood that this fear hindered them from participating in class discussion and would likely stunt their learning. In this way, fear and intimidation became one key finding that pointed to more interpersonal barriers that students face. Another sub-theme pointed to apprehension that a student might have as it relates to the course content or the subject being covered in class discussions or for an assignment. In this study, I distinguished the discomfort with class content and/or students in the class separate from the fear that might be felt by students' perception of the instructor. This type of discomfort played out in a number of ways in the classroom setting.

### **Discomfort**

Instructors explained how discomfort is a major part of student attitudes that are displayed in class. Instructor 4 spoke of this in greater detail and explained that when students have to formulate their own opinions about controversial issues, they often are faced with discomfort.

I think all of them are a little uncomfortable. When you talk about the n-word or the word redneck or compare Christianity to Islam . . . When you talk about gun control and abortion . . . [Those conversations are] uncomfortable in general but I think [those conversations] in this environment, here on this campus, in the context of communication is a little bit more uncomfortable for students. I think that the students perceive [we] shouldn't be having those kinds of discussions. We shouldn't be talking about that on this campus. Also, I think that some of them are just a little uncomfortable because they've never had to talk about the realities of these issues. They've never had to come up with their own opinion.

Similarly, Instructor 1 explained her students' reservations weighing in on conversations dealing with race, diversity, and similar topics. She recalled that "a lot of times in the beginning people are very tentative about it and apologetic saying, 'I don't mean to offend anyone, I just kind of think . . .'" As a result of instructors who very intentionally address the barrier of discomfort, students also experience a change in their own perspectives.

### **Perspective and Attitude Change**

The sub-theme of perspective and attitude change describes the event where students' understanding of an event or situation changes. Often, what happens as a result of classroom discussion or through the instruction of the teacher, the students in the class become more open-minded to perspectives outside of their own. Instructors also frequently find that students that are apprehensive to perspective change, who often challenge the material, are most apparent in their attitude change. Instructor 3 described the desire that her instruction influences change in that way.

It is my demand that students try to take a couple steps [...] If you leave here thinking the exact same way about everything as the day you came in, I probably didn't do a great job of stirring things up. That's what education is. That means you learn things. That means you change.

In the discomfort theme description, Instructor 1 discussed students that were more reserved in expressing their opinions. In this description of perspective and attitude change, Instructor 1 discussed the change in student attitudes over time. When at one point, students were tentative about sharing their beliefs and/or perspectives they might have, Instructor 1 found her students more open to sharing as the semester went on.

It's about learning from each other and expanding our minds, and challenging ourselves, and questioning what we thought always was truth. That comes by hearing other peoples' opinions, and it's fine to disagree. Disagreements are good. If you surround yourself with people who know and think exactly the same way you do, you're not going to learn anything. I like those classes and a lot of times in the beginning people are very tentative about it and apologetic. 'I don't mean to offend anyone, I just kind of think . . .' By the end of the semester people are just like, 'I disagree because this is what I know.'

This change is not to suggest they change and believe everything the instructor is posing to them, but to think about the ways in which they agree and disagree. Instructor 3 explained a learning situation where this was true for her. Instructor 3 noted,

There's a danger to that if they think "Oh I agree with everything [professor] says." Then they're not really thinking maybe. They'll just take my word and go with it or they might go against all of it.

In a follow up question, Instructor 2 described what it is like for a student to have changed their mind about how they originally perceived her ability to teach.

I measure the effectiveness of it by asking questions, by having an individual conversation with students, and I encourage them to come and talk with me one on one because I've found that the best way to break down barriers is for them to get to know me and I get to know them. I have a lot of one on one conversation. Invariably, the outcome is that they change. They change.

Whether the instructor described apprehension to change or an eventual willingness to change, student attitudes played a large part in the experiences of female instructors of color. To recognize that students bring assumption and bias to the

classroom is a significant starting point for many instructors because it helps them identify where to begin with a student who might present a learning challenge. Knowing that a student brings bias, assumptions, and prior learning into the classroom that might have nothing to do with their instruction also helps instructors protect their own perception of their credibility. When an instructor can identify and discomfort or intimidation coming from the student, the instructor can decide to make any behavioral changes necessary to invite the student into class discussion as well as feel more comfortable in the class environment; this also increases instructor credibility. Many times, as seen through these interviews, students have a tendency to change their ways of thinking and become more open to the class, the class content, and ultimately the instructor.

### **Instructor Attitudes and Behavior**

Throughout these interviews, instructors explained how they confront controversial issues that are discussed in the classroom. Described in the previous theme, students bring assumption and bias and it is often helpful for the instructor to understand this fact and work to teach around this assumption, in a sense. In doing this, they allow the student to have and express their own opinions, biased or not, and allow any change in their understanding to come over time. Thus, allowing students their own perspectives became a sub-theme for this major theme outlining instructors' attitudes and behavior – Allowing students their own perspective. In many other cases, instructors find it valuable to help expose a student's assumption/bias in the classroom, which became another sub-theme as instructors challenge student perspectives. A final sub-theme for the theme of instructor attitudes and behavior is teaching opportunities. Many instructors cited “learning opportunities” or a similar idea as an integral part of the conversations they

have one-on-one with students and/or the discussions they facilitate in the classroom. The way an instructor chooses to address bias and teach content that might put them at risk of losing credibility is significant in their credibility gaining. The findings in this theme work together to create a depiction of those experiences.

### **Allowing Students Their Own Perspectives**

Many instructors expressed that they hope to influence some sort of attitude change in their students by exposing them to perspectives that differ from their own. Whether it is through questioning, case study, or a visit from a guest speaker, many of these instructors said that their ultimate goal is to plant a seed of change and difference in their students. However, most instructors in this study reported that they do not force their opinions or the opinions of the majority onto a student, but instead honor their students by allowing them to have and express their opinions. Allowing students their own perspectives is important for instructors and in an interview question that inquired about how instructors challenge student perspectives, many interviewees responded with their practice of allowing students to have their own. This is a practice that allows instructors to expose their students to various modes of thinking, but does not necessarily require them to adopt a different frame of thought. Instructor 3 talked of how she frequently aims to challenge student perspectives.

So how do I do it . . . ? Ok, I think my first strategy is, as much as possible, honoring where students are. I think some professors, and maybe rightly so, have a strategy that's kind of like 'Let me throw it atcha! You thought this and now I'm going to tell you why you're sooo wrong about all these things.' Sort of a shock approach [...] That's not my style. My style is a little bit more like, 'Think about where you're at. Think about



how you came to believe the things you believe.’ And my expectation is not that every student comes out believing what I believe or voting the way that I vote or any of those things.

Instructor 2 described a similar sentiment as she talked with a student through a misunderstanding. Described in an earlier theme, one student disagreed with the way she integrated faith into the course discussion. She posed a few ideas regarding the way this situation was to be processed.

I made sure that I supported him where he was because that's all he had. That's all I have. I put it back in terms of: You can only say what you've been given and what we say should honor God.

Instructor 5 discussed an experience that proved that she, too, wills for her students to have their own belief system. She did this through a “common ground” type of exercise amongst her students. One student is tasked with finding a commonality or a point of understanding with another student whose belief differs regarding abortion. Instructor 5 recalled a case of perspective change for her student.

My student said, ‘You know . . . I would have never thought I would say this, and though I'm still pro-life, I can understand.’ I said, ‘I'm done for the day! Bye!’

Instructor 5’s objective in this exercise was to allow this student to keep her beliefs, but develop practice in understand someone else’s. Because the student was able to understand another perspective without necessarily changing her own, Instructor 5 fulfilled the objective of that class meeting (so much so, she could head home for the day). Instructor 1, a social work professor, described her negotiating the experience of having a gay minister speak with her students one day for class. Different from Instructor

5, she did not look for any specific response from her students. She described a paper assignment wherein students responded to their experience.

One student said, 'It's wrong. It says in the Bible that it's wrong. I'm not going to change my mind about it. It's wrong.' I let people have their thoughts. I'm not going to try to change your mind. I'm going to let you have this experience and then you work through it however way. The students after they have these visits usually have to write a response paper. There's a whole gamut. Sometimes people say in the response papers, 'I felt like it was wrong and still feel like it was wrong. I like that person, but I still feel like it's wrong.' Or, 'I never liked it, I still don't like it, and I don't like that person.' And then you have people that say, 'I thought it was really wrong but after talking to her, I realized something else and my mind is expanded. I'm going to have to think more about it.' I wait and let them have the full experience of whatever happens in their minds when they interact.

Instructor 1 aimed to respect the student's beliefs and "meet them where they are." While exposing them to what might be conflictual in their minds, challenging their belief system and previous teaching, these instructors still value their practice in letting students have and keep their own beliefs. Bringing forth opportunities for students to question some of their initial thoughts might be seen as a challenge in some respects. Outlined by many participant instructors were a number of instances when instructors had to address biased or assumptive thinking. Instructors who referenced times they had to push back on student perspectives lead to the second finding within the instructor attitudes and behavior, challenging students' perspectives.

## Challenging Students' Perspectives

Often students express thoughts and opinions in class discussion that lead instructors believe the student might possess unconscious bias or assumption. To overcome what might be a barrier in class discussion, this theme describes instructors confronting bias or assumptions that students usually do not see in themselves. These references point to specific language that instructors use relating to their ability to challenge students' perspectives. Whether that challenge derives from a casual conversation with students, class discussion, case/field study, or experiences with a guest speaker, these instructors referenced their experiences challenging students on perceptions they might have. In a conversation with one student, Instructor 6 recognized and addressed what might be assumptive thinking from her students.

I'll get 'those people' questions [. . .] 'Well things must have been very hard for those people because they probably turned to crime because they didn't have good role models or anything in the family.' Then it's like, 'Ok, I think I'm hearing some assumptions in that question. Are you basing this on any assumption?' And if they can't kind of self-recognize and identify then I'll pull that out. 'What do you think the demographics are of the persons who are coming into juvenile court? What do you think the nexus is with poverty and by poverty what do you mean? Do you mean educational level? Do you mean financial?' Let's keep going down, let's keep drilling, keep drilling. Peeling the onion is something we teach them to do generally. If I am confronted with a student attitude that seems to be lying in the surface and it looks like they have not explored the inner layers of the onion, I will try to socratically take them through that.

Furthermore, Instructor 6 recounted her processes of allowing students to continue exploring their ways of thinking. Through a line of questioning she aimed to understand her students' pattern of thought.

Again, this may be easy for me because my current discipline is all based on questioning. It's all based on uncovering and unearthing what is not explicitly stated. We sort of say conflict starts where A & B have two competing positions. Position A vs Position B, but we talk about going below the line and asking, 'What are the interests that they hold that are beneath the positions?' Then, 'What are the deeper concerns that lie below the interests that lie below the positions?'

The only way to get there is through close and careful questioning. Instructor 6 Instructor 6 realizes many students have not explored the assumptions that they have. She does not ask her students what their assumptions are, but instead asks them to answer questions based on what they know about the world and the society. Other instructors in this study said they have used a type of questioning to discover similar findings. Instructor 5, for example, talked of how she incorporates a number of "I wonder" statements with her classes. She finds that supposing another reality helps students to explore other ways of thinking.

I use the phrase I wonder. I use that a lot. 'I wonder if this were to happen' or 'I know it's *this* and *this* is the reason, but I wonder could it be something else?' [...]  
I do a lot of I wonder. 'How do you know? Tell me how you know.' I'm very big on, 'You can feel what you feel, you can believe what you believe, but can you defend it? Can you explain to me why?'

Instructor 5 recalled a situation when she questioned a student's ability to be effective in his future social work profession. She asked if in his future social work position, he would be able to help a gay person gain employment.

A student came and said, 'I can't. No, no, no. I could never work with someone who's gay.' [I asked] 'If you were a counselor and [a gay person] came [to receive counseling], would you?' And this student actually had a paradigm shift in my presence. [He said], 'Hm . . . I think I would. I think I would work with them.'

Through this questioning, the student was able to conclude his own decision. As Instructor 5 said, "you can feel what you feel, you can believe what you believe, but can you defend it?" Through simply questioning the student, he sifted through his thoughts and ultimately decided that he would be able to work with a gay person in his line of work. Instructor 3 challenges students in a similar way in her social work instruction as she calls her students to "pretend" and imagine themselves in another context.

What if this avenue actually went *this way* instead of *that way*? I do a lot of suggesting. You don't have to change your mind when you leave the class, but if you could just pretend you were something interesting and think this way for this hour, then what would you say?

Through questioning and imagining another reality, both of these instructors reminded students of the many worldviews through which to observe and understand situations. They ask students to imagine, pretend, and try on new perspectives as a way to challenge their own. Another way students might look at another reality is through a formal case study. Instructor 1 described discussions she has with students based on case study.

Some of the things that we do is we give them case studies and say work through the case studies. Let's look through the case studies together. That's interesting because the case studies often provide some kind of challenge. And students want to add content to the case study to make it easier for them. [I say], 'No it's not in there. That little piece is not in there.' That's one of the ways we challenge and push back.

Instructors also challenge students' perspectives by looking at the personal narratives of others. Instructor 3 asserted that memoirs and personal stories are 'hard to deny.' She challenges her students by calling their attention to a narrative they have not heard through "songs, film, and books". She described the "responsible" balance between teaching in the cognitive realm and utilizing emotion as well.

When you hear someone's story, it's hard to deny someone's story. Because it engages a different sense. So much of the time when professors are trying to challenge a perspective, they stay completely in the cognitive realm. Sometimes people, maybe to a manipulative level, only use the emotional realm and really show some really striking film that almost makes everyone leave feeling guilty or something. I try to sort of marry those things in whatever way I think is responsible.

Additionally, she often references the stories of students in her classes. During one conversation, a student argued that one cannot consider themselves a Christian and be gay. Another student corrected him and described that situation true of her mother. Because it was a narrative to be discussed, argued, and analyzed in real time, the student had to think through some of their original conceptions of homosexuality. Instructor 3 recalled,

The student kept on and said, 'She's wrong. There's no such thing.' In that situation, I had to pull that student into my office and say, 'You will not say something like that again in my class. You have hurt your colleagues feelings.' To their credit, this person was like, 'I did?' There were really out of touch and willing to admit that they didn't think about how it impacted that person personally. They just thought about generically what they thought about the topic.

Providing an opportunity for students to think past their generic conceptions, but rather more specifically about their beliefs becomes important to many instructors. Referenced previously, Instructor 1 invited a gay pastor and a number of guest speakers to her class to have them describe some of their personal stories. Other guests included Muslims, Native American Spiritualists, Atheists, and pagan worshippers to name a few, which undoubtedly disrupts the comfort level of the average Christian college attendee. However, messages of these speakers do allow for students to become aware of other life experiences, faiths, and ways of being and compare that to their own.

A final way that instructors provide narrative, or beliefs of others as a way to challenge students' perspectives is through an exercise in symbolic interactionism. Instructor 3 displayed 15 symbols and has everyone "think in their own heart whether they have a positive or negative reaction to that symbol and what it stands for to them." She stated,

I always throw in interesting things like a diamond ring, confederate flag, things that people from very different cultures and families think differently about. The confederate flag is always one of the best ones because, being in Texas, I always have some people who say 'I love it' or 'This is really about heritage, and it's

about my family, and it's not racist, and it's not mean, it's just part of a family choice, I like the confederate flag.' Particularly as a person of color, I'm in an awkward position if I have to say, 'Ehh, a lot of people think it's racist.' But [it's better] if I have some other students of color, who are able to weigh in their personal perspective and say, 'When I see that, I'm scared.' So, even though I trust and I hear that you're saying for you it's this family thing, I don't know that when I'm in my car and it makes me scared. That's when a lot of learning happens. In using the student population.

In this way, the students present in the classroom become active participants as they describe their various perspectives and worldviews. When they are present in the classroom, they become a voice recognizable for other students to hear, evaluate, and compare to their personal ideals. Collecting personal narratives or examining case studies is not the only method instructors use to challenge student perspectives. Other participant instructors described using news media.

Referencing both current events and events of the past also allows instructors to challenge student perspectives. Instructor 6 described utilizing both methods and teaching through the lens of the headlines.

I will go all the way there and if a Missouri [situation] happens to pop off in the middle of my semester as it did, I will pull that in, out of the headlines, and say, 'Let's put this up on the board and see how it cross locks with the very thing we're studying now.'



In last year's discussion of Muslims being quarantined as a result of the Paris bombing, she brought this conversation to her students by comparing it to the Korematsu decision in 1944. Because some of these events are less close to home, she talked of how she and students can avoid 'finger pointing' as perspectives are challenged in class.

What we were able to do [is] take the headlines and drop it into the syllabus.

Looking at the Japanese situation, [...] there are very few Japanese American students in the community. It ends up being a safe way, no finger pointing at anybody way to look at the racial dynamic, a racialized construct. Tear it apart, figure out what happened here. Then ask, 'Wow, could that process happen with Muslims?' Then, can that be extended to other populations? Again, we give our students an opportunity to look at this process.

Additionally, Instructor 4 described the need for her journalism students to know a great deal of the world happenings. She talked of her experience integrating controversial issues in the classroom. Not only to challenge their perspectives, but to give students the opportunity to defend their perspectives. She takes a different approach by describing "controversial issues" as "everyday issues that are talked about in the news but aren't always talked about in detail in the classroom." She also finds it important that students understand these issues from the "perspective of Christianity as it relates to a faith practice." She described that sometimes it feels "taboo" to discuss certain issues, but reiterated the importance for her students to be "completely competent in cultural issues" to help them be prepared for their future profession. Instructors' efforts to challenge the perspectives of their students is a helpful one and allows them to think critically of their own values and beliefs. Instructors explained the questioning, the discussion, and the attitude change the typically comes from those discussions.

## Teaching/Learning Opportunities

It might seem redundant to incorporate a sub-theme that covers teaching/learning opportunities because this is an educator's primary objective. However, this theme points to a number of references in which instructors discussed the opportunity to teach and the opportunity for students to learn. What might have been considered a challenge to the instructor's credibility, often the instructor turns into a teaching/learning opportunity that they cited in the interview. While closely related to the challenging students theme, this area differs because some instructors would not classify their teaching style as "challenging." Instead, some of the professors aim to lead students toward and understanding. In reference to Instructor 2's earlier account with the student who believed she was hired in her university due to Affirmative Action, Instructor 2 describes that account as a learning opportunity.

It gave me an opportunity to truly clarify is that government mandates really don't do much of anything. We think that they do, but they really don't [. . .] I saw it as a learning opportunity to be able to mold and shape and help people to understand that there are bigger pictures than government and business and other areas that are kind of looked at to be competing here.

Instructor 2 decided to take what might have been offensive at first and turn it into a learning opportunity. She recognized bias or assumptive thinking on the student's part and addressed it by reminding the student that there is far much more at play than government mandates. In a latter part of the interview, she recalled a conversation with students about research.

What it does is it creates the opportunity to really talk about research as it serves a purpose. Putting them in that frame of mind where they're always learning.

They're always thinking. They've been given the ability to think and that makes all the difference.

A large portion of Instructor 2's interview, she described what it means to "mold and shape" a student. Believing that students are "teachable always." Other participant instructors of this study reported that it was imperative not to simply challenge their students' perspectives, but give them an opportunity to defend their perspectives for themselves. They find ways to question using the narratives of others, questioning how realities might be different, and through current controversial events. This explains the overall attitude of instructors as they bring students through course content. However, in some of these challenge situations, instructors find their students questioning their ability.

### **Self-Concepts**

Instructors' descriptions of how they view themselves is necessary to explore when understanding their experience of gaining credibility. In this theme of describing self-concepts, three sub-themes emerged including – intersectionality, self-doubt, and self-confidence. The sub-theme intersectionality outlines instructors pinpointing the basis of a credibility challenge as they deal with "multiple marginality" as women of color on their campus. The sub-theme of self-doubt was an emergent theme from the interview question, "Have any of these credibility challenges ever made you doubt your expertise?" Instructors cited specific cases where their credibility was challenged and thus caused them to feel less competent in their work. Finally, was the sub-theme self-confidence, which outlined the descriptions of the overarching feeling instructors possess about their role on their university campuses.

## **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality was found in interview responses as instructors discussed the multiple ways they identify themselves. In the research for this study, intersectionality is also termed “multiple marginality” and describes disadvantages female instructors of color might experience as a result of their intersections (Sotello Viernes, 2002, p. 74). Instructor 6 discussed the “multiple distancing factors” she experiences at her university.

Faculty, colleagues, and students being taught by someone who is not a denomination, and a woman, and an African American woman. All three of those are sort of triple, distancing differences that I breached to reach out and become a part of the community.

In a course she taught one semester, Instructor 5 added content that allowed students to reference many different cultures. She had students assess their “mental models” and “hear from different people.” Additionally, she explained the many intersections she recognizes in herself as she looks to explain the complex nature of learning from her field.

It was established that you can't really learn about a particular culture in one chapter or book because we're all different. I'm not just Black; I'm also a Black woman, and a Black woman who is Christian.

A final reference of intersectionality is through Instructor 1 who described her experience making sense of challenges she has faced in her instruction. She thinks through “microaggressions” and considers which areas of her many intersections caused a credibility challenge for her in the classroom. She explained, “That's the issue with microaggressions. We don't always know. We have to question it. Something happens and I think, ‘Is it because I'm a woman? Is it because I'm Black? Is it because I'm a Black

woman?” A number of situations have led instructors to question the basis for a challenge that might happen in the classroom or otherwise. Sometimes the challenges are due to their multiple marginality, but, often, instructors do not attribute challenges to their identity, but to their professional competence. Some of those questions lead to feelings of doubt and in response to an interview question that asked about those feelings, some replied with feelings of self-doubt.

### **Self-Doubt**

Experiencing self-doubt works as another sub-theme for this theme of self-concepts. As mentioned earlier in this theme section, the question was asked, “Have any of these credibility challenges ever made you doubt your expertise?” While the responses from this question are manifested in this theme, other responses lent themselves to this theme as well. In a description of how she deals with self-doubt, Instructor 3 pointed to the doubts she has speculated from her students.

One of the burdens of being a Black person, or biracial, [...] you get so many subtle and not-subtle messages about your capacity and your ability. That’s tremendous amount of energy. Even if it's not at the forefront of my mind, it’s proving, being much more prepared than some other professor. If I make a simple mispronunciation or misspelling in class or something like that, I persevere on it because I know that for some of my students, they will not perceive it as a human being who for some weird reason spelled the wrong "their," but it's a Black professor, who, maybe she doesn't know how to spell that.

Recalling a situation with a “student fact-checker,” Instructor 1 described some of the feelings associated with having her information challenged on a regular basis throughout the semester.

It revealed to me the doubt I already had in myself. Most professors deal with doubt all the time. We deal with, 'I'm not really this smart. I really don't know what I'm doing half the time.' I even joke like that, 'I don't know what I'm doing half the time.' Things like that kind of bring it up and show it to you. [...] Some of it is showing you a side of yourself that you don't want to see or that you don't want to deal with.

### **Self-Confidence**

While many instructors do feel the weight of self-doubt, some instructor responses lent themselves to another feeling of confidence on the part of the female instructor of color. Some find assurance in their work by exemplifying clarity in both their subject matter and their teaching philosophy. In a later description, Instructor 6 defined her expertise early in her courses. She described the two caveats in her agreeing to participate in campus conversations in the classroom or otherwise.

I don't do critical race theory, I'm not a historian, but let me give you the conflict management approach to it, and then I'm happy to do it. Then I'm not angry, it comes off clear, and it's fine [...] I would much rather speak in the tone in which I'm speaking to you now with my PowerPoint slides, diagrams, and the references from the literature all teed up [...] That becomes important to me. [...] At my advanced age now and what I am doing, I'm pretty good with staying in my lane. That's why I gave you some kind of professional context/limitations that I have set from the outset. I'm not going to get into a conversation about the sociological meaning of racism, and a clear definition of structural racism, and if something is or is not racism or how that intersects. I don't know all that, I don't study it. [...] It's kind of hard to catch me out on what I'm doing because I work very hard to

stay at the top of my game in my work. And when folk coming in because they don't know this field, I know for a fact, I know for a fact that they don't best me in that. I am extremely comfortable with that. It sounds like the verge of being arrogant. But it's very limited arrogance. Most of the stuff in the universe, I have no clue and I'm probably the most ignorant person. But do not step into my very narrow lane.

Also described in another theme area is the concept of “high expectation, high relationship.” When an instructor requires a great deal from students, they in return engage in building relationships with their students. Instructor 5 expounded upon her idea of setting high work expectations for her students, doing it confidently, and having her students respect her because of it.

I've been teaching 10 years, which means I've taught about 700 people. I'll say 90% of my students consider me an outstanding instructor, one of their favorite instructors. They'll say, 'She made us work' or 'Man, our hands would hurt after our exams,' but it's because . . . I'll say this [. . .] students don't always agree with me, but they respect me.

In describing her overall fit with the university, Instructor 4 explained how taking care of her university experiences is more important than a positive perception from students.

It's much more important for me to find my way to fit instead of [worrying about] what the perception is. I've got to be more comfortable with how I fit. I'm more focused on that than making adjustments and trying to be nice and all that. I'm more concerned about finding my way to get into the piece of the pie here so that I can have a better experience, and that my better experience will then [impact] how I interact with my students.

Finally in the area of recognizing self-confident, Instructor 1 overviews her teaching philosophy which allows her to have the confidence she has when instructing. She expresses that she does not feel any lack in her subject or in her teaching. Her understanding of God explains why.

No I did not feel any lack. I never feel any lack. I think that's one thing of where, if you've asked God and he has placed you, there's no doubt. To doubt my ability to me would be to question God because he's given me what I need. He prepared me and he's going to prepare me. There's no need to think that *I* did anything.

In exploring how instructors of color perceive their experiences gaining credibility, it was important to explore descriptions of how they see themselves. A great deal focuses on their experiences with their students' perceptions. However, some instructors prove that their experience is not solely based on the perceptions of their students. For example, the Instructor 4 who was very clear in her pursuit to find her "fit," explains how instructors must actively engage with their environment so that they have a positive teaching experience. In this theme of describing self-concepts, three major themes emerged including – instructors' intersectionality, experiencing self-doubt, and self-confidence, and came together to provide a picture of what the instructor recognizes in themselves in their teaching situations.

In this study, female instructors of color described their university experience to be a positive one as they navigated through various barriers to their perceived credibility. A great deal of what contributed to the instructor's positive experience at her university dealt with the over encompassing culture of their university. Being a Christian university allows for a spirit of community and Christ-likeness to be prevalent on the campus, so many instructors cited these concepts as the essence to be found at their institution. Lack



of diversity was also an emergent sub-theme and was explored in two ways – ethnic diversity and religious diversity. Instructors defined what it means for the student population, for their course, and even for their success as instructors when both ethnic and religious diversity is unfavorable at the university. Other barriers to instructor credibility and thus, student learning included the way the instructor chose to integrate faith into their course content. Contrarily, barriers to credibility arose from the way an instructor might have chosen not to integrate faith into course content. In both cases, a misalignment on how that should be done based on the students' perception caused a momentary conflict thus, calling the instructor's credibility into question. Student attitudes also proved to be a key finding in this study as instructors described a student's apprehension to change their perspective on a certain matter as well as a student's eventual willingness to change their perspective. Additionally, barriers such as students feeling intimidated by the instructor as well as feeling uncomfortable with the course content were other barriers explored in this study. Instructors described how they overcome those unique challenges and make additional efforts to cultivate a feeling of openness in their classroom. Many times, as seen through these interviews, students have a tendency to change their ways of thinking and become more open to the class, the class content, and ultimately the instructor. The conversation's key themes shifted to other challenges that emerged within the class content as instructors observe their students' perspectives, give students an opportunity to defend their perspectives, and engage in meaningful dialogue that allows the students to critique their conceptions and worldviews. A final area of study was exploring how instructors saw themselves throughout the academic semester and/or when faced with challenges to their credibility. In this theme of describing self-concepts, three major themes emerged including –

instructors' intersectionality, experiencing self-doubt, and self-confidence, and came together to provide a picture of what the instructor recognizes in themselves in their teaching situations. Further discussion describes in detail how the Evangelical Christian university culture, faith integration, student and instructor attitudes, and instructor self-concepts work together to encompass the experience of gaining credibility for female instructors of color.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

Understanding the faith-based university culture sets the stage for this part of the discussion as culture plays a significant role in how female instructors of color experience gaining credibility. After a prompting question, “What is it like to teach at this university?” many instructors answered with a description of the culture of their faith-based university, how it is uniquely different from any other university. When viewed together, their experiences connected to establish a narrative similar to one another. These comparisons allowed them to better define current experiences at their Evangelical Christian university. The unique differences that instructors cited at their Christian university included experiencing a less competitive environment than other universities, feelings of warmth and caring, supportive, whole-person development at their university, and finally, engagement in regular prayer. In describing their experiences of gaining credibility through these unique differences, instructors described situations where their strides seemed to be met with support based on the university’s overall culture. Still, other complexities arise as a result of the culture. These complexities come in the form of homophily and the barriers associated with perceived difference. This section aims to describe how the Christian university culture can facilitate building credibility, how the concept homophily can simultaneously be helpful and harmful, and how underrepresentation and tokenism are primarily harmful for the female instructor of color. Finally, viewing this study through the lens of standpoint theory, this study raises

important questions about the role female instructors of color bring to the mission of Evangelical faith-based PWIs.

### **Advantages of the Faith-Based University for Building Credibility**

One advantage of the faith-based university is “less competition” as described by some instructors in this study. One instructor in particular described less competition within her university and department as compared to another university where she had taught previously. She described how in other organizations and universities, faculty members compete with one another, but at her university, people are generally supportive in their academic/professional endeavors. Similarly, another professor described research-focused universities and the level of competition that is present there as compared to her less competitive Christian university. Because there is a different focal point in their faith-based universities, instructors of color are able to focus on broader, more holistic areas of growth for themselves and students.

Instructors who participated in this study talked about feelings of warmth or caring in their university. One instructor described how “you can get cold and distant anywhere else,” and emphasizes that because she instructs at a faith-based university, displaying this type of warmth is a part of her job. Instructors emphasized the caring community they have experienced in her university as compared to other universities, where people have a tendency to share information on a personal level, inquire about other classes, and spend time praying with one another. Students of immediate instructors have higher affective and cognitive learning, increased motivation, an increased willingness to participate in class discussions, improved behavior outcomes, and a greater likelihood of completing their schooling. And because immediacy is positively and

significantly associated with competence and character, instructors who demonstrate immediate behaviors simultaneously build their credibility in their classroom.

Many instructors in this study described their immediacy habits – inquiring about students’ classes outside of the one they instruct, often inquiring about their personal lives, sharing with them in casual conversation, and inviting their students to visit office hours to name a few. Inquiring about a student’s life outside the classroom both demonstrates the instructor can relate to the student and engages them in various ways apart from course content. DeGroot, Young, and VanSlette (2015) agree that instructors who engage with their students informally develop a trust and liking to be observed both inside and outside of the formal classroom setting. This sharing has to do with whole-person development, which is a sub-theme found in this study. Many instructors described the holistic focus of a Christian university, which considers all elements of student growth including personal, professional, academic, and spiritual. The spiritual aspect is apparent in the cultural expectation to engage in prayer. The practice of praying for students is characteristic to the faith-based university.

Engagement of prayer leads us closer to understanding how the culture comes to be one of supportiveness and whole-person development. Instructors emphasize their concern by investing in students’ spiritual well-being. One instructor noted the “holistic standpoint” from which she views her instruction. She emphasized not only “education, but also empowerment” to her students, and described herself as holding dual roles as both an instructor *and* mentor. The “holistic standpoint” that many instructors referenced in their interviews described areas of the students’ lives including academic, personal, professional, and spiritual. Many instructors highlight the importance of helping their

students grow holistically and often that includes inquiring about their personal lives and engaging students' spirituality by taking time to pray with and for their students. Another instructor asserts that she is the student's Sister-in-Christ, not just their professor. This indicates the instructor's value on the spiritual relationship she shares with her student in addition to the professional-academic relationship they share. I argue that these findings indicate that it is the culture of Christian universities that allows for further involvement in multiple aspects of a student's life for both instructors in this study and likely for instructors at other Christian universities. Christianity calls believers to "practice carrying each other's burdens," just as Christ bore the burden of all people he came in contact with. Instructors put into practice knowing and understanding students' everyday hardships, mostly academic, but often from a personal/spiritual context as well. Unique to the faith-based university, engagement in regular prayer does not only demonstrate an interest that an instructor has in the student that is separate from his/her academic achievements, it also demonstrates further credibility building on the part of the professor. When an instructor prays with a student, she demonstrates concern for the student's holistic growth which then results in a demonstration of liking toward that student. That liking leads the instructor to more improved credibility. The cultural aspects described here create an environment conducive for female instructors of color to gain credibility. It is the support culture prevalent in the faith-based university that assists in the credibility gaining for female instructors of color. Instructors who value less competition, warmth on campus, supportive community, whole-person growth, and regular prayer will thrive in the university that likewise promotes these values. Instructor-demonstrated immediacy makes for a feeling of closeness between professor and student,

and furthermore supports the warm and caring culture as demonstrated by many professors.

### **The Challenges of the Faith-Based University for Building Credibility**

A primary challenge that a female instructor of color might face is also related to the university's culture. While the culture might be supportive and whole-person focused, the standpoint of the female instructor of color might disrupt this peaceful and harmonious environment. It is the useful anger in pursuit of radical pedagogy that might make the female instructor of color seem threatening in the classroom and subsequently threatening to the university culture. If a student perceives that the instructor's standpoint is biased and self-serving, they will certainly deny the value in anger being used to discuss issues involving race, class, power, and oppression as it might be discussed in course content. Instead, any use of anger would make the female instructor an "angry Black woman" and will disrupt the supportive, whole person community that often characterizes the faith-based university. Other challenges relate specifically to the way instructors integrate faith in course content and these challenges relate to homophily.

Homophily, or lack thereof, plays a sometimes contrary role to the faith-based university facilitating female instructors of color as they build credibility. When an instructor engages a student's spiritual identity, for example by offering prayer for the student or integrating faith with course content, the student might perceive their instructor as sharing beliefs, attitudes, and values as it relates to their Christianity. As stated in this study's literature review, homophily is the "extent to which students consider their instructors to share similar attitudes (i.e., shared beliefs, attitudes, and values) and backgrounds" (Myers & Huebner, 2011, p. 85). Much like credibility itself, homophily is

a receiver-based phenomenon based on the receiver's perception of the instructor. When students perceive their instructors homophilous to them, they will see the instructor as more credible and will thus, learn more effectively. The faith-based university consists of students who find themselves along a spectrum of identifications – students who identify very strongly with their faith and students who have no faith identification at all.

Although instructing at a Christian university, many instructors are keenly aware of the varying levels of spirituality represented by their students. A student who identifies strongly with their faith will likely look for a strong Christian example in their professors. When an instructor is perceived as a strong Christian example, they prove homophilous toward a student who actively practices their faith and considers themselves strong in their faith. On the other hand, students who do not have a strong identification with spirituality and faith might expect their professors to refrain from actively engaging their Christianity in class. This might mean expecting the instructor remain neutral in integrating faith with course content, specifically for areas including gay rights, abortion, and other controversial issues. Additionally, neutrality might mean refraining from offering prayer during class, quoting scripture, and/or integrating faith with course content. In an interview, one instructor described a question previously found in teacher's evaluations that inquired about the instructor's semblance of a Christian role model. This instructor described that women often score lower than men do on this area of evaluation. In this way, a student is permitted to evaluate the credibility of their instructor based on how they perceive that instructor's spirituality. While this question did not aim to explicitly evaluate the credibility of the instructor, this question does call credibility into question as students negotiate their values, beliefs, and attitudes as compared to the



instructors. This question of credibility emphasizes another problem in the Evangelical university in that it is a faith tradition that historically excluded women from the corporate worship setting. Depending on the background of the student, they might not have ever had to evaluate women as “Christian examples.”

Some students face a barrier in their learning because they do not perceive their instructor to share beliefs, attitudes, and values with them, often causing “you can’t teach me” attitude from the student. A business professor in this study received pushback from a student because of the way she integrated faith in her course discussion. She aimed to describe how God is present in all things and to not steward your business is a sin. By steward, this instructor described that all opportunities are given from God, so in economics, it is imperative that people do business as ethically and righteously as possible. The student disagreed and stated that because he did not believe that God created economies, use of the word “sin” was inappropriate. This disagreement triggered conflict for the student and made it difficult for him to actively participate in the conversation. Furthermore, because of this disagreement, the instructor recognized subtle resistance from the student in latter parts of the semester.

On the other end of the spectrum, a social work professor described what she supposed student perceptions were regarding her faith. She believed some students perceived her as “not really a Christian” because as a social worker, she finds value in allowing clients to self-identity rather than assuming they are at all religious. She explains this rule to her social work students in hopes of sharing that value with them. As a result of these decisions, student-instructor homophily might have been at risk for the instructor. She described this situation as a “bummer” because even though she feels

devout in her faith, she regretted that students might not understand this value of being “blank.” Similarly to the situation described before, this instructor also referenced latter parts in the semester when students will show resistance to her teaching based on a concept they quietly disagreed with earlier in the semester. Because students in her faith-based university classroom perceive her as “not really Christian,” this instructor might struggle with those barriers to her homophilous credibility.

In one case, the instructor was seemingly “too Christian,” integrating faith as a focal point in a conversation about economies when a student perceived that to be unfitting for the conversation. In the other case, the instructor was seemingly not Christian enough and dealt with lack of homophily between her and her student. In both cases, the student in question did not perceive the instructor to have shared beliefs, attitudes, and values, which caused momentary friction in the way the course content would be delivered. A student who does not perceive their instructor homophilous will be experience a disruption in learning and receiving information from that instructor. These findings imply the complexity instructors face navigating faith in their classroom as it relates to homophily. Homophily not only addresses questions related to attitudes and beliefs, but background as well.

Because homophily involves both attitudes and backgrounds, ethnicity and/or cultural background is another component to consider when describing the experiences of female instructors of color. Eric Goffman’s (1963) description of what constitutes authority is a “young, married, White, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight and height, and recent record in sports.” Despite the time that has passed since this finding, an underlying

conception of authority in the U.S. supports the idea that authority has an identity much like Goffman states. Because of this, female instructors of color are perceived to have difference despite their level of competence and their faith practices in and outside of class. Even when a female instructor of color has a degree of similarity with their student in regard to attitudes and background, she must still overcome barriers of perceived difference by being both a woman and a person of color. The distinguishing factor in this study is that credibility challenges come in nuance for female instructors of color primarily because of their context at the faith-based university. Many participant instructors did not explicitly cite their gender and/or ethnic makeup as a reason for having received a challenge to their credibility. One instructor explained that because it is “not Christlike” to overtly challenge an instructor’s credibility based on gender and/or ethnic make up, deciphering whether or not they are being challenged can be difficult. Much of the interview data indicate an instructor’s mere speculation of a credibility challenge based on these areas, with an exception of only a few overt challenges. One of those exceptions is the situation with a student who believed her instructor was placed in her role to meet Affirmative Action standards, undermining her competence as an instructor. Similarly, this instructor also faced credibility challenges with a student who believed she could not learn from a Black instructor. This is distinctly where multiple marginality comes into play as female instructors of color negotiate their many identifications, for the purpose of this study, their gender and their ethnicity. Because of these identifiers, they are placed on the margins and not granted credibility to the same degree as many of their White and/or male colleagues.

### **Underrepresentation and Tokenism**

Complexity for female instructors of color is not just in the fact that they are a part of a marginalized group, but that they are an underrepresented group in the Evangelical Christian university system. Some instructors referenced the low amount of diversity in both faculty representation and student population. The low number of female instructors of color is a hindrance to the instructor's credibility as some students might find it challenging to learn from them given their limited experience doing so. I argue that because there is little variance in the physical body that students see standing before them, it becomes a challenge for students to learn from a female instructor of color at their faith-based university. Lack of representation makes for another complexity for female instructors of color as they gain credibility. One instructor described the fact that credibility comes from colleagues as well. If administration does not value the female instructor of color by ensuring her representation on campus, it might likewise lead to an undervaluing of the female instructors of color who are present. In reference to the low amount of students of color on their faith-based university campuses, instructors might be at risk in another way. Instructors of color might feel the responsibility of being the voice or at least reference the voice of population that is not present in the classroom. This study's literature review addressed the risk of female instructors of color being assumed biased in their classroom. While this issue did not emerge often from the interview responses, one instructor did reference times when she has had to point to research rather than collect responses from students who have lived the experience. Moreover, the concept of tokenism emerged in this study as it is a phenomenon that challenges female instructors of color at faith-based universities and elsewhere.

Tokenism plays a fascinating role in the conversation of homophily and building credibility because female instructors of color already face the challenge of difference. Tokenism describes how female instructors of color are pointed to as representative of difference in their university setting. In one case, an instructor found herself cornered to talk about the Black experience, but was not given much context for this conversation. She described the discomfort she felt throughout this conversation because she was not asked to speak from her expertise, but as a token representative. Facilitators of this conversation unknowingly looked to make her an emotional character, requesting that she put aside her professional competence, to speak about areas outside of her expertise, and only to explain herself as a raced person. Undermining her professional competence was an overt challenge to her credibility. In reflection of this occurrence, she described her now restrictions to speak only from her field of study – not as a historian or critical race theorist, and never during the Black history season between January 15 to the end of February. She asks that if she is invited to speak to a class about any relevant topic, that it be relevant to her field of study or how her discipline meets or intersects with other disciplines. Tokenizing female instructors of color devalues the expertise she has in her field and thus, detracts from her credibility. There are ways to avoid the pitfalls of tokenizing and devaluing female instructors of color by increasing their representation and consciously welcoming the standpoint of female instructors of color as a way to promote diversity and inclusion on Christian university campuses.

### **Welcoming the Standpoint of Female Instructors of Color**

While universities take gradual steps toward diversity and inclusion, welcoming the standpoint of female instructors of color proves to be a separate effort that is vital to

the mission of the faith-based university. Understanding the efforts of female instructors of color, their marginalization, and their tokenism on their campuses is where diversity and inclusion begin. Because standpoint allows female instructors of color to have a view from below, they possess comprehensive and exhaustive knowledge, especially when dealing with issues of race, class, and social oppression, it is important to allow female instructors of color space in the classrooms to describe their standpoint if they so choose and allow female instructors of color to expose bias, introduce her perspective, and incite a thoughtful and challenging argument in the classroom when appropriate for the classroom.

By employing and retaining female instructors of color, faith-based universities can cease the undermining of female instructors of color and their experiences. Employing and retaining diverse faculty will, first, ensure a diverse student population. Diverse faculty is essential to the mission of Evangelical Christian PWIs as it helps retain underrepresented student populations, which are often students of color. When students of color find faculty mentors that they identify with, they are likely to not only complete their schooling, but excel throughout their academic tenure. These findings are evidenced in discussion of homophily in that students tend to learn more effectively from instructors who they feel have similar values, beliefs, and attitudes. It would seem that students would be more inclined to explore some values, beliefs, and attitudes with instructors that hold the same or similar standpoint as them, specifically when dealing with race, class, and social matters. This similarity makes way for a comradery between instructor and student and could potentially give the student permission to define his or her standpoint in a place where they might not have otherwise. The presence of the female instructor of

color allows an authority figure to, if necessary, validate the perspectives of a student of color.

Ensuring that the Evangelical Christian university has diverse faculty in female instructors of color also allows for a different voice and new perspectives to be brought to the table. Outside of the key conversation dealing with race, it also allows for a different type of faith integration as referenced in both the seamless integration of faith theme as well as the theme that explored challenges related to integrating faith. Because a woman experiences faith in ways that differ from the way a man might experience faith, the way they integrate their faith with course content will differ greatly. Women should be represented on Evangelical Christian campuses – If not for the perspective that she brings to our conceptualization of the secular world, then vitally for the importance she brings to our understanding of God moves in each discipline represented in Evangelical Christian universities.

It is no surprise that a Christian university possess the need to stand out amongst other Christian institutions of higher learning as many school compete to be the leader in Christian education. Because Evangelical Christian universities and other religious institutions have a history of excluding both women and ethnic minorities from higher education and theological scholarship, now is the prime opportunity for the Evangelical Christian university to experience a shift from the past and into the pressing need of inclusion today. I argue that it is necessary for this change to come directly from the Evangelical Christian university system where scholarship and theology intersect to cultivate a broader understanding of who God is and how he plans to work in various disciplines, through various people, and shine a great light on His work. Many Christian

universities profess to prepare their students for Christ-centered leadership in their many areas of work and here lies a great opportunity for Christian universities to practice what they profess. With their varying perspectives, various ways of integrating faith and practice, and unique presence at their Christian universities, there is no greater way to this pioneer change than preparing students for work with diverse populations, beginning first with female instructors of color.

With this study, I have attempted to outline the experiences Black female instructors have had with their Christian university. Specifically, I hoped to describe their experiences with credibility given their unique perspectives and standpoint. This study attempts to contribute to the effort of allowing the standpoint of female instructors of color to be explored and pronounced in the higher education sector. In future research, credibility gaining experiences from Asian women, Hispanic women, Indian women, and other ethnic groups will be represented. In this way, research will cover more accurately and completely the experience of female instructors of color who, by their non-White color, contradict Goffman's conception of authority. A key aspect of credibility is that it is a receiver evaluation and is based on perceptions of the audience (students) rather than the speaker (instructor). Qualitative research shares a similar aspect, but that it is an evaluation based on perceptions of the participant's reality. Moreover is standpoint theory is assessing the standpoint of the participant, drawing experiences and understanding from the study's participant. The common thread of perception is key to this study. It made it imperative that I converse and draw from the sense-making that instructors experienced far before, throughout, and after their participation in this qualitative research study.



## Conclusion

The culture of the Christian university creates opportunities as well as challenges for female instructors of color as they build credibility in the classroom. Because the culture is one that influences support and whole-person growth, female instructors of color lean into an instruction style that reflects this cultural expectation. By inquiring about their students' lives, encouraging them through prayer and kind words, female instructors of color emphasize the warm and caring feeling prevalent throughout their university system. The faith-based university can continue to promote this community of support as it proves beneficial for both the instructor and the student. The instructor can continue to build her credibility in the way she relates to her students and the student can continue receiving messages of support from their female instructors of color.

In other cases, the faith-based university detracts from credibility building for female instructors of color. The university culture makes for faith integration, which is dual sided – some students desire intentional faith integration in the classroom and some students do not. In any case, the instructor faces a risk of not being perceived homophilous by her students by the way she chooses to or chooses not to integrate faith in the classroom. While this is just one example of how homophily proves its importance in the faith-based university system, homophily is significant because it asks, “Do our values and beliefs align?” If student-instructor values and beliefs do not align, students perceive the instructor to have less credibility, making it hard for students to learn from that instructor. More primarily from the perspective of homophily, female instructors of color must overcome a separate barrier taking into account their gender and ethnicity – their multiple marginalities.

Credibility challenges often come in nuance because these Christian universities promote Christ-likeness. And often, credibility challenges come in the form of assumption, bias, and are often unintentional. Faith-based university systems can work to esteem female instructors of color by ensuring their representation on campus. When female instructor of color representation improves on these university campuses, students get experience learning from different people and get exposure to different knowledge and frames of reference. Additionally, these university systems can work to remove tokenizing habits from the overall university culture. This includes refraining from inviting female instructors of color to speak in areas outside of their expertise and recognizing and promoting the competence and expertise that they do have.

Female instructors of color can improve their credibility by recognizing the complex nature of homophily and recognizing the distancing factors that already exists for her. While balancing perceptions that might already be present, she can work more effectively toward gaining credibility in the classroom. Many instructors from this study reference their divine call to teach. While it is a significant factor in an instructor's overall success, many instructors from this study recognize that it is not the most important aspect in their teaching. These instructors describe their development toward credibility as a part of the process and realize that they teach because God has placed them in their faith-based university to do it. Many instructors make God the focal point of their purpose and consider their position as stewardship. It seems that even in the midst of credibility challenges, their main goal is to serve God and the purpose for which He has sent them.

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## APPENDIX A

### IRB Approval

**ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**  
*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*  
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
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November 30, 2015

Ms. Jamilah Spears  
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Abilene Christian University

Dear Ms. Spears,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Perceived Credibility of Woman Instructors of Color in Faith-based Universities" was approved by expedited review on 11/24/2015 for a period of one year (IRB # 15-102). The expiration date for this study is 11/24/2016. If you intend to continue the study beyond this date, please submit the Continuing Review Form at least 30 days, but no more than 45 days, prior to the expiration date. Upon completion of this study, please submit the Inactivation Request Form.

If you wish to make **any** changes to this study, including but not limited to changes in study personnel, number of participants recruited, changes to the consent form or process, and/or changes in overall methodology, please complete the Study Amendment Request Form.

If any problems develop with the study, including any unanticipated events that may change the risk profile of your study or if there were any unapproved changes in your protocol, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs and the IRB promptly using the Unanticipated Events Form.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Megan Roth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

cc: Dr. Jonathan Camp

## APPENDIX B

### Participant Recruitment Letter

Hello Prof.,

I hope your week is off to a great start. I'm emailing you with a special request regarding some research I'm conducting this semester.

In this qualitative study, I'm exploring the experiences of female instructors of color at faith based institutions, more specifically their experiences with credibility. As a female instructor of color at your university, it seems you would fit my sample criteria. If you are able and willing, I'm requesting your participation in this study, which includes an hour long interview sometime this month.

If you are interested in participating in this study, attached is the informed consent document which includes more details about what your participation would entail. It might also be helpful for you to know that no institution would be named anywhere in my research. Please let me know of any questions you have. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent

#### Informed Consent

#### “Perceived Credibility in Women of Color on University Campuses”

Provide informed consent documentation before interviews including risks and purpose of study, insurance of confidentiality, and notice of voluntary participation.

I (the primary researcher) will ask you (the participant) a series of questions regarding your experience instructing in the classroom. This interview will last approximately one hour. This conversation will be recorded on my iPhone and I will use this recording for later analysis (transcribing - listening to and typing conversation).

Risks for participating in this study are minimal for you (the participant). It is possible you experience feelings of discomfort about events in the past or anxiety about teaching situations in the future. Should you feel discomfort during the interview, you have the option to end the interview at any time.

Women instructors of color seeking to participate in this study will 1. Gain better understanding to contributing factors to perceived credibility, 2. With their awareness be better able to examine and execute steps toward gaining credibility in class.

In order to ensure confidentiality, I will not publish your name or identifying information. I will keep all interview transcripts and recordings on a password protected computer and I, the primary interviewer, will be the only one with the ability to access these records. Portions of my transcriptions will be shared with my research committee during face-to-face coding sessions, but only after I have removed identifying information from the transcripts.

Your participation is completely voluntary and if at any time you feel uncomfortable continuing the interview, you are able to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the project without intimidation or prejudice.

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Signature

Printed Name

Date

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Principal Investigator

If you have any pertinent questions about the research or your rights as a part of this research, contact:

**Jamilah Spears**

Department / Affiliation: **Dept. of Communication and Sociology**

Phone: 626-367-9136

## APPENDIX D

### Interview Protocol

#### **Grand Tour Questions**

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching at your university?
3. Tell me what it's like to teach at your university.
4. Describe some of the courses you instruct.

#### **Immediacy & Homophily**

1. How do you build rapport with students?
2. How do you demonstrate affective behavior with your students in class?
3. Describe your experience with self-disclosure in class.

#### **Evangelical Institutions**

1. Describe your experiences talking about faith in your discipline.
2. Was there ever a time you felt uncomfortable talking about faith in your discipline?
3. What was that experience like?

#### **Credibility and Intersectionality**

1. Are there subjects/courses that you feel your credibility is challenged while instructing? What are those subjects/courses? Continue to ask for more on this part.

2. Describe the courses you have instructed dealing with race, politics, diversity, culture, etc.
3. What has been your experience with students challenging your expertise in class or outside of class?
4. When your credibility was questioned, did that lead to any feelings of incompetence or lack of credibility on your part? Describe.
5. Have you ever had your credibility questioned because of your gender?
6. Describe the event, statement, or occurrence that made it seem like you were being questioned because of your gender.
7. Have you ever had your credibility questioned because of your race?
8. Describe the event, statement, or occurrence that made it seem like you were being questioned because of your race.
9. Describe the event, statement, or occurrence that initiated that feeling of incompetence.

### **Content Expertise & Argumentativeness**

1. How do you challenge student perspectives in class?
2. What course was that? Describe that experience.
3. How do you pushback or argue student perspectives in class?
4. What are other ways you improve your credibility?