

## ABSTRACT

Social Support and Its Influence on College Students' Understanding of Moral Expertise

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Colleges and universities offer environments conducive to moral development, which is seen as essential for cultivating civic engagement, intellectual growth, and virtuous character. As part of a larger study on character and religion at Christian universities, this article provides a longitudinal case study analysis of students at a mid-size, faith-based research university, exploring how students seek moral expertise through social support from faculty, staff, peers, and social, as well as religious, communities. Fourteen students were interviewed in their first and third years of enrollment, culminating in 28 total interviews. Data were coded and analyzed to discern how students understood moral expertise. The findings suggest that students sought out guidance from a variety of social groups and that students' relationships with religious organizations and peer mentors influenced how students articulated their views of moral expertise. Students' understanding of moral expertise was shaped by social supports, particularly moral exemplars and mentors.

Social Support and Its Influence on College Students' Understanding of Moral Expertise

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Educational Leadership

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
DEDICATION .....	vi
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
Social Support and Its Influence on College Students' Understanding of Moral Expertise .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	2
Methods.....	9
Findings.....	18
Discussion.....	29
Conclusion .....	37
APPENDIX.....	41
Baylor Faith and Spirituality Survey Qualitative Instrument .....	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	44

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## DEDICATION

To the Quad, for the moral expertise we developed together.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Social Support and Its Influence on College Students' Understanding of Moral Expertise

#### *Introduction*

America's higher education leaders, to varying degrees, have always considered the cultivation of moral and civic virtue among its students one of higher education's purposes (Colby et al., 2003; Glanzer & Ream, 2009; Kiss & Euben, 2010; Reuben, 1996). Although a few scholars reject the responsibility of faculty or staff to engage in moral education, concerned that it detracts from the academic pursuit of knowledge and knowledge-acquisition skills, these scholars are in the minority (Fish, 2012; King & Mayhew, 2002). Even with this general support, there have been different visions of moral education and civic engagement, with scholars arguing for a variety of approaches, including emphases on social justice, virtue, or service-oriented educational approaches to promote moral development (Colby et al., 2003).

In the light of the importance of moral development in higher education, the purpose of this study is to explore how social supports shape students' understanding of moral expertise within the context of a faith-based research university. The study takes place as part of the larger Faith and Character Study (Dougherty et al., forthcoming). We utilized a qualitative, case study method in the context of a faith-based research university. The main research question was: *How do social support and social isolation shape the way students understand and identify moral expertise and interact with moral*

*models and mentors while in college?* In exploring moral expertise, we look not just at moral judgement or knowledge, but students' understanding of moral characteristics and practices as well. Additionally, we focus on individuals who provided students a model or vision of a moral expert, referred to as moral exemplars, as well as moral mentors, those to whom students went for moral guidance. We use a longitudinal approach to explore how students' interactions change over the course of their college experience. We focus upon peer, religious, and educational social supports. Data collection took place at a mid-size, Christian research university in the American southwest among students in their first and third years of undergraduate study.

### *Literature Review*

Much of the focus on moral development over the past half century has prioritized moral cognition and development of self-authorship, both of which tend toward an individual focus related to moral development (Glanzer, in press). The standard textbooks (see, for example, Patton et al., 2016) on college student development have featured entire chapters that describe the moral development theories of Perry (1981) and Kohlberg (1981), which have guided much of the subsequent moral development research in higher education in the last few decades (Glanzer, in press; Glanzer & Cockle, in press; Patton et al., 2016).

The use of Kohlberg's (1981) theory in student affairs particularly stands out among the rest. Kohlberg's (1981) stage theory focused on development of moral cognition, specifically on how individuals make moral judgments. Each level (with two



stages) represents a different relationship between how the individual interacts with society's rules and expectations (Kohlberg, 1981). Glanzer (in press) argues, "Perry (1981) and Kohlberg (1981) both emphasized the ultimate end of moral development involved the need to make one's individual cognitive choices without being unduly emphasized by other authorities or social groups." Hence, these moral development theories, which are oriented around the individual and their relationship with society's rules and expectations, have tended toward a more individualistic and psychological emphasis for moral development in student affairs.

More recently, student affairs research has also emphasized Baxter Magolda's (1999, 2001, 2004, 2008) theory of self-authorship, which indirectly addresses moral development. Baxter Magolda described the concept of self-authorship as the "capacity to internally define a coherent belief system and identity that coordinates mutual relations with others" (2004, p. 8). Within the self-authorship theory is "a contrast between external authorities (persons, institutions, or abstract formulas) and one's internal voice" (Glanzer, in press). Development of self-authorship can be influenced by personal characteristics of the individual, their social context, and the challenges and supports they face (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Based on this context, self-authorship emphasizes of the role of collaboration in the self-authoring process more than Kohlberg's (1981) theory of developing moral cognition (Glanzer, in press). However, self-authorship still hinges upon the *individual's* capacity to develop their internal framework, which then coordinates external relationships.

## *Moral Expertise*

While moral reasoning and self-authorship are commonly researched as part of college student development, moral expertise is an alternate approach that could substantiate the field. Much of the research on moral experts and expertise emerged from the work of Peter Singer (1972), who claimed that moral philosophers were able to provide insight on moral issues and provide guidance for members of their society. Responses to Singer's work, however, have challenged its limitation of experts to moral philosophers and offered more inclusive views of who a moral expert might be and how to identify them (Archard, 2011; Miller, 1975; Riaz, 2020).

Psychologists have emphasized the connection between moral expertise and expertise more broadly understood as exceptional understanding, decision-making, and performance within a particular skill or area (Driver, 2013; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005;). The overarching concept of expertise was defined by psychologist Anders Ericsson (2018) as, "the characteristics, skills, and knowledge that distinguish experts from novices and less experienced people" (para. 2). Expertise, then refers to an exceptional capacity to problem-solve and perform within a certain area relative to a more general populace. Moral expertise relates this exceptional aptitude to moral judgement and behavior (Driver, 2013; Swartwood, 2013). Miller (1975) identified moral expertise in a basic sense, "as the ability to live a human life well" (p. 1). Importantly, possessing moral expertise does not imply possessing absolute authority on a moral matter (Archard, 2011; Prialux, Weinel, & Wrigley, 2016). Furthermore, Archard emphasized that the "common-sense morality" held by many laypeople is often the foundation on which moral

philosophers construct their moral systems (2011, p. 125). For many scholars, moral expertise then refers to excellence in moral judgement, character, and behavior relative to other groups or individuals and provides a moral expert with the capacity to understand how to live life well.

One of the limitations both traditional higher education scholars and earlier scholars of moral expertise have is their tendency to focus primarily on expertise at only a cognitive level (Glanzer & Cockle, in press). A moral expert is adept in judging correctly on a moral issue and communicating that judgement well to others (Archard, 2011; Driver, 2006). By focusing on knowledge alone, however, one neglects other important aspects to moral expertise, since Miller (1975) notes, “Morality is not simply a matter of skill in moral reasoning and judgment. Character, conduct, and consequences are also important and, in some ways, more basic” (p. 4). More recent scholarship from Driver (2013) emphasized a practitioner aspect to the moral expert as well. Driver wrote that a person, “can be a good moral practitioner, actor, or judger” (2013, p. 296). This aligns well with the broader understanding of expertise generally, which refers not only to knowledge but to proper practices and approaches to the activity in which one is expert at, although cognitive skills remain essential (Ericsson & Pool, 2016).

Miller (1975) argued that there are many types of moral experts due to, “the richness of the good and the impossibility for anyone to meet all its demands” (p. 12). One kind of moral expert is the moral exemplar, described by the philosopher Linda Zagzebski (2017) as, “... persons whom we see, on close observation and with reflection, to be admirable in all or most of their acquired traits” (2017, p. 65). A moral exemplar is

seen to be morally admirable in their acquired characteristics and is different from the moral mentor discussed below in that they set an example of what is good rather than guiding and conversing with individuals, who then develop moral expertise and navigate moral challenges. Zagzebski theorized that a typical individual understands what it means to be good and what terms such “virtue,” “right act,” and “good life” mean by referring to exemplars, “or persons like that, where that is the object of admiration” (2017, p. 2). A moral exemplar then is someone who provides a vision of the good life and good actions through the cultivation of admirable characteristics, a vision worthy of emulation.

Mentors are also an important element in an individual’s cultivation of moral expertise. Mentorship has often been considered a major theme in relation to college students’ moral development, although mentorship was only emphasized in Kohlberg’s (1981) theory as a facilitator of moral conflict discussions and reasoning. Sharon Daloz Parks (2000) defined mentors as those, “who are appropriately depended upon for authoritative guidance at the time of the development of critical thought” (p. 128). Liddell et al. (2010) provided an overview of Parks’ most salient points regarding an effective mentor, noting that one:

- (1) recognizes the learner as capable but potentially not yet autonomous in cognitive authority, (2) supports the potentially competent adult who is becoming while challenging and pushing the learner toward his or her potential, (3) inspires the individual learner to meet high expectations, and (4) stays in authentic and caring dialogue while the learner works through conflict and challenge. (p. 12).

The importance of mentors in college student moral development is grounded upon relationships with students, wherein mentors model moral behavior and coach students’ in the “meaning-making process” as they discern their purpose and values (Healy et al.,

2012, p. 83). Colleges and universities provide an environment for students to experience mentoring relationships with educators that will promote moral development (Healy & Liddell, 1998; Parks, 2008).

The body of research on moral mentorship in higher education is still growing. Liddel et al. (2010) focused on moral mentorship in the residence hall context, describing the limitations that prevent healthy mentoring relationship, skills for successful mentoring, and how mentoring contributes to ethical and supportive communities. Recent scholarship emphasized how moral modeling by coaches in the athletic context is foundational to student athletes' moral and professional development (Hamilton & LaVoi, 2017). This case study explores the influence of mentorship on students' cultivation and understanding of moral expertise within the context of social supports, such as familial, educational, and religious supports, specifically within the context of a faith-based university.

#### *Support and Isolation in Relation to Moral Expertise*

Social support is a multi-faceted concept that is of great importance to college student development. Researchers often attempt to identify ways that social support affects college student behavior. In doing so, they have distinguished that social support can be either enacted or socio-emotional. Ellison & George (1994) characterized enacted social support as the measures that are meant to deal directly with problems, whereas the socio-emotional element includes moral and emotional support, which are often based on students' perception. Scholars have agreed consistently that social support is “an

interpersonal resource that one utilizes, often unknowingly, to maintain or improve psychological well-being” (Fink et al., 2013, p. 1). Thus, social support is studied in a variety of contexts.

The more social support a student has, the greater degree to which they have access to support for developing moral expertise (Narvaez, 2010). In a study of emerging adult moral exemplars, Walker and Frimer (2007) found their early life experiences included “the presence of ‘helpers’ who scaffold development (and the relative absence of ‘enemies’), and secure attachments in various relationships,” (p. 848) which is indicative of social support early in their lives. Padilla Walker (2015) noted that, since Walker and Frimer’s research focused on moral exemplars, those considered in some areas morally excellent, less emphasis was given to how non-exemplar emerging adults may have been influenced by social supports in their early life.

Isolation, or loneliness, has both emotional and social connotations. Emotional isolation or loneliness refers to one’s self-perceived loneliness, and social loneliness refers to an empirical lack of friendships or social relationships and is a major predictor of college students’ psychological distress (Vincent & Grabosky, 1987; McIntyre et al., 2018). Students deal with loneliness through coping mechanisms, which include distraction, support-seeking, and self-reliance. Students also utilized coping mechanisms that reflected helplessness, submission, or occasionally opposition, although these were less present among students (Vasileiou et al., 2019). This is important to our study, as Narvaez (2010) argued that social support and mentorship are invaluable assets for cultivating moral expertise. Understanding how students who experience loneliness or

lack of social support make sense of moral expertise may help to better understand behaviors of students who experience psychological distress and the connections between concerning behavior and perceived loneliness or isolation.

### *Summary*

Moral expertise is a field of study that emphasizes an exceptional capacity to make moral judgements and behave morally relative to a more general populace. Development of moral expertise takes place through a variety of means, but we have chosen to narrow our focus to the influence of social supports on undergraduate moral expertise development, with significant focus paid to moral exemplars and moral mentors. Considering the need for studies that explore the moral expertise development of college students, this case study substantiates the research on how higher education faculty and staff can support students' cultivation of moral expertise through interaction with social supports, moral exemplars, and moral mentors, as well as how students' understanding of moral expertise changes over time.

### *Methods*

This study occurred as part of a larger overall investigation into students' faith and character development at Christian colleges and universities. The Faith and Character Study used quantitative methods to measure students' religious and character development, finding that religious organizations and communities, as well as mentorship opportunities, were important elements in students' character development (Dougherty et al., forthcoming). This study substantiates that research with a qualitative case-study

investigation into the role of social supports on students' moral development. The following research question drives this study: *How do social support and social isolation shape the way students understand and identify moral expertise and interact with moral exemplars and mentors while in college?* We additionally focused on two sub-questions: (a) how does social support or social isolation shape how students understood moral expertise over the course of their first and third years?, and (b) which resources and relationships do students believe are most influential in terms of cultivating their own moral expertise, such as the moral mentors whom they sought out?.

An essential aspect of any case study approach is the context (Stake, 1995). The context for this study is a mid-size, Christian research university in the American Southwest. We chose this context because religious communities offer a context where communal moral formation is prioritized (Colby et al., 2003; Glanzer & Ream, 2009; Hill, 2007; Hunter, 2000). Additionally, this institution provides an abundance of opportunities for students to connect with religious organizations. We also chose a research university context because research universities are known to give less attention to moral versus intellectual virtue development (Glanzer & Ream, 2009; Reuben, 1996). In other words, this context had a mission and characteristics that would give it both clear social supports for developing moral expertise but also may leave students, particularly those who possess a religious orientation separate from the institution, isolated from opportunities for development or moral mentorship.



### *Participants*

The original set of first-year respondents included 42 undergraduate students in their initial year at the university. We followed-up with these students in their third year and received a high number of non-respondents for the second round of interviews. Of those original 42 students, four had left the institution and 24 were still attending but did not respond to our request to interview. Reasons for the drop-off may have included the effects of the 2019 to 2021 Covid-19 pandemic, the remote platform used during these interviews, and the lack of financial incentives or other incentives offered for the study.

All told, we were able to follow-up with 14 participants. Our data overall included the 28 total interviews with these 14 respondents, with two interviews for each student in their first and third years respectively. Of the respondents, nine identified as male and five as female; nine identified as white, one as Black/African American, two as Asian American, and two preferred not to indicate. Regarding their religious affiliation, all 14 students identified as Christian, with six identifying as Christian only, five as Baptist, one as Nondenominational, one as an American Protestant, and one as Orthodox.

### *Consent to Participate*

Participation in this study was completely voluntary. Researchers provided students with a document that included contact information for the university's Institutional Review Board should students wish to learn more about the study before providing consent. This document included the consent form, which notified students that they would be recorded, the methods used to maintain respondent confidentiality, and the

risks and benefits of participating in the study. The risks and benefits were limited to possible loss of confidentiality. Participants received the consent form electronically leading up to the interview, and they were required to complete the consent form before taking part in the interview. Completed consent forms were then stored in a password-protected computer in a password-protected Box folder managed by the authors of this study. Participants possess the right to withdraw or amend their data up until the publication of the research, and they possess the right to withdraw their consent at any point during the study.

### *Data Collection*

First-year participants were questioned using the Baylor University Spiritual Life and Character Strengths Survey (see Appendix; cite withheld for review) a semi-structured interview typically conducted individually through face-to-face interaction. The survey included questions relating to students' religious and moral development, particularly the relationships, academic courses, and co-curricular experiences salient to students' perceived religious and moral decision-making. The survey also included questions related to students' experiences with moral mentorship before entering the institution. The third-year students were asked the same questions with some additions, including questions specifically related to students' experience with moral mentorship at the university, their sources of ethical knowledge and moral formation at the institution, their sense of belonging at the institution, and moral challenges they faced during their first three years. Moral exemplars, as discussed by Zagzebski (2017), were referred to in

the interview questions as “moral heroes” (see Appendix). These questions provided researchers a greater understanding of college students’ perceived sources of moral expertise and mentorship.

Data were collected over two rounds of interviews; the first took place during respondents’ first semester at the institution (fall 2018), and the second occurred during fall 2020 in the respondents’ third year. Due to the second round of data collection taking place during the Covid-19 pandemic, most interviews were conducted over video-chat software, particularly Zoom. First-year interviews were conducted by a Ph.D. candidate in Higher Education Administration and master’s degree students in Higher Education and Student Affairs. The second round of interviews were conducted by two master’s degree students in Higher Education and Student Affairs. Aligned with practices related to normative qualitative research, students responded to questions by describing their moral and religious experiences in their own perspectives and words. The interviews took between 60-90 minutes to complete, and each interview was recorded and transcribed for coding and analysis. As is common in case study inquiry, interviewers asked follow-up questions when necessary.

### *Data Analysis*

We used a case study approach for data collection and analysis, as “it provides the researcher with a holistic understanding of a problem, issue, or phenomenon within its social context” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 256). Stake (1995) notes that data collection for case studies can emerge from multiple areas, particularly interviews. The

case studied here is students' understanding of moral expertise and how it changes based on the influence of social supports while those students are enrolled at a Christian research university. Our longitudinal data collection allowed for a stronger analysis of the changes in students' experience over time. Data were analyzed through multiple cycles of coding, making use of Microsoft Excel over the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2021. The two graduate student researchers who conducted the third-year interviews served as the primary investigators for this analysis. Analysis occurred during data collection in fall 2020 and extended into spring 2021.

For this case study, the coding process began through examining and labeling specific details and drawing connections between the data to create specific categories and concepts, which then served as the substance for our findings. As this study emerged out of a case study approach, we strived to reach an understanding about the case through, "direct interpretation of the individual instance and through aggregation of instances until something can be said about them as a class" (Stake, 1995). As the effort to derive meaning from a case is constituted as a search for patterns, we focused on a coding process that provided labels to students' recollections and claims in interviews, and then used those interviews to draw together previously existent themes expounded upon in our research questions (Stake, 1995).

In addition, we drew out additional themes newly discovered in analysis. In our first cycle of analysis, we emphasized the flexible approach of initial coding, understood as "breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences" (Saldaña. 2013, p. 100). Hesse-Biber &

Leavy (2011) encourage researchers in case study approaches to remain in regular discussion as they examine the data. In light of our discussions and analysis, we combined codes into broad thematic categories to provide a report that can offer a holistic vision of the case (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Stake, 2005). In the data analysis phase, the authors maintained a research journal, used to organize codes and concepts, as well as memos, which provided a record of thoughts, feelings, and actions relevant to the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

### *Positionality Statement*

Although both researchers, identify as white, male, and Christian, each has unique experiences related to moral and religious identity development. One graduate researcher largely grew up in the Midwest in a family with both Roman Catholic and Lutheran backgrounds. His religious identity had varying levels of development throughout early childhood and adolescence, but significantly took shape during his first year of undergraduate education. Involvement with a protestant campus ministry helped to shape his identity as a Protestant Evangelical. Since both Evangelical and Christian carry a variety of connotations in American society, this researcher prefers to be identified with the descriptive label of “Christ-follower,” even though much of his religious identity is rooted in the Protestant Evangelical denomination.

This researcher attended a different undergraduate institution than the one at which this study was completed. However, this research was conducted while serving in a graduate role in residential life with a high degree of contact with primarily first-year

male students. There is likely a positive bias toward students with on-campus living experiences, especially those that were particularly formative for a student's moral and religious identity as the development of the student's religious identity is an explicit aspect of residential living at the institution. As such, this researcher identifies with the majority of participants in their positionality as Christian, residential, and a member of majority culture of the institution.

The second researcher grew up on the West Coast of the United States. This researcher was raised a member of the Church of Christ, a Christian tradition that lacks an established denominational structure, with each church led independently by a set of elders, but which maintain key emphases on Biblical study, a cappella worship, and other shared elements of identity. Raised in a devoted religious household with parents who served in church leadership roles, the researcher's commitment to Christianity has remained stable, although it has been impacted by witness to interchurch conflict over doctrine and practice. This researcher has also taken part in Anglican catechesis, but was not confirmed into the Anglican communion, a liturgical Christian denomination.

It is important to note that this researcher did attend as an undergraduate the institution where the data were collected. This provided this researcher with an awareness of religious practice and social communities at the institution and surrounding area, which may lead to bias when interacting with participants who have attended religious communities known to the researcher. In addition, this researcher shares his colleague's belief that student communities in residence halls have an important impact on students' religious and moral knowledge and mentorship. This researcher also identifies as a

Christian and, resultantly, as a majority member of the institution. These experiences may influence the researcher's presumptions as to why the institution may have the influence it does on participants' experiences.

### *Quality Enhancement Methods*

Triangulation in case study, as in other qualitative approaches, is vital for maintaining accurate verification of findings and claims (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Stake (1995) emphasized the importance of triangulation when he wrote, "All researchers recognize the need not only for being accurate in measuring things but logical in interpreting the meaning of those measurements" (p. 108). In this study, we sought validation for our interpretation of the data through two methods of triangulation: 1) *data source triangulation*, wherein researchers explore whether the phenomenon being studied remains the same at different times, spaces, and interactions, and 2) *investigator triangulation*, in which different researchers analyze the exact same phenomenon (Denzin, 1984; Stake, 1995).

For data source triangulation, we examined social supports influence on students' moral identity ownership and articulation in different contexts, such as familial and educational. The longitudinal element of the survey allowed us to explore whether our claims in the first year regarding students' moral identity ownership were validated in students' third year of study. For investigator triangulation, the researchers maintained consistent discussion and analysis of respondents' narratives and claims to confirm a

shared interpretation of the phenomenon and maintained discussion when evaluations differed.

### *Findings*

In our longitudinal study, we found that both first- and third-year students primarily articulated their moral expertise through interactions and relations with three kinds of social supports: family and peer, educational, and religious. Consistently, the structure of students' moral expertise development was influenced by whichever social support to which the student felt the most connection. Our findings showed these supports offered the most salient frameworks and guidance for students' moral expertise development and moral reasoning. Oftentimes, students had a friend, professor, or mentor, who helped them to connect with a particular social support or framework that influenced their understanding of moral expertise, related to beliefs, practices, and judgements in a particular area of life.

#### *Family Social Support and Moral Expertise in the First Year*

Family members and peers were often considered moral mentors for students in their first year. When navigating moral challenges, students would often refer to specific friends or family members to whom they would go for guidance and support. When asked about whom he would turn to for moral guidance, Westin, a first-year student, noted, "I would either have to say probably my dad. If not him, then I probably would turn to my brother." Another student, Scarlett, in her first year said, "My mom is like my number one whenever I have a problem. That's who I talk to. I'm like, she knows – she's



gonna be able to tell me how to fix this. So, I look to her for guidance and things.” This turning to family for moral guidance was common among many first-year students. Peer guidance played a role as well, as students noted that both their friends in high school and peers in college would provide guidance, moral support, and encouragement consistently throughout their undergraduate experience. However, family was the primary social support among first-year students.

A student’s family influenced the kind of moral language and understanding a student had. Paul, whose parents emphasized religion as integral to moral expertise, noted that, in terms of his moral habits, “I was always taught to pray before meals, go to church Wednesdays/Sundays, Sunday nights, ‘Yes ma’am, no ma’am;’ Just be nice to everybody. Kind of like that golden rule, you know?” For Paul, the language and priorities that defined moral expertise were defined by the key social support where he turned to for moral guidance: his parents, specifically his father. Similarly, Silas looked to his mother for a religious foundation that influenced his moral habits and identity.

Silas said of his mother:

...she’s the one who taught me how to do my first devotions, she’s the one who taught me to pray every day. She’s the one who told me my relationship with God is one of the most important things, so you have to make sure that always stays strong. And I think in turn, because she’s such a... big spiritual leader, or spiritual person for me in my life that has impacted me a lot, that comes with the good morals that is usually associated with Christians.

For Silas, to be moral means to practice devotions, prayer, and prioritize a relationship with God. He was taught this understanding of moral goodness from his mother, who he

considered a moral expert. Like Paul and Silas, many first-year students emulated the moral expertise of the most salient social supports in their lives.

### *First-Year Students' Understanding of Moral Expertise Relied on Social Supports*

As noted above, alignment with a particular social support often governs the way in which students understand their moral expertise; as social supports change for students over their collegiate experience, so does their understanding of their own moral expertise. Jenna, a first-year student drew much of her understanding of moral expertise from her religious affiliations as a Christian and from her family upbringing. She understood her moral expertise and character as operating completely in alignment with her Christian faith, stating, “There’s no part of my character that isn’t rooted in what I believe to be part of the Christian faith. So, I think they go hand-in-hand, and I can’t separate them.” In addition, she understood her family as a major source of social support, and her father served as an important moral exemplar, “because of the practical ways he goes about his faith, evangelizing and being disciplined as a servant of the church and in my family.” For Jenna, understanding moral expertise was directly related to religious language, and she understood a moral exemplar as, like her father, being one who fulfilled the obligations of their religious community.

Like Jenna, many students involved in religious organizations or church communities saw their moral ideals as indistinguishable from their religious identity. One student, Everett, emphasized this relation directly, stating, “I would say it is because I am a Christian. Out of that is my moral character.” For Everett, his Christian identity served

as the foundation of his moral character. Sebastian, who is involved in several faith-based on-campus organizations, noted that his religious identity as a Christian motivates much of his interactions, “It has almost everything to do with my character. I try and give off like good Christian image, especially when I talk to people.” For Sebastian, the salience of his religious affiliation as a Christian related directly to how he understood the way that he should act and interact with others, particularly to maintain a positive image of a Christian individual.

Religious social supports were commonly referred to as relevant to participants’ understanding of moral expertise. Participants would turn to religious mentors for guidance, such as Silas, who reflected on a youth counselor connected with his church. Silas noted, “if I have any kind of questions or if I have any dilemmas, I can always message [the counselor]. I can ask him, ‘I know this may be right, or the thing I’m supposed to do, but really I should be doing this.’” Other members of religious communities, such as accountability partners, motivated students to emphasize moral behavior in their lives, such as Taylor, who noted that when she seeks out “Moral motivation... [it is] definitely my accountability partner back home.” The supports provided them by members of their religious communities were essential for many students in providing guidance while they navigated challenging moral and personal situations.

### *Diminishing Parental Influences in Students' Third Year*

In the third year, students were less likely to consider their moral expertise in relationship to their parents, although several still maintained that their parents were a source of moral support and guidance. More importantly, however, students' understanding of moral expertise was guided more often by a range of social supports they experienced in their undergraduate setting.

Paul spoke of the influence of his roommate, who he considers a "life mentor" in multiple respects. Due to their proximity as roommates, this person is someone Paul has consistent access to for moral guidance and support. Paul described their relationship by saying,

...I'm blessed that one of my roommates that I live with is actually like one of my life mentors, and so like if I ever have any questions based off of, you know, just like life or like a relationship that I have, or just like any questions about the Bible, like we literally just sit in our living room and just like, ask these questions, really random questions too.

From these comments, this mentor seems to at least meet the fourth quality of a mentor as one who "stays in authentic and caring dialogue while the learner works through conflict and challenge" (Liddell et al., 2010, p. 12). It also became clear that having consistent access to a mentor, such as a roommate, continues to aid Paul's personal sense of moral expertise. Furthermore, the process of having such conversations with roommates and maintaining dialogue is one way that students found moral expertise in their third year.

One of the more common education-related social supports mentioned in the third year was professors. In contrast to first year students, who less frequently mentioned their high school teachers as moral mentors or exemplars, college professors received more

credit as moral mentors. One student, Zoe, noted that she turned to professors when encountering challenging moral situations. She said:

I trust a lot of professors at [the university]. So, if it's something that that academic or even not. Yeah, definitely, even if it's not, I'll still go and talk to them because I know that they're my life for a reason. And usually, they give incredible advice because they've been through all the college things, and they've seen it all.

For Zoe, as for other students, professors were not just those to whom a student could go for academic questions but also for questions regarding right and wrong. Zoe mentioned a specific example of attending office hours and talking about moral issues when she said,

I remember going into [the professor's] office hours to review before exams and stuff like that. And just like building an actual relationship with him, which was very, very cool. ...I think [the class] was influential just because of the connection I made with the professor because he actually genuinely cared.

Some students, now that they had developed relationships with professors, would turn to them for moral guidance and support. Third-year students mentioned professors as moral mentors primarily if the professor had fostered a relationship with them outside the classroom, as Zoe mentioned above.

As Zoe's example illustrates, Students sought out professors because professors had previously offered students both support and a sense of belonging. Paul recalled how his interactions with a particular professor led to a sense of trust and a willingness to seek out questions:

And so, I remember going to his office hours, or asking him at lunch... 'What are your thoughts on 'x' or what are your thoughts on this in terms of like how that relates to you know either your faith, or how it relates to like businesses and leadership and businesses?' And so, I feel like that has helped me a lot.

Everett also shared that the professors who offered support were those who shared concern for students' well-being. He saw as moral supports, "Those professors [that] made me feel I feel like I belonged...because they knew my name. They knew how my day was going." Students would turn to professors on a regular basis for moral support and guidance, particularly those professors who showed regard for them and made them feel welcome. In doing so, students were inspired to ask further questions that helped them gain wisdom to apply to moral challenges in their life, which developed their moral expertise further through those challenges.

### *Third Year Students Reconsider the Influence of Religion and Moral Expertise*

Students' reliance upon religious mentors and models changed over the three years. In many cases, students still looked to religious figures, but the figures themselves changed. Everett, in his third year, recalled how the leader of a faith-based campus organization, Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU), helped him through a moral challenge:

I was in a relationship that was not very good for me it was it was sinful and leading me down paths that didn't need to go on. And I had opened up to Matt [a pseudonym] the CRU leader about this, and he was one very understanding and very opening. He wasn't condemning me of sin or judging me on that, but instead he was offering support and encouragement and helping me come to light with that and take the steps I needed to get out of that, overcome it, and to just heal from it over time.

Matt assisted Everett in navigating a difficult situation regarding an unhealthy relationship, and he did so through exemplifying kindness and encouragement to Everett, which allowed him to move forward and make the difficult decisions needed to manage that relationship. Through these relationships, students developed their own practices to

navigate moral challenges. Other students, such as Gavin, Grayson, Grey, and Clark all mentioned that religious communities, whether those be church-based small groups or larger church communities provided spaces of moral support and encouragement, as well as guidance.

Third-year students often found moral exemplars in religious organizations. Jenna noted that one of the local leaders at a faith-based non-profit served as a moral exemplar, saying, “[the leader] just exemplifies an entire life that’s oriented around, first and foremost, love of God and being loved by God, but also letting that animate her friendships and.... where she like chose to live and the people she chooses to fight for.” By seeing someone act with integrity based in their religious belief, Jenna saw how her faith could be lived out in service to others. Clark pointed to several college and youth ministers in the local community as, “moral characters that I've not looked up to but just like look to when it’s like, man, what should I do here? Like how is he reacting to this and should I react to this?” By examining youth ministers, Clark found a vision for proper moral behavior. Leaders within religious organizations often provided moral exemplars that inspired students to take reflective action, which led them to cultivate the practices, habits, and traits associated with moral expertise.

Yet, some students restructured their understanding of moral expertise due to a sense of disassociation with their religious communities. In her third-year interview, Jenna had grown more distant from both her family and her religious community. She spoke of diminished involvement and comfort with her local life group, a small group of church members who meet for Bible Study and community. In speaking of her moral

expertise and the influence of her faith, she notes that, while she may use Christian doctrine and language to justify certain behaviors and practices, “quite honestly the intuition towards kindness specifically, and a lot of other things, similarly, comes more from just like going to public school, and being told by my parents [that] being kind is good.” Her understanding of moral expertise had shifted away from religious practices and now entailed kindness and care toward others. As her involvement and sense of belonging in her church community shifted, Jenna’s own understanding of how her faith influenced her character changed as well.

New peer interactions also shaped the way that students’ religious identity influenced their moral reasoning and understanding of moral expertise. One student, Gavin, discussed how his religious beliefs had been challenged and shaped by interactions with his peers. In his third year, Gavin noted that a major moral challenge he experienced had been learning how to balance beliefs he had regarding the LGBTQIA+ community and the Christian call to love one’s neighbor. Through building friendships with LGBTQIA+ peers, reconsidering beliefs, and noting the condemnation and hatred directed toward LGBTQIA+ individuals by many in the Christian community, Gavin focused on showing love over condemnation. He noted, “If you're going to love, love in every facet of it, whether that's speaking out against something or that's just being there for [LGBTQIA+ people], because..., no matter where they are, what they're doing, they're people.” Gavin’s value system shifted from a rigid emphasis on doctrinal issues to a moral exhortation to love others, even if one’s doctrinal beliefs remain the same. For Gavin, this shift demonstrates a change in how he understood moral expertise. Diverse



interactions with his peers shaped the way that Gavin framed the moral demands of his faith and the practices that were needed to demonstrate moral excellence.

*Peer Mentorship as a Key Social Support in Students' Third Year*

While the substance of students' moral expertise and affiliated beliefs were shaped significantly by prevalent social supports, students often connected with those social supports through key individuals. These individuals often connected the student to a larger social group, usually a religious group or community, and provided moral exemplars which the student emulated. Interestingly, these individuals were often peers.

One student, Grey, grew up in loosely religious household and upon coming to college connected with a church community. He states, "When I came in as a freshman I was more of a lukewarm believer. But now I'm a firm believer." Grey's religious beliefs also shifted, specifically regarding his navigation of the tension between more traditional branches of the Christian faith and LGBTQIA+ issues. As a gay male who found strong social supports in a conservative Baptist church community, Grey moved to a position that balanced a belief that homosexual behavior was sinful but that he was still loved and valued by God. Grey understood moral expertise as centered on emulation of Jesus Christ, one defined by love and personal sacrifice, due to a heightened connection to his religious community.

Grey spoke of one student, Seth (a pseudonym), who was instrumental in connecting him with the Baptist church he now attends. Grey notes that Seth, "randomly sat next to me in Chapel, and he invited me to go to his church. And that's the church

where I go to today. I ended up like joining his CG [a small group of church members who meet for Bible study and community] and stuff..." For Grey, Seth showed him love and support, particularly when he was working to reconcile his sexual orientation with his religious beliefs. Grey then emulated that love and support that Seth exemplified in his own moral reasoning and moral practice. Seth served as both a moral exemplar and moral mentor as Grey developed a new understanding of moral expertise.

Similarly, Gavin claimed that one of his major moral influences is "A very, very good friend of mine in [Gavin's] life group [similar to a CG], whom I love very dearly, and seeing his, not only his life, but his faith flourish and grow." As a leader, Gavin's friend provided a moral exemplar for him to emulate within his religious community. These peers also shared characteristics common to Parks' (2000) construct of the moral mentor. As noted, in many cases these were fellow students rather than professors, administrators, or family members.

By proximity, a few students mentioned the strong influence of their roommates in having consistent conversation and engaging in weekly activities together, like attending church. For Westin, he tended to gravitate toward his roommate relationship as a source of social support. Westin explained,

I'd have to say that who I go to most frequently is my roommate and one of my good friends, Andre (pseudonym). I go to church with them every Sunday. I've had so many different and meaningful conversations with them the past semester, and it's been a really beneficial relationship to have for everyone.

Like Paul, who mentioned his roommate served as a key peer mentor, Westin's roommate played a key role of social support even though Westin did not identify his

roommate as a mentor. As Westin also mentioned, positive roommate relationships tended to benefit others beyond the specific context of the relationship.

Peer supports often changed for students as they moved through the college years, and indeed they often grew as a prominent influence on students' development of moral expertise. Students who considered their parents to be major moral exemplars and mentors in their first year would then note specific college peers and friends who took the place of key moral mentors and supports in terms of student's understanding and cultivation of moral expertise. These peers would help students articulate what it meant to be a good or moral person, and those friends would help keep students accountable in terms of maintaining moral practices and behaviors.

### *Discussion*

The main focus of this longitudinal case study is how sources of social support shape undergraduate students' understanding of their moral exemplars and mentors and what being a moral expert entails. As students experience different social supports in their undergraduate experience, students here take further ownership of pursuing moral expertise depending upon which supports are most important to them at the time. Although social supports vary depending on the student, this case study shows how family, peers, professors, ministry leaders, and others support undergraduate students in forming their language for what it means to be a moral expert. As students move from the first year to the third year, they develop expanded frameworks and language for moral expertise, which helped them to cultivate relevant practices and characteristics.

The context of a faith-based, research university proved important insofar as it provided a variety of resources for students to explore and cultivate moral expertise. As a faith-based institution, the visibility of on-campus religious organizations, such as CRU, and the openness with which students and faculty could discuss issues related to religion and morality, allowed students to connect with a variety of moral mentors. Additionally, the institution's location provided connections with off-campus mentors, such as pastors. These connections off-campus are important for students in their exploration of moral expertise and character development (Dougherty et al., forthcoming). As a research university, the focus on moral development by the institution overall was not as salient to students, as is consistent with scholarship (Glanzer & Ream, 2009; Reuben, 1996). Students rarely discussed moral learning in relation to the larger institution, but the social supports with which they connected often had affiliation, to various degrees, with the university. The ability to have conversations regarding morality and religion, as well as the provision of a variety of supports, were major contributions of the context in which this study took place.

Religious communities in our study were revealed to be important social supports for students in their crafting and understanding of moral expertise. Scholars have noted the impact that college and religious communities have on students, noting that the type of college that students attend, the off-campus environments, and the experiences they have are important influences on students' religious beliefs and college experience (Hill, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012; Mayrl & Oeur, 2009; Uecker, Regenerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Religious identity development often involves a

process of grappling with and challenging one's own beliefs, with these religious beliefs occasionally taking on greater salience and influence on the way an individual lives their life (Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011; Foster & LaForce, 1999; King, 2003).

In navigating challenges related to their religious identity, we found students often had to articulate their own moral beliefs and understanding of moral expertise, and they did so in comparison and in opposition to their religious community. Jenna, for instance, understood moral expertise through the lens of her Christian faith in her first year. By her third year, experiencing a disassociation with her religious community, Jenna understood moral expertise in terms separate from her faith. While many of her values remained the same, she made moral decisions through journaling and reading rather than in conversation with family or religious social supports. However, other students who maintained strong religious affiliations navigated difficult moral situations with a religiously grounded vision of moral expertise, which, alongside consultation of moral mentors, was used as an articulate framework for moral reasoning.

The presence of peer mentors, who provided students with an image of a moral hero, lends empirical validation to philosopher Zagzebski's claims (2017) regarding moral exemplars. Zagzebski noted:

As far as I know, [empirical studies on moral exemplars] have begun only in the last few years. The range of the studies is necessarily limited by the nature of the methodology of empirical science and the fact that exemplars have to be identified by easily observed external features. (2017, p. 68).

Our findings corroborate Zagzebski's (2017) argument that moral exemplars provide an understanding of what it means to be good. Our research joins previous study of moral

exemplars, as in the work Colby and Damon (1991). Exemplarist moral theory articulates a moral framework dependent upon those individuals who practice or represent the moral ideals towards which one ought to aspire. As noted above, students often had moral exemplars, such as parents in their first year and then peers, supervisors, or professors in their third year. Moral exemplars set an example of what it meant to be a good person, as well as providing a template for the moral language that students used.

In our interviews, parents, peer groups, and peer mentors helped guide students in shaping their understanding of moral expertise and what acquiring moral expertise entails. Mentorship has been studied consistently in higher education and emerging adult literature, although much of it focuses on faculty-student mentoring relationships (Fruith & Chan, 2018; Fuentes et al., 2014; Parks, 2000). Our findings suggest that mentorship is an essential aspect of moral expertise development and understanding, as seen in Paul's dialogues with his roommate, whom he considered a mentor. We emphasize that peer friendships that possess a mentorship component are important for students' moral expertise development as they transition between their first and third year.

Additionally, in recent years there has been a development of research on deeper life interactions, understood as conversations between students wherein those students reflect on their beliefs and values, within residence hall communities and throughout the college experience (Beckowski & Gebauer, 2018; Sriram et al., 2020a; Sriram et al., 2020b; Sriram & McLevain, 2016). Scholars have found interactions between students, staff, and faculty that focus on academic conversations and then to deeper life interactions lead to psychological sense of community (Sriram et al., 2020a). These

conversations about beliefs and values were essential for students in our study, as they forced students to navigate moral questions and articulate what kind of person they wanted to be and why they wanted to be such.

### *Implications for Practice*

With the pronounced importance of peer mentors' influence on moral expertise development, we suggest that administrators should reemphasize their focus on promoting mentoring relationships between students, particularly those between students in different years of study. One possible method is to offer on-campus housing incentives for upper-division students to serve specifically as peer mentors. This would allow further opportunities and access for first-year students to connect with mentors and build the meaningful relationships that contribute to moral expertise development. Additionally, administrators could bolster pre-existing mentorship programs. These are ways in which the mentoring connections essential to moral expertise can be maintained.

Relationships between students and education-related social supports who deliberately create a sense of belonging should be highlighted, particularly the role of faculty outside the classroom. Professors who utilize office hours for building a relationship with a student through various means, such as dedicating time for sharing meals with students to create a sense of belonging, is an important resource for student development of moral expertise on campus. Rather than focusing solely on course content in most interactions with students, faculty can ask intentional questions that help

a student increase their moral imagination or help them consider different frameworks for moral decisions. Such action would assist students in cultivating moral expertise.

Student affairs administrators, as well as faculty, should also be cognizant of the religious organizations present in the surrounding community. Participants shared that religious affiliation and involvement provided a pivotal frame-of-reference when students sought out moral mentorship. Connecting religiously oriented students with organizations and communities that share their orientation will help provide students with important opportunities for cultivating moral expertise. While this process may be easier at faith-based institutions that may maintain bonds with local religious institutions, public and non-sectarian institutions can also maintain an awareness of religious resources to which they can direct students. Given the reality that many students come to college with diverse religious affiliations, administrators can promote their exploration of moral expertise through supporting students' efforts to connect with religious organizations.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

In this longitudinal case study, we discerned the importance of peer mentors and peer communities in promoting moral reasoning and moral expertise. Students were often guided by their peers when they encountered difficult moral challenges, and conversations with ideologically diverse peers, as well as peers from different religious, cultural, and racial/ethnic backgrounds, appear to be important in changing students' moral frameworks from their first to third years. However, more research in this area is



needed, and future qualitative studies can focus on peer mentorship and its impact on students' cultivation of moral expertise.

The influence of students' religious identity is also important. Students often reflected and recounted how their religious identity was formative of their character and understanding of what it means to be a moral person. Religious figures and peers also served as moral mentors. Further research could explore this intersection of moral and religious identity, how students of different religions understand moral expertise, and how different denominations or sects provide moral mentorship. Exploring these areas could help inform our assumptions as to what social supports could be utilized or formed to aid students in pursuing moral mentorship and cultivating moral expertise.

Further research could also explore the influence of student affairs administrators on students' development of moral expertise. In this case study, students provided more frequent and vivid descriptions of peers, peer mentors, and religious social supports they turned to for moral guidance. University staff members were infrequently mentioned apart from some residence hall staff and staff at the university's counseling center. At the residential level, student staff members (peers) were mentioned and described as sources of social support much more frequently. This raises a broader question of how student affairs administrators provide social support for students, what their role is in providing moral guidance and support, and how students perceive a sense of moral support and guidance from student affairs staff specifically.

### *Limits*

An important limitation in our analysis is that of our sample, as participation was limited in the third year with the use of virtual interview methods and restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Researchers in this study believe some of those limitations are related to giving and receiving non-verbal communication during the interview process and the overall response rate for participants in the study. Overall participation was also limited to a single institution, although the longitudinal approach we utilized allowed for more responses that demonstrated their changing experiences and relationships.

An additional limitation occurred in relation to questions regarding social isolation. Questions regarding isolation were not included the first-year survey, and in the third-year survey additions only one question focused on students' sense of isolation at the institution. This limited the opportunities for respondents to address or consider how isolation shaped the way that they understood moral expertise. Students who may have lacked social supports at different periods pointed to practices such as journaling, reading, and listening to podcasts as ways to build one's moral judgment and expertise. However, the study would have been strengthened by further exploration of the relationship between students' sense of isolation and understanding of moral expertise. This limitation should be considered in future research.

It is also important to note that respondents also shared a similar religious background and orientation in a particular faith tradition. Future research on moral expertise and moral development among college students would do well to focus on more institutions as well as on a more diverse sample of students with different religious

orientation or no religious orientation. For example, we are not able to draw conclusions about how social supports shape Muslim students' understanding of moral expertise and how their understanding of moral expertise may be different in the context of a Christian research university. Increasing the religious diversity of the respondents would improve generalizability in the research and greater understanding of students' development of moral expertise. Studies that explore the experience of students with different or no religious orientation, as well as a sample size with greater racial and ethnic diversity, could provide new insights into the forces that shape students' understanding of what it means to be a moral expert and how they pursue moral mentorship. Such research can also assist in triangulating the findings provided in this study.

### *Conclusion*

In our longitudinal case-study, students in their first year of college understood moral expertise through interaction with several key social supports, including family, peers, and religious organization leaders, as well as mentors from high school. The frameworks and language that students used to make sense of moral expertise often emerged from mentors connected to those social supports that were most influential in a student's life, such as parents, a religious organization, or peer mentors. As students transitioned through college into their third year, changes in their social supports altered the way they made sense of moral expertise, the moral exemplars they emulated, and the moral mentors they consulted. Faculty and other educational supports also gained greater prominence among students.

Our findings suggest that students' understanding of moral expertise, and moral development more broadly, is reliant upon supporting students' interactions with supportive peer groups, mentors, and communities that give students a space and language to understand their moral frameworks and to whom they can turn for guidance. For administrators and faculty interested in supporting students' pursuit of moral expertise and helping students to explore moral development, providing places where on-campus student communities and organizations can learn and discuss issues related to moral identity may be a helpful approach.

This longitudinal case study adds to the existing college student moral development research that has traditionally been focused around moral cognition. The findings of this study substantiate moral development research that focuses on how students collaborate and appropriately rely on others to cultivate skills, habits, and characteristics that demonstrate moral development, particularly during their undergraduate experiences. In this case study, students look to sources of social support they most identify with in moral challenges to seek out moral guidance and support, which this study has shown is rarely a highly individualized process that has been emphasized in student affairs practice for decades. The evidence presented here should amplify the alternative approach to moral development research that emphasizes how students relate and look to moral mentors and exemplars to gain language, wisdom, practices, skills, and habits that further their moral development.

Additionally, administrators should encourage peer mentorship initiatives to provide students with relationship opportunities that can lead to these discussions. Further

study on moral expertise and social supports should include larger and more diverse samples and a focus on peer mentorship and the role that peers play as moral exemplars and mentors. Exploration of the relationship of moral expertise and religion may also build greater understanding as student life professionals formulate social support entities on their campus. By exploring students' understanding of moral expertise in the context of a Christian university, this case study provides a foundation for additional research that will support students as they reflect upon issues of moral excellence.

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### Baylor Faith and Spirituality Survey Qualitative Instrument

1. Can you tell me your age and current major?
2. What do you think the purpose of college is?

**We're going to ask some questions about your moral development and growth.**

3. What are some habits that you were encouraged to practice to be a better person?
  - a. Which ones do you still practice to try to help your moral development?
  - b. Which habits do you find are especially helpful in your moral development?
4. Are there any habits that you find particularly unhelpful? If so, what are they, and why are they unhelpful?
5. Where do you typically turn to for guidance about what is right and wrong or good and bad?
6. To where do you turn for motivation, strength, and support when facing a tough moral situation?
  - a. Were there any particular courses, groups, communities, mentors or teachers, etc. at [the institution] that you found particularly helpful? If so, what or who were they? What made them so helpful?
  - b. Were there any that you found particularly unhelpful? If so, what or who were they? What made them so unhelpful?
  - c. Can you tell me a story about a time one of these supports was really helpful?
7. Please tell me about a major moral challenge have you faced during your time at [the institution]?
  - a. How did you address and resolve it?
  - b. What resources and/or relationships helped you address it and resolve it?
  - c. Why do you think these resources/relationships were these so helpful?

8. Since you have been at [the institution], who have been some of your major moral heroes? Why?
9. What are some of your core moral convictions that you've developed while at [the institution]?
10. Can you describe a time when felt extremely loved and supported at [the institution]? What helped you to feel this way?
11. Can you tell about a time you felt isolated at [the institution]?
12. What courses at [the institution] would you identify as courses that have been the most morally influential during your time at [the institution]? What was morally influential about them?
13. What outside the classroom experiences would you identify as being the most morally influential during your time at [the institution]? What was morally influential about them?
14. Are there certain types of moral education, conversations or support you wish you had at [the institution] that you did not experience? If so, what?
15. Do you have a sense of purpose in your life, or is this something you are still trying to figure out?
  - a. If you have a purpose, what would you say it is?
  - b. Did [the institution] help you develop it? If so, how? If not, why not?
16. Ten years from now, what would living a "good life" look like to you? (e.g., family, living situation, job, as well as issues related to meaning and purpose in life)
17. Have your religious beliefs changed at all since you started to attend [the institution]?

[if NO]

Have certain religious beliefs become more important or less important?

[if YES and changed while in college]:

- a. How did your beliefs change?
- b. What is it about your experience at [the institution] that has made you change your beliefs?



18. Is there a particular religious, spiritual, or non-religious label with which you identify? [if student needs prompt] For example, some people say that they are Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Atheist, Agnostic, etc.?
  - a. What beliefs do you consider central to this identity?
  - b. What about practices?
  - c. Experiences?
19. Can you share a story when the professor brought a Christian perspective to the subject matter, besides the religion courses?
20. Do you remember an example of professors ever talking about their own faith or Christian perspective in class?
21. Would you say Chapel strengthened or weakened your religious beliefs? Why?
22. Have you had a life crisis or other major difficulty at [the institution]? If so, how would you say the [institutional] community and experience helped or hurt during that time?
23. To what extent do you feel like you are part of a spiritual community here? If yes, how authentic do you feel like you can be in that community? If no, why not?
24. Regarding the moral struggle you mentioned earlier, did being [named religious identity] help you? In what way or ways? Why do you think this helped you? If it didn't help you, why do you think it was unhelpful?
25. How do you think being [named religious identity] has influenced the formation of your character?
26. With regard to race, how would you identify yourself?
27. Where did you go to high school?

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