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DISCURSIVE STRUGGLES REFLECTED IN THE COMMUNICATION OF
CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN PARENTS AND THEIR ADULT CHILDREN WITH
DIFFERING RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND VALUES

by

Braedon G. Worman

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Communication Studies

Under the Supervision of Drs. Dawn O. Braithwaite and Jordan Soliz

Lincoln, Nebraska

November 2023

DISCURSIVE STRUGGLES REFLECTED IN THE COMMUNICATION OF
CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN PARENTS AND THEIR ADULT CHILDREN WITH
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Braedon G. Worman, Ph. D.

University of Nebraska, 2023

Advisor: Drs. Dawn O. Braithwaite and Jordan Soliz

Nearly half of American adults no longer believe in their childhood faiths (Pew Research Center, 2015). The steady decline of Christianity could have considerable impacts on family life (Pew Research Center, 2022). From a postmodern critical perspective and guided by Relational Dialectics Theory 2.0, the researcher sought to discern how conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values communicated when they discussed these differences, as well as to identify the discourses that informed and were reflected in their talk and illustrate how these discourses interplayed and animated the meaning of participants' Christian family identities. The researcher undertook turning points interviews; 30 adult children with differing religious beliefs and values from their conservative Christian parent(s) identified relational change sites. The researcher then used contrapuntal data analysis to analyze the data.

Based in relational dialectics theory, the researcher discovered two primary discourses that informed and were reflected in participants' talk concerning their communication with their conservative Christian parents: (a) righteousness and exclusion; and (b) openness and inclusion. Most participants countered the dominant

discourse of righteousness and exclusion with the discourse of openness and inclusion. Others negated righteousness and exclusion altogether and/or entertained it along with openness and inclusion. Some participants brought the two discourses together, creating discursive hybrids.

The findings of the present study facilitated the researcher's argument that when adult children with differing religious beliefs and values from those of their conservative Christian parents assert their own religious identities to these parents, both the conservative Christian parents and the adult children experience difficulty making meaning of their Christian family identity. Understanding the interplay of the discourse of righteousness and exclusion and the discourse of openness and inclusion in participants' talk provides insight into the processes of individual and collective identity construction and meaning making. The researcher discusses these insights and applications for these family members.

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Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” – which is the first commandment with a promise – “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

(New International Version Bible, 1978/2011, Ephesians 6:1-4)

Relationships are close to the extent that they enable selves to become.

(Baxter, 2004b, p. 110)

CHAPTER ONE: ARGUMENT FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

One’s personal identity is one’s theory of who one is and would like to become (Moshman, 2011). A person’s capability to construct their own identity is informed and “constrained, but not determined, by inner and outer realities, including [their] social affiliations and the perceptions of those around [them]” (Moshman, 2007, p. 185). In other words, one’s relationships to and interactions with others both facilitate and limit the sense of self one can create. One social affiliation that often impacts the identity development of an individual is family. A family identity is co-constructed as family members interact with one another; developing and reinforcing expectations of members in an effort to create a sense of who the family is and would like to become as a collective unit (Baxter, 1987, 2004c, 2011, 2014b; Braithwaite, Foster, et al., 2018; Duck 1994, 2002; Hall, 1992; Hecht, 1993; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Medved et al., 2006; Montgomery, 1992; Sillars, 1995; Wood, 1982).

Phillips and Soliz (2020) added to previous conceptions of family identity by making the connection between family communication, relational identity, and culture

explicit. They called family identity a “family relational culture,” and defined it as “the communicative processes and relational ideologies that constitute the family as it is constructed through social-cultural influences” (p. 259). Family identity serves as the nucleus of a family relationship by providing members with a shared universe of discourse and definition in matters that are important to the family and in their larger culture. Therefore, to investigate the concept of family identity without first understanding the central role of communication in the development, maintenance, modification, and/or destruction of family identity is to overlook its most crucial aspect and to underestimate what communication scholars and theorists have contributed to the current academic understanding of family identity.

As families are systems (Yoshimura & Galvin, 2018), family members help to shape a family’s identity. Younger members of families are often socialized into existing family identities by older members (Phillips & Soliz, 2020; Rittenour, 2020; Sillars, 1995). Families teach their members numerous beliefs, values, practices, and norms; largely indirectly through routine family communication, although such teaching may be done purposefully as well. Family socialization is enacted in various ways, such as enacting rituals, telling and discussing stories, and communicating expectations. For example, researchers have suggested that storytelling can help establish and reinforce family identity, particularly when stories are told in an interactional manner and invoke a sense of collectivity through the use of “we-statements” (e.g., Koenig Kellas, 2005, 2015; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2013; Thompson et al., 2009), and that some messages that people receive from their family members are particularly memorable and have considerable socialization power (Knapp et al., 1981; Medved et al., 2006; Wang, 2014).

Because socialization into family identities is never so complete that family members' personal identities are entirely subsumed by the identities of their families, Sillars (1995) recognized that "all families require some means of bridging individual and family identities" (p. 390). Bridging identity differences is often quite challenging and is even more complicated for culturally, generationally, and religiously diverse families because members of such families may have meaningfully different beliefs and/or values (Colaner et al., 2014; Sillars & Canary, 2013).

In many families, members' shared religious beliefs and values contribute considerably to their family identity. According to the Pew Research Center (2021), 72 percent of the U.S. population identifies as religiously affiliated. Phillips and Soliz (2020) observed that "a family religious identity may be unimportant in some families, and yet when it is important to the family, it may serve as the foundation for the ways in which a family communicates" (p. 265). Ysseldyk et al. (2010) pointed out that unlike other identities associated with groups, such as sports teams, schools, or occupations, religious identity can provide a sense of eternally-lasting group membership that helps quell existential anxiety. Moreover, Hogg et al. (2010) claimed that religious identity also reduces one's uncertainty regarding oneself, the behavior of others, and one's interaction with others because it "furnishes a sense of who we are" and "prescribes what we should think, feel, and do" (p. 74). In some families, shared religious beliefs and values are so important to members that they become synonymous with the family identity (Baumbach et al., 2006; Colaner, 2008; Martinez et al., 2016; Morgan, 2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022). Family members may mark their religious beliefs and values as part of what distinguishes their family from others and allow their religious beliefs to inform the

expectations they hold for one another and themselves individually (Scharp & Beck, 2017; Worman & Kartch, 2022). The importance of religious beliefs and values in the identities of such families helps explain why families play a prominent role in the religious identity development of their younger members. Boyatzis et al. (2006) acknowledged, “Even if it takes a village to raise a child, the family is surely ‘the first village’ of RSD [religious and spiritual development]” (p. 298). Perhaps chief among the expectations that religious families hold for their members is the expectation that children will come to share the religious beliefs and values introduced and instilled by their parents (Hayward, 2020; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2002; Trinitipoli, 2007; Worman, 2020).

In sum, the communicative co-creation of family identities into which new and younger family members are socialized over time by more seasoned family members is influenced by discourses voiced within families as well as in the cultures in which families live (Baxter, 2011). Among the discourses at play are those pertaining to religious beliefs and values; most often entailed is the expectation that younger family members come to adopt the religious beliefs and values of older family members (Hayward, 2020; Ingersoll-Dayton et al., 2002; Trinitipoli, 2007; Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022). Competition between discourses regarding religious beliefs and values complicates the process of socializing a younger family member into the religious identity of a family (Colaner et al., 2014), and may be perceived by members of families for whom religious identity is closely linked to family identity as identity-threatening (Scharp & Beck, 2017; Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022) and uncertainty-producing (Hogg et al., 2010; Ysseldyk et al., 2010).

To better understand these important features of family identity, *my initial aim with the present study was to uncover the competing discourses animating the talk of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values. My central goal was to understand the nature of the interplay of the competing discourses, the power of these discourses relative to one another, as well as the impact of the competition of these discourses on how conservative Christian parents and their adult children who have differing religious beliefs and values make meaning of their Christian family identities.* To this end, to follow, I first discuss socializing family members into the family's religious identity, including the prominent roles of parents and of turning points in parent-child relationships pertaining to this socialization process. Second, I discuss communicating across religious belief and value differences in families.

Socializing Family Members into the Family's Religious Identity

First, I discuss the process of socializing a family member into the religious identity of the family to underscore its relevance to the present study. Socialization into the religious identity of a family involves ongoing conscious and unconscious efforts by key, knowledgeable family members (Phillips & Soliz, 2020; Rittenour, 2020; Sillars, 1995). To follow, I discuss four points about communication and socialization into the religious identity of a family. First, I describe the process of communication and socialization into the religious identity of a family, primarily focusing on the role that parents commonly play in the process, the seriousness with which parents often take on this role, and the means that parents employ to socialize their children into the religious identities of their families. Second, I illustrate the connection between socialization into the religious identity of a family and parent-child relational turning points and the

findings of one of the most extensive scholarly explorations involving turning points, parent-child communication, and religious beliefs and values. Third, I justify my use of the language of success and failure to describe outcomes of socialization into the religious identity of a family. Fourth, I typify the communication of parents who successfully socialize their children into the religious identity of their families and the life-long impact that successful socialization of this nature has on the values and behavior of their children.

First, I turn to the socialization process itself. Part of the process of socializing members into a family is teaching them about the family's religious identity. Most people are socialized into accepting the religious beliefs and values of their families from an early age (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991), and parents most often play the central role in this process. Ingersoll-Dayton et al. (2002) identified four dimensions of religiosity (organizational participation, religious affiliation, religious beliefs and practices, and religious commitment) that are particularly subject to change over the course of a person's life as well as four forces promoting increased religiosity. Among these catalysts for increased religiosity was child-rearing. Ingersoll-Dayton et al. found that some religious parents increased their own religiosity upon having children in order to encourage their children to adopt their religious beliefs and values. Often, this increase in religiosity involved more regular church attendance.

The tendency to increase one's religiosity once one becomes a parent may also be explained by the common perception of parenthood by religious parents as a holy calling that they must answer by assuming responsibility for the religious identities of their children (Dollahite & Marks, 2005; Mahoney, 2005). Gunnoe et al. (1999) claimed that

“ensuring children’s salvation is the religious parent’s primary childrearing objective” (p. 201). Baumbach et al. (2006) have asserted that “parental interaction and communication may be the single most important influence on adolescent attitudes toward religion and spirituality” (p. 395). Several researchers (e.g., Chen, 2005; Colaner, 2008; Ecklund & Lee, 2011; Lewis, 2012; Mahoney, 2005; Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022) have suggested that religious parents, especially those who are conservative¹, may express the view that embracing only particular religious beliefs and values is acceptable and beneficial, and that differences in religious beliefs and values may be a source of conflict among family members. To avoid the negative consequences that having a child with differing religious beliefs may bring, many parents socialize their children into the religious identity of their families through both routine interactions and intentionally meaningful moments. For example, many families in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints socialize their members into the family religion by regularly attending

¹ The term *conservative* has multiple potential meanings. Participants in a recent study I undertook (Worman & Kartch, 2022) were aware that the term ‘conservative Christian’ may refer to a person’s political views in addition to or apart from their religious ones. Lewis (2012) described conservative people as possessing a realist ontological view and having placed a high value on their beliefs. The term *conservative* is the one most commonly applied by scholars to refer to religious individuals who fit Lewis’s description (e.g., Andersen & Taylor, 2008; Boggs, 2016; Brown, 2002; Hacker, 2005; Kunzman, 2009; McNamara, 1985). Other scholars have used terms such as *evangelical* (e.g., Bryant, 2011; Ingersoll, 2003; Moran, 2007), *traditional* (e.g., Jones & Butman, 2011; O’Donovan, 1983), *exclusivist* (e.g., Pearce et al., 2017; Trinitapoli, 2007; Worman & Kartch, 2022), or some combination thereof (e.g., Deckman, 2004; Giesbrecht & Sevcik, 2000). When asked what it means to be a conservative Christian, the participants in one of my previous studies (Worman, 2020), who self-identified as conservative Christian parents, tended to describe the meaning of the term as involving adherence to a “strict moral code” (Tamera, 1:1, 26) that is informed by “tak[ing] seriously... the authority of the Bible” (Pete, 2:2, 34-35), accepting the Bible as literally true, and “believ[ing] in Jesus” (Melanie, 4:6, 38) [These names are pseudonyms. These numbers refer to interview number, page number, and line number in the transcripts. Hence, (1:1, 26) refers to interview #1, page 1, and line 26.]. These participants’ own articulations of what it means to be a conservative Christian appear to roughly correspond to the type of individuals identified by Lewis (2012) as least likely to be accepting of the differing religious beliefs and values of their children. As in my previous study, I did not define the term *conservative Christian* for participants in the present study and instead solicited their own understandings. However, I did provide participants in the present study with these descriptors if prompted. I wish to continue to reveal potential meanings of this term, especially as applied to Christian parents by their adult children with religious beliefs and/or values that differ from those of these parents.

religious services and home meetings together and engaging in daily scripture study with one another, as well as gathering to mark religious occasions such as a baptism or family member's leave for or return from a mission trip (Worwood et al., 2020).

Second, the oft-high stakes that come with parent-child communication about differing religious beliefs and/or values may turn the instances during which these messages are exchanged into relational turning points (Colaner, 2008; Morgan, 2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Worwood et al., 2020). Turning points are instances of transformation in a person's life during which consequential change occurs in the meanings that people and/or interpersonal relationships have for them (Baxter, 2011; Bolton, 1961; Bullis & Bach, 1989; Goodall, 2000). During such times, the trajectories of relationship development are altered (e.g., see Mongeau et al., 2022). Many scholars have examined the interpersonal and/or family communication that occurs during turning points and the relational consequences that ensue, both positively and negatively (e.g., Baxter et al., 1999; Braithwaite, Waldron, et al., 2018; Wang & Nuru, 2017). Colaner (2008), Morgan (2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022), and Worwood et al. (2020) have done so with respect to revelations of differing religious beliefs among family members, and Bullis and Bach (1989) have done so with respect to socialization into an organizational culture.

In one of the most extensive investigations of family communication and religious identity to date, Colaner (2008) undertook a turning points study of the experiences of emerging adults raised in Evangelical homes. She identified six supra-types of turning points in the identification of children with their parents' Evangelical values as well as three themes of parent-child communicative co-construction of religious identity. These

supra-types include events pertaining to (a) Christian activities; (b) life transitions; (c) family changes; (d) traumatic events; (e) making own decisions; and (f) exposure to other religions. The themes Colaner developed illustrate that Evangelical parents (a) negotiate expectations for appropriate behavior with their children, such as attending church services and activities, abstaining from dating non-Evangelicals, sex outside of marriage, and consumption of salacious media, spending time with Christian friends, and celebrating religious holidays and special occasions; (b) instruct their children in the tenants of the family religion, as well as its validity and utility, through collectively-enacted rituals such as saying mealtime prayers, reading Bible stories, and working through family devotionals; (c) hold discussions with their children in response to everyday situations and children's questions regarding Evangelicalism; and (d) implicitly emphasize the family religion as integral to the family culture/identity.

While Colaner (2008) provided an account of religious family identity socialization efforts of parents within one specific religious tradition, through her results, she lent credence to broader claims made by other scholars. For instance, these findings serve as additional support for the importance of consistency in parental attempts to socialize their children into the religious identity of their family; participants in Colaner's study reported being confused and disappointed when their parents did not follow their own religious teachings, leading some to reject Evangelicalism altogether. Her results are similar to those of Dollahite and Marks (2005), who found that the main facilitators of children's spiritual development are what parents teach their children, the example they set for their children, and the discussions that they have with their children regarding religious/spiritual issues.

Colaner (2008) shed light on specific rituals that may be part of the process of socialization into a religious family identity. Colaner identified nightly Bible reading and family devotions as aspects of socialization into a family religion that involved family rituals. A family ritual is a “voluntary, recurring, patterned communication event whose jointly-enacted performance by family members pays homage to what they regard as sacred, thereby producing and reproducing a family’s identity and its web of social relations” (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006a, pp. 262-263). Family rituals are important because they may be demonstrations of reverence for family members and for being a member of the family. Family rituals, such as sharing a daily meal, also “can provide a sense of family unity and identity” and “create an opportunity to pass on attitudes and values within a family across generations” (Brotherson & Estepp, 2020, p. F11). Family rituals can be used to strengthen family members’ connections to each other and to the cultural and/or ethnic background of the family as well.

In addition to Colaner (2008), a number of scholars have specifically recognized the role of rituals in reinforcing religious identity and promoting its internalization as well (e.g., Beit-Hallahmi, 1991; Mullikin, 2006; Park & Ecklund, 2007; Roccas, 2005). Although much more research on the use of ritual in socialization into a family’s religious identity is needed, researchers (e.g., Beit-Hallahmi, 1991; Mullikin, 2006; Park & Ecklund, 2007; see Roccas, 2005) have indicated that the practice of religious rituals as a family (such as collective prayer, communion, and church attendance) is among the most central elements of socialization into a family’s religious identity. Other central elements of socialization into a family’s religious identity are (a) religious lessons given by parents to their children; (b) religious discussions between parents and their children;

(c) the examples set by parents for their children through their everyday actions and decision-making; and (d) the frequency, consistency, and meaningfulness of these aforementioned elements for children (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991; Mullikin, 2006; Park & Ecklund, 2007; see Roccas, 2005). Because of the prevalence of rituals in socialization into a family's religious identity, I suspected that rituals might have been important to my work in the present study.

Third, there are three reasons that I describe outcomes of socialization into the religious identity of a family using success/failure terms. To start, I use such terms in order to echo the terms that other scholars who have written about socialization have used in the past (e.g., Baumrind & Black, 1967) and continue to use (e.g., Baumbach et al., 2006; Hogg et al., 2010; Trinitapoli, 2007). Additionally, I utilize the language of success and failure to describe outcomes of socialization into the religious identity of a family because, as Colaner (2008) observed, "a focus upon socialization [in families] is primarily concerned with the ways in which parents act toward children as a way to regulate their behavior and promote desirable behaviors, norms, and values" (p. 29). In other words, scholars understand socialization in families to mostly involve intentional efforts to coerce a target into identifying, thinking, believing, behaving and/or communicating in a particular manner; those actively doing the socializing have a desired outcome and work to achieve that outcome (Boyatzis et al., 2006; Colaner et al., 2014; Regnerus et al., 2004). Therefore, when younger family members reach adulthood, those family members who tried to socialize younger family members into the family identity (mostly parents) can reasonably be said to have succeeded or failed on the basis of whether or not they achieved the outcome they desired (i.e., the younger family member

conformed to the family identity). While such a definitive distinction may be less appropriate for describing outcomes of other kinds of socialization in families, as such outcomes may be less obvious, efforts to socialize younger family members into the religious identity of their family have a fairly conclusive outcome: by the time a younger family member reaches adulthood, they have either fully embraced the same religious beliefs and/or values as their family members or have not fully embraced the same religious beliefs and/or values as their family members.

Finally, I describe outcomes of socialization into the religious identity of a family as (un)successful or as failures because parents who engage in such socialization often use similar language. Ellison et al. (1996) showed that conservative Protestant parents often come to feel as if they failed their children when their children do not fully embrace their religious beliefs and/or values. Also, the conservative Christian parents who I interviewed in a pilot study (Worman, 2020) described their own efforts to socialize their children into the conservative Christian identity of their families using success/failure terms. For example, many of these parents stated that they felt like they failed their children who did not come to fully embrace their religious beliefs and values. Pete, a father whose adult daughter has religious beliefs and values that differ from his own, said: “[The fact that my daughter does not share my religious beliefs and values] made me very disappointed in myself, that I had *failed* to communicate [the value of the religious beliefs and values of our family] to her and [teach] her” (2:11, 369-370, emphasis added). Given these three reasons for describing outcomes of socialization into the religious identity of a family using success/failure terms, I argue that I am justified in using such terms in the present study.

Fourth, researchers have provided some indication of how parents successfully interact and pass on their religious beliefs and identities to their children (e.g., Bader & Desmond, 2006; Baumbach et al., 2006; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1990; Mullikin, 2006; Petts, 2009; Taris & Semin, 1997). For example, Baumbach et al. (2006) suggested that, while parenting style (authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive; see Baumrind, 1968, 1991) does not predict adolescent spirituality, parental communication about spirituality that is frequent, open, and honest has a strong impact on adolescent spirituality. Mullikin (2006) also found that frequent religious communication between parents and children was correlated with children self-identifying as religious. Parents who transmit their religious beliefs to their children most effectively have been shown to be those who (a) have high-quality interactions with their children (Taris & Semin, 1997); and (b) are consistent with their religious messages and act in ways that are commensurate with those messages (Bader & Desmond, 2006). Despite the fact that diminished participation in religious activities is common for individuals entering adulthood, Petts (2009) found that children raised with religious consistency may “delay any decline in religious involvement and attend religious services frequently throughout adolescence” (p. 568). Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) found that the satisfaction of children with their relationships with their parents affects the likelihood that they will come to adopt religious beliefs that differ from those of their parents.

The success of families at socializing their younger members into their religious identities has been shown to have wide-ranging implications for these members’ embrace of other family ideologies that are not explicitly religious (Burke, 2016; Griffith, 2017; e.g., Colaner & Giles, 2008; Pearce & Thorton, 2007). Pearce and Thorton (2007)

described a family ideology as consisting of attitudes, beliefs, and values that are held in high esteem by family members, guide family members' actions and decision-making, and influence family forms. Pearce and Thorton also recognized religion as one of the most common promulgators of family ideologies.

Griffith (2017) validated Pearce and Thorton's (2007) assertion from a historical perspective, at least with respect to U.S. American Christian families. For example, according to Griffith, for the last hundred years, if not longer, religious socialization in U.S. American Christian families has coincided with socialization into the family's morality-informed socio-political positions on various issues. Griffin highlighted several of these issues, including women's rights (such as to birth control and abortion access), sex and sexuality in media and entertainment, desegregation and interracial relations, sex education, laws and policies aimed at the prevention of sexual harassment, and/or same-sex marriage and other LGBT rights. Griffith also acknowledged that, within U.S. American Christian families, parents have played the most important role in the socialization of their children into family ideologies.

Among Evangelicals, religious socialization in families has considerable influence on people's acceptance of certain ideologies; Burke (2016) and Colaner and Giles (2008) demonstrated that Evangelicalism can inform perspectives on sex and sexuality and gender roles. According to Burke (2016), in Evangelical churches and families, people are often presented with and come to internalize messages of condemnation regarding sexual pleasure. Burke wrote that the creators and users of the Evangelical sexuality websites she studied "describe sexual inhibitions – once required to live a godly life – as hard to shed on or after one's wedding day" (p. 35). Colaner and

Giles (2008) studied the impact of the Evangelical ideology of Complementarianism, in which distinct roles for married heterosexual couples are advocated, such that “the man has ultimate headship, authority, and responsibility in the marriage” (p. 528). Colaner and Giles (2008) revealed that, among Evangelical female college students who were raised with the ideology of Complementarianism, career aspiration and mothering aspiration are negatively correlated and Complementarianism significantly affects mothering aspirations.

Successful socialization of younger family members into the religious identity of a family has implications for these members’ adoption of specific communication tendencies and preferences as well (Colaner, 2009; Farrell et al., 2013/2014; Williams et al., 2015). In a study undertaken from the perspective of a parent-child communication theory known as Family Communication Patterns Theory (see Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c), Colaner (2009) found Complementarianism to be positively associated with conformity-orientation and negatively associated with conversation-orientation in Evangelical families. Farrell et al. (2013/2014) discovered that spiritually aware people are less likely to disclose private information outside of their families and more likely to disclose private information within their families, people with unstable relationships with a higher power are more likely to disclose private information within their families, and people with grandiose relationships with a higher power are more likely to disclose private information outside of their families. Williams et al. (2015) found, among a sample of religious African-American families, a preference for messages to adolescents about sex that are parent-initiated, both religiously-informed and practical, and promote abstinence until marriage and a negative view of contraception.

Clearly, the religious messages that one receives from one's parents and other family members are important for shaping one's worldview, communication, and behavior, and were thus worthy of further scholarly investigation in the present study.

In summary, considering the literature on socialization into the religious identity of a family cited above, researchers have made clear that older family members are quick to begin this socialization process and make efforts to socialize their children throughout the lifecourse, that parents in particular take on the bulk of the responsibility for teaching their children the religious beliefs and values upheld by their families writ large, that parents who effectively socialize their children into the religion of their families demonstrate openness and communicate consistent messages to their children, and that successful socialization into the religious identity of a family can impact the values and actions of children for the rest of their lives. Thus, in the present study, I explored this process further and from the perspective of adult children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their conservative Christian parents in an effort to illuminate the interplay of discourses within this particular family identity context. To follow, I shed light on family communication across religious belief and/or value difference in general.

Communicating Across Religious Belief and Value Difference in Families

Despite the prevalence of religious socialization in families, evidence suggests that communication across the religious belief and/or value differences of family members may be quite common (e.g., Boggs, 2016; Lewis, 2012; Mahoney, 2005; Morgan, 2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2015, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022). To follow, I discuss three topics about family communication

across religious belief and/or value differences. First, I describe the prevalence and extent of parent-child religious belief differences in the U.S. Second, I suggest a reason why efforts to socialize younger family members into the religious identity of a family are sometimes unsuccessful. Third, I illuminate the impact of religious belief and value differences on parent-child relationships and communication.

First, I turn to the prevalence and extent of religious belief differences among parents and their children. The Pew Research Center (2020) surveyed more than 1,800 U.S. American teenagers and their parents and uncovered much about their religious belief similarities and differences. The Pew Research Center found that U.S. American teenagers tended to claim the same broad religious affiliation as their parents (i.e., Protestant, Catholic, religiously unaffiliated). However, they also found that 20 percent of U.S. American Evangelical Protestant and 45 percent of U.S. American mainline Protestant teenagers did not identify with the same Christian denomination as their parents. In fact, they found that half of all U.S. American teenagers reported not having identical religious beliefs as their parents, and that 17 percent of these teenagers also reported that the differences between their own religious beliefs and those of their parents cause conflict in their families. Additionally, the Pew Research Center discovered that many U.S. American parents overestimated religion's importance to their teenage children, and that the majority of U.S. American parents who overestimated the similarity between their own religious beliefs and the religious beliefs of their teenage children assumed that they and their teenage children held more of the same religious beliefs in common than their teenage children indicated.

Religious belief differences in families are not exclusive to parents and teenagers; many parents and their adult children differ religiously as well (Pew Research Center, 2015). The Pew Research Center's (2015) most recent findings on religious belief change among adults in the U.S. showed that, when including changing from identifying with one Protestant denomination to another (e.g., Baptist to Presbyterian) and from one subgroup of religiously unaffiliated people to another (e.g., atheist to agnostic), 48 percent of U.S. American adults did not believe in their childhood faiths. Within this 48 percent are individuals who (a) were raised Catholic and became Protestant or religiously unaffiliated; (b) were raised in one Protestant denomination and became affiliated with a different Protestant denomination, or became Catholic or religiously unaffiliated; (c) were raised in one subgroup of religiously unaffiliated people and came to identify with a different subgroup of religiously unaffiliated people, or became religiously affiliated; (d) converted to Catholicism or Protestantism; or (e) converted to or from faiths other than Catholicism or Protestantism. In an earlier version of this study, the Pew Research Center (2009) also found that U.S. American adults who left their childhood faiths tended to do so by the time they reached 24 years of age. No information about the age at which U.S. American adults who left their childhood faiths tended to do so was reported in the Pew Research Center's (2015) most recent study. The work of the Pew Research Center has made evident that many parents and children in the U.S. have religious belief differences meaningful enough to note and explore.

Second, one reason why the efforts of families to socialize younger members into the family religion sometimes fail is that family communication does not occur in a vacuum devoid of the influence of outside discourses. According to Baxter (2004a,

2004b, 2004c, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter et al., 2021; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998), in addition to being informed by and reflecting discourses that have been, are, and are expected to be espoused by people in interpersonal relationships, family communication is informed by and reflects discourses that have been, are, and are expected to be espoused by members of the culture to which people in interpersonal relationships belong. Baxter (2011) has suggested that as family members interact and/or articulate their religious beliefs and values, the competition for dominance that occurs between these discourses is an important part of the socialization process. According to Baxter, it is in the midst of this competition that the merits of different discourses regarding religious beliefs and values are challenged; some of these discourses are centered and others marginalized, and the possibility of new meanings arises.

Scholars studying interpersonal religious communication have acknowledged (e.g., Morgan, 2020) and demonstrated (e.g., Martinez et al., 2016; Thatcher, 2011) that among the myriad cultural discourses that inform and are reflected in interaction are those regarding religious beliefs and values, such as (a)theism, spiritual pluralism, and secularism, and I define each to follow. The discourse of (a)theism involves the belief or non-belief in a god (Quillen, 2015; Smith, 2013). In a study of meaning-making in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, Thatcher (2011) described the discourse of spiritual pluralism in opposition to a discourse of Christianity and said that he identified it “by references to religious openness, arguments against the mention of specific religions, religious texts, and practices in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and the employment of ambiguous terms in place of more specific names or concepts associated with religions or religious deities” (p. 394). The discourse of secularism is defined by the Non-Religion

and Secularity Research Network (2011) as: “A distinctive doctrine, system or theory of differentiating primarily secular (in which religion is not the primary or immediate reference point) and primarily religious parts (in which religion is the primary or immediate reference point) of a whole.” Discourses regarding religious beliefs and values such as these may influence family communication.

Over time, most children raised in religious homes come to observe and be influenced by the expressed, religious identity-related attitudes and behaviors of friends, school peers, their surrounding communities, and mass media, including the importance they place on religious faith and the frequency of their church attendance (Mullikin, 2006; Regnerus et al., 2004). The influence of these outside-the-family messages increases as children age, and these messages become especially impactful once children move out of their family homes (Mullikin, 2006). Consideration of cultural discourses may lead younger family members to question the lessons regarding religious beliefs and values that older family members have taught them and, in turn, to develop religious identities that may or may not correspond to the religious identities of their parents. I designed the present study to help discover whether this is the case.

Third, when families are unsuccessful at socializing their younger members into their religious identities, whether a younger member chooses to religiously affiliate with another denomination or entirely different faith, to be religiously unaffiliated, or to continue to identify with the religious affiliation of their family members despite having differing religious beliefs and/or values, significant relational difficulties often ensue (Boggs, 2016; Chen, 2005; Colaner, 2008; Colaner et al., 2014; Hendricks et al., 2023; Lewis, 2012; Mahoney, 2005; Morgan, 2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Roer-

Strier et al., 2009; Scharp & Beck, 2017; Taris & Semin, 1997; Worman & Kartch, 2022; Worwood et al., 2020). Younger family members who do not fully embrace the religious identities of their families must make challenging decisions about whether, to what extent, how, when, and to whom to reveal their differing religious beliefs (Lewis, 2012; Worman & Kartch, 2022; Worwood et al., 2020). For example, Lewis (2012) found that, when deciding whether or not to tell their parents about their religious belief change, adult children took the time to consider how their parents would respond to this news as well as how this news would impact their parents emotionally and/or influence their relationship with their parents. Lewis also found that such adult children often concealed their religious belief change from their parents in efforts to protect their parents, themselves, and/or their relationships with their parents. Those who revealed their religious belief change to their parents often did so in order to be genuine, to “get it over,” and/or because they had confidence and pride in their beliefs. Lewis’s findings may indicate that, when choosing whether to reveal their religious belief changes to their parents or conceal their religious belief changes from their parents, individuals experience the dialectical tensions of integration-separation, certainty-uncertainty, and openness-nonexpression (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, 1998), forcing them to decide how to address these competing desires.

Decisions about how to communicate with one’s family members regarding a change in one’s religious identity are made all the more complicated when one’s family members believe that doing so may condemn them to hell (Boggs, 2016; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Worman & Kartch, 2022). For instance, Boggs (2016) undertook a case study of a young woman who was raised in an “evangelical/fundamentalist”

Christian family and began to question her religious beliefs and values after moving away for college. The woman explained the communication difficulties that she experienced upon moving back in with her family: ““I had a nervous breakdown and completely shut down for 8 months of my life. I just really didn’t function; barely talked.”” (p. 25). She also mentioned that she had ““nightmares about sending people [she loves] to hell accidentally”” by sharing her religious beliefs and values with them (p. 26).

Younger family members who do not conform to the religious identities of their families risk much. Differing religious beliefs and values can lead to considerable conflict among family members (Soliz & Colaner, 2015). For example, Sechrist et al. (2011) found increased parent-adult child conflict, as well as decreased affection, to be associated with religious differences. Individuals whose religious beliefs and values differ from those of their family members also risk losing the acceptance of their family members (Chen, 2005; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Roer-Strier et al., 2009). In a study of the reactions of family members to the religious identity changes of adult African American daughters who converted to Islam from Christianity, Roer-Strier et al. (2009) found that, compared to other families in the study, some families were quick to accept a daughter’s differing religious identity, but the majority of families described feeling “surprised, shocked, betrayed, guilty, distressed, and angry” upon learning about a daughter’s differing religious identity and “reacted in ways that revealed their displeasure” (p. 223).

Having religious beliefs and values that differ from the religious beliefs and values of one’s family is tied to having less satisfying and lower-quality relationships with one’s family members (Colaner et al., 2014; Hendricks et al., 2023; Licher &

Carmalt, 2009; Mahoney, 2005; Noonan et al., 2012). Adolescents with differing religious beliefs and values from their families who participated in Noonan et al.'s (2012) study were found to be less satisfied with their parent-child communication than those who held the religious beliefs and values of their family. Moreover, many people that do not hold the religious beliefs and values of their family members report losing their senses of religious and family identity (Colaner et al., 2014; Scharp & Beck, 2017) and some experience family estrangement (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2010). A participant in Scharp and Beck's (2017) study of identity reconstruction in Mormon exit narratives summed up her perception of this risk well:

Losing my religion, my identity (which was so tied up in the Church), and that very important element which I had in common with my family, friends and community, was terrifying. But living a lie would have been even more devastating, and would have caused me to lose something much more precious – the integrity of my soul. (p. 140)

It is important to understand that choosing a different religious path than one's family is a process, occurring over time. Younger family members may experience the time during which they come to terms with their differing religious identities as one of disruption and upheaval in their family relationships because of the potential relational ramifications that come with asserting one's differing religious identity (Lewis, 2012; Morgan, 2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Worman & Kartch, 2022). Researchers have shown that it is during times that discourses compete with one another that opportunities to embrace and/or create new meaning(s) often become more apparent (e.g., Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Braithwaite et al., 1998; Bryant, 2006; Toller, 2005; Toller &

Braithwaite, 2009). With the present study and future research, I seek to help determine whether this holds true for younger family members contending with clashing ideologies regarding religious beliefs and values, and if so, whether and how these family members come to reevaluate the meanings of their personal and relational identities and recalibrate the meaning of their relationship with their family members, especially their parents.

Taking all of this previous research into consideration renders evident that Baxter's (2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Baxter et al., 2021; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998) accounting of the influence of cultural and relational discourses on interpersonal communication is relevant to family communication regarding the differing religious beliefs and values of family members. It is also clear that, although children come to be influenced by more than just their parents when forming their religious identities, religious belief and value differences place a considerable disclosure burden on children. This burden can strain the relationships and stifle the communication of parents and their children. In the present study, I used relational dialectics theory (RDT; Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021; Suter & Seurer, 2018) as a theoretical guide to identify and understand the competition of discourses evident in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values regarding their religious belief and value differences. Doing so afforded me the opportunity to assess the interplay of these discourses and their power relative to one another and discern the impact of their interplay on how such adult children make meaning of their Christian family identity. In addition, undertaking this study provided me with the opportunity to understand how such adult children and their parents interact throughout this process.

Thus, in the present study, I focused on communication during relational turning points between conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. To follow, I provide my rationale for centering the present study in RDT, ending with the research questions.

Theoretical Rationale: Relational Dialectics Theory

It is my contention that RDT is an excellent theory for inquiring about the socialization of young family members into the religious identity of a family and its links to parent-child communication and relationships. To follow, I describe RDT in order to demonstrate its fitness as a guide for the present study. First, I detail the origins of RDT. Second, I describe the search for a paradigmatic home for RDT 1.0. Third, I describe the search for a paradigmatic home for RDT 2.0. Fourth, I explain how RDT 2.0 differs from RDT 1.0. Fifth, I describe the strengths of RDT. Sixth, I illustrate the alignment of RDT with my aims for the present study. Once I have rendered evident the fitness of RDT as a guide for the present study, I relay the research questions that I used to focus the present study.

Origins of RDT

First, I turn to the origins of RDT. RDT was developed through a sustained effort to establish a dialogic theory of interpersonal and family communication that began in the early 1990s (Baxter, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2006, 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). To follow, I discuss why and how Baxter and Montgomery came to advance RDT in the first place. To start, I elucidate Baxter's thinking about dialectics during the 1980s. Next, I explain how Baxter's thinking with respect to dialectics evolved as she became inspired by Murphy (1971) and, most

especially, Bakhtin (1975/1981, 1963/1984a, 1965/1984b, 1979/1986, 1979/1990, 1986/1993; Volosinov & Bakhtin, 1929/1973; Volosinov, 1927/1987²), during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Finally, I describe how Baxter and Montgomery (1996; Montgomery and Baxter, 1998) used Bakhtin's dialogism (1979/1986; Volosinov & Bakhtin, 1929/1973) to shape RDT in the mid- to late-1990s.

I start by introducing Baxter's initial foray into dialectics during her early scholarly career. Baxter (2004a) was introduced to the study of dialectics by reading Altman et al.'s (1981) dialectical views on openness in relationships and discussing them with Altman during a chance encounter on an airplane. Following their initial conversation, Baxter (2004a, 2011) quickly familiarized herself with and became influenced by the Hegelian/Marxist tradition of dialectics (Hegel, 1949, 1969; Marx, 1961), in which the interaction of opposing discourses is presented as benignly following a predictable pattern and eventually resolving in a state of permanently balanced equilibrium (see Cornforth, 1968; Mao, 1965). Baxter (2004a) identified her (1988) essay on communication strategies in relationship development to be the most quintessential example of her Hegelian/Marxist thinking vis-à-vis dialectics.

Baxter's (2004a) dialectical perspective began to shift when she read Murphy's (1971) book on dialectics in the late-1980s and discovered views on dialectics that predated those of Hegel (1949; 1969) and Marx (1961). Murphy (1971) presented interplay of discourses as more combative, less predictable, capable of bringing about change in accepted meanings, and potentially leading to the destruction of entrenched social structures and systems. Baxter (2004a) was unsure what to do with these older views on

² Many scholars (e.g., Hirschkop, 1999) believe that Bakhtin strongly influenced or wrote some of the works credited to Volosinov, including *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* (1927/1987).

dialectics until she was introduced to the theory of dialogism advanced by twentieth century Russian social philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (e.g., 1975/1981, 1963/1984a, 1965/1984b, 1979/1986, 1979/1990, 1986/1993; Volosinov & Bakhtin, 1929/1973; Volosinov, 1927/1987). Baxter (2004a) recalled being “struck by [Bakhtin’s] analytical moves” and delighted that he “[shared her] frustrations with Hegelian and Marxist dialectics and had 50 years’ worth of writing to elaborate his point” (pp. 183-184). Baxter found herself agreeing with the Bakhtinian notion that social life is characterized by the never-ending power struggle of dominant and subordinated discourses. Beginning around 1990, Baxter started laying the groundwork for what would become RDT (e.g., 1992b, 1994).

Finally, Baxter came to adopt Bakhtin’s (1979/1986; Volosinov & Bakhtin, 1929/1973) belief that it is through dialogical interplay that meanings are developed and that cultural discourses and past relational interactions, as well as anticipated responses by others, are linked together and inform dialogue between interlocutors. This belief, as well as the social constructionist perspective (Baxter, 2004a, 2011, 2014b; Braithwaite, Foster et al., 2018), prompted Baxter (2004a) “to rethink the notion of communication as goal-directed strategies or manifest behaviors of individuals, instead conceiving it as an emergent process between interlocutors” (p. 184). Social constructionists believe that meanings of phenomena, including the phenomena of identity and relationships, are created through communication between people, regardless of where or with whom communication takes place or the phenomena about which people communicate (Baxter, 2011; 2014a; Braithwaite, Foster, et al., 2018).

Baxter (2004a) began a dialogic research program centered on jointly-enacted communication and aimed at exploring contradictions present and constituted therein (e.g., Baxter, 1992a; Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996; Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Braithwaite et al., 1998). This program of research led Baxter (e.g., 1993) to spotlight three regularly-evident contradictions (integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression) and to think of communication as “the interpenetration of united-yet-competing values, orientations, perspectives, or ideas” (Baxter, 2004a, pp. 184-185). In collaboration with Montgomery, Baxter (1996) published her first formal articulation of RDT. Soon after, Montgomery and Baxter (1998) edited another volume to highlight key differences and similarities between their dialogic approach to dialectics and other approaches (for another discussion of the differences between dialectical approaches at that time, see Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006b). For instance, Montgomery and Baxter (1998) stressed the distinctiveness of the tensional quality of Bakhtin’s dialogism and Baxter and Montgomery’s (1996) RDT. Montgomery and Baxter (1998) underscored that unresolvable tension between competing discourses ensures and preserves the fluid, dynamic nature of meaning-making via dialogue (Stewart et al., 2004).

In Bakhtin’s work, Baxter (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998) found an alternative understanding of dialectics that fit with the social constructionist meta-theoretical perspective, contrasted from the Hegelian/Marxist view of dialogical interplay, and could be appropriated into a theory of interpersonal communication: RDT. Baxter spent the latter portion of her career further developing (2011; Baxter et al., 2021) and elucidating (e.g., 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; 2014b; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2006b; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021) this theory. RDT has

been used by a wide variety of researchers since its inception (as I discuss below; Baxter, 2004a, 2011; Baxter & Asbury, 2015; Baxter & Norwood, 2015) and continues to be widely used to this day (Baxter et al., 2021), albeit in a more recently developed form that Baxter (2011) referred to as RDT 2.0.

The Search for a Paradigmatic Home: RDT 1.0

Beginning with the earliest formal iteration of RDT, which Baxter has since labeled RDT 1.0 (2011; Baxter et al., 2021), Baxter and Montgomery (1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998) framed interpersonal communication as a *dialogic* process of meaning-making, that is, a process in which discourses shape social reality (Deetz, 2001), rather than as merely a means of accomplishing goals and manifesting behavior. However, confusion regarding the paradigm most befitting RDT 1.0 remained long after these iterations were published; the theory was often being used by scholars with philosophical assumptions and research aims that aligned relatively poorly with RDT 1.0 (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Several factors contributed to this confusion, including (a) Baxter and Montgomery's (1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998) failure to emphasize central elements of RDT, such as the utterance chain, the interplay of competing discourses, discursive inequality, and contrapuntal analysis (all of which are explained in a later section); (b) misunderstandings of Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) advocacy for a dialectical pluralism approach to inquiry; and (c) a general lack of awareness of the dialogic and postmodern critical paradigms by scholars using the theory at the time.

To follow, I describe the paradigmatic journey of RDT 1.0, from post-positivism to the critical paradigm, in a roughly chronological order. First, I describe researchers'

(mis)use of RDT 1.0 within the post-positive paradigm. Second, I describe their use of RDT 1.0 within the interpretive paradigm. Third, I describe researchers' use of RDT 1.0 within the dialogic paradigm. Fourth, I explain researchers' use of RDT 1.0 within the critical paradigm.

First, I turn to researchers' use of RDT 1.0 within the post-positive paradigm. Baxter (e.g., 2011; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) made repeated, unambiguous declarations that "RDT is not a post-positivist theory" (Baxter, 2011, p. 6). Nonetheless, some researchers tried to situate RDT-informed studies within post-positivism (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). Researchers who undertook post-positive RDT-informed research brought little to light regarding what dialectic tensions revealed about dialogic interplay, thereby shortchanging the heuristic utility of RDT.

Second, the vast majority of the RDT-informed work that scholars undertook during the time between what Baxter (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998) labeled RDT 1.0 and came to label as RDT 2.0 (2011) was interpretive (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Suter & Seurer, 2018). The interpretive paradigm centers on developing an understanding of the ways that people within a social scene make sense of and ascribe meanings to their lived experiences (Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Tracy, 2020). Researchers who worked within the interpretive paradigm used RDT 1.0 in efforts to understand how people contend with dialectical tensions and make meaning from them (Baxter & Norwood, 2015). For example, Braithwaite et al. (1998) undertook a RDT-informed study with the goal of better understanding how stepfamilies use rituals to interact and develop their new families. Braithwaite et al. used interpretive/qualitative data analysis methods to develop supracategories of ritual use and

themes of ritual use within these supracategories. Braithwaite et al. found that many stepfamily members experienced dialectical tension between ritual enactments honoring their old families and embracing their new families, as well as that rituals that demonstrated respect for both old and new families helped stepfamily members to address these competing desires and adapt to their new families. Like other researchers who undertook interpretive RDT-informed research during this time, Braithwaite et al. identified dialectical tensions and how study participants managed these tensions, and, as was the case with many RDT studies of this era, did not explore the precise nature of the dialogic interplay reflected in and informing participants' talk.

Third, another sizeable portion of the RDT-informed research that researchers undertook during the time between RDT 1.0 and 2.0 was dialogic, meaning that the roles of societal discourses were investigated for their capacity to shape social reality (Deetz, 2001). Researchers who worked within dialogism used RDT 1.0 in order to illuminate the role of cultural and relational discourses in creating and maintaining meaning (Baxter, 2011). These researchers recognized that identities are not fixed and are "always emergent in the competing discourses of a given moment" (Baxter, 2011, p. 39). One example of a RDT-informed study undertaken from a dialogic perspective during this time is Thatcher's (2011) study of the communication of members of Alcoholics Anonymous. Thatcher used RDT, along with dialogism theory (Holquist, 1990), to show that the process by which members made meaning of spiritual concepts was characterized by the struggle between the discourse of Christianity and the discourse of religious pluralism and to investigate the specific forms of this discursive struggle. Because he was

working from the dialogic perspective, Thatcher did not inquire about the power of the discourses of Christianity and secular pluralism relative to one another.

Fourth, during the time between RDT 1.0 and 2.0, little, if any, RDT-informed research was undertaken from within the critical paradigm. According to Baxter (2011), the critical perspective was “barely on the radar screen of interpersonal and family communication” at the time (Baxter, 2011, p. 38). In fact, Braithwaite and Baxter (2008) found that critical research accounted for 3.5 percent of the interpersonal communication studies published between 1990 and 2003. According to Baxter (2011), researchers who were working within the critical paradigm during that period tended to view identities as static and subject to domination by powerful, oppressive systems rather than as social constructions upheld through discourse, and thus found their philosophical approach irreconcilable with RDT.

Despite some limitations in retrospect, researchers using RDT 1.0 made some excellent contributions to the understanding of interpersonal and family communication and they made some important headway for interpretive research at a time when the field was still largely post-positive (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). As researchers’ interest in RDT 1.0 grew, they became more aware of how the theory could be used and began to apply it as a lens to help them find answers to important research questions. After continuing to refine the theory into RDT 2.0 and reflecting on its use, Baxter (2011) came to recognize the need to send RDT 2.0 on its own, shorter paradigmatic journey.

The Search for a Paradigmatic Home: RDT 2.0

In her updated articulation of RDT, which she labeled RDT 2.0, Baxter (2011) situated the theory within the dialogic paradigm for three main reasons. First, Baxter

explained that discourse is centered within the dialogic paradigm, giving researchers the opportunity to illuminate the ways in which language is used to socially construct meanings. Second, Baxter came to realize that the dialogic paradigm allowed her to better account for her description of selves and societies as incomplete and unfinalized in RDT 2.0. According to Baxter, individual and relational/collective identities are never fully realized and people do not simply make rational decisions based on fixed understandings of themselves, their groups, and their goals. Third, Baxter (2011) argued that power is not perceived as being in structures or held by members of privileged groups in the dialogic paradigm; rather, power is located in “the systems of meaning that produce and maintain these social constructions” (p. 40).

Following scholars who took a critical perspective on organizational communication (e.g., Deetz, 2001; Mumby, 1997), Baxter came to recognize the distinction between the modern and postmodern critical paradigms and identified the latter paradigm as the best fit for RDT 2.0 (Baxter & Asbury, 2015; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021). In her view, while the modern critical tradition remained subject to the critiques she laid out in her 2011 book (noted above), the postmodern critical tradition did not. Other RDT scholars soon agreed (e.g., Suter, 2016; Suter & Norwood, 2017; Suter & Seurer, 2018). Baxter made this move because, in addition to locating power within discourses, scholars within the postmodern critical paradigm encourage consideration of the power differential between opposing discourses (Baxter & Asbury, 2015; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021; Suter, 2016; Suter & Seurer, 2018). For example, Goltz and Zingsheim (2010) undertook an autoethnographic study of their Gayla, a relational commitment ceremony which they described as “a celebration

of our love, our queer family, and our community, but also a political performance of caution, protest, and activism” (p. 291). In this study, Goltz and Zingsheim explained they created and enacted several rituals during the event that were intended to serve as a counterdiscourse to subvert the culturally pervasive discourse of heteronormativity and its association with relational commitment ceremonies.

Baxter and Asbury (2015) argued that, in the postmodern critical paradigm, as in the dialogic paradigm, discourses are perceived to be powerful because people may take the claims about reality embedded within a discourse for granted and act upon these claims in the course of their daily lives. The postmodern critical paradigm differs from the dialogic paradigm, Baxter and Asbury asserted, in that, in the postmodern critical paradigm, the power of a taken-for-granted discourse, no matter how entrenched, is recognized as forever unstable and vulnerable to counterdiscourses that resist it. From the postmodern critical perspective, counterdiscourses, if adopted and enacted by a critical mass of people, may come to strip a taken-for-granted discourse of its dominant status. In addition to the potential for existing meanings to become deeply imbedded, and for counterdiscourses to supplant them, the potential for new meanings to emerge exists as well. According to Suter (2016), in the postmodern critical view of family communication, “Seemingly private familial practices are conceptualized anew as capable of not only reifying normative practices, but also as potentiating resistance, critique, or even transformation of existing arrangements in both private and public domains” (p. 3). This difference between the postmodern critical and dialogic paradigms convinced Baxter that RDT 2.0 fits most squarely with the postmodern critical paradigm (Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021).

Clearly, RDT is a robust theory that scholars working within various paradigms have found to be useful. Nevertheless, most researchers currently using the theory, like me, do so because, RDT is most suited to be used in critical work, as Baxter and others have argued (e.g., Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021; Suter, 2016; Suter & Norwood, 2017; Suter & Seurer, 2018). This critical turn may not have happened if Baxter had not continued to develop and/or emphasize certain key aspects of the theory, such as dialogic interplay (2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021). Her more recent work makes evident how RDT 2.0 built upon and differs from RDT 1.0.

How RDT 2.0 Differs from RDT 1.0

As I previously noted, following the first iteration of RDT that largely focused on identifying and understanding the influence of discourses in interpersonal and family communication (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998), in 2011, Baxter articulated a version of the theory that she referred to as RDT 2.0. RDT 2.0 is similar to the original version of the theory in that they were both created with the aim of understanding how social construction and meaning-making occurs through the clash of opposing discourses (Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021). However, RDT 2.0 differs from its predecessor in five primary respects, which I discuss to follow: (a) the focus on discourse; (b) the emphasis on the linkage of past, present, and future utterances; (c) the description of the ways that discourses interpenetrate and acknowledgement of the role of power; (d) the discussion of the potential for transformative dialogue; and (e) the inclusion of a specific analytical method for use with the theory.

First, in RDT 2.0, Baxter emphasized, more strongly than in RDT 1.0, that contradictions are discourses struggling against one another. Baxter (2011) made clear

that it is not people or thoughts within a person's mind that are in competition. She argued that as people in relationship communicate, their talk is informed by and reflects cultural and relational discourses, and that people's voicings of these discourses can be studied.

Second, Baxter asserted that, in RDT 2.0 (2011), utterances, turns taken at talk in the course of interaction, are to be thought of as social rather than psychological, centering a focus on communication. Every utterance is linked to utterances spoken within one's culture and relationships in the past and expected to be spoken within one's culture and relationships in the future. These linked discourses, called the *distal already-spoken*, *proximal already-spoken*, *proximal not-yet-spoken*, and *distal not-yet-spoken*, form the conceptual utterance chain and give meaning to an utterance. The terms *distal* and *proximal* are in reference to the distance of these discourses in time from a given utterance in the present, where *distal* refers to discourses voiced by generalized others within a given culture and *proximal* refers to discourses voiced within the context of a given relationship. In RDT, no utterance is thought to be an isolated act of an autonomous individual; the voices of others are always animating one's communication and influencing meaning-making (Baxter, 2011). While Baxter made mention of the utterance chain in RDT 1.0, she presents it as a central concept in RDT 2.0. According to Baxter (2011), the concept of the utterance chain facilitates the study of utterances, however they are expressed, and the influence of discourses reflected therein on individual and relational identity development.

Third, Baxter (2011) argued that meanings are made in the interplay of opposing discourses in RDT 2.0. More than in RDT 1.0, in 2.0, Baxter (2011) stressed the

importance of analyzing the influence of cultural and relational dialogues in talk in great detail and identified the centripetal-centrifugal struggle between opposing discourses as the process by which meaning is fought for and derived. She illustrated that the interpenetration of discourses can take many forms, and that by more closely examining it, researchers can make clear the role of discourses in the meaning-making process.

In RDT 2.0, Baxter (2011) emphasized that most discourses are on unequal ground; within a given culture, some are centered (*centripetal*) and others are marginalized (*centrifugal*). Centripetal discourses are more privileged and powerful than centrifugal discourses because, in a given culture, they are largely regarded as correct, normal, and good, whereas centrifugal discourses are largely dismissed as wrong, abnormal, or bad, or are forgotten altogether. Theoretically, it is possible for a discourse to become so powerful that no other discourses are voiced and dialogue becomes monologue. However, dialogic interplay, the competition between discourses, allows for new meanings to emerge and for change to occur because of the impact that opposing dialogues may have on one another.

The continual and varied nature of the dialogic struggle between opposing discourses makes it a dynamic process from which fixed meaning cannot be derived (Baxter, 2011). According to Baxter, at a particular time or within a particular context, one discourse may be privileged and another marginalized, only for their positions to switch at a different time or within an alternative context. Baxter calls this discursive praxis *diachronic separation*. At any given time, it is also possible for opposing dialogues to either clash in a *moral conflict* (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997) or be voiced along with several other discourses simultaneously. Additionally, interlocutors may

choose to avoid direct dialogical interplay, ignore and thereby marginalize alternative discourses, or diminish the legitimacy of a dominating discourse by being discursively ambiguous, or else speak frankly to ensure dialogic interplay. Alternatively, they may decide to make a mockery or feign ignorance of an opposing discourse, playfully distort it, or take it seriously. Together, Baxter refers to these forms of interpenetration as *synchronic interplay*. Interlocutors may even strike a balance between opposing discourses by partially affirming each of them. However interlocutors position and contend with opposing discourses, each utterance has the potential to turn the tide of the centripetal-centrifugal struggle between them. As a result of the unfinalizability of meaning: “Order (meaning) is an accomplishment to be achieved out of the ordinary messiness of everyday life; it is constituted in fleeting moments of consummation” (Baxter, 2011, p. 26).

Fourth, although Baxter and Montgomery (1996) recognized that the interplay of competing discourses, as well as the nature of this interplay, is most evident at times of relational transition, change, and disruption, in RDT 2.0, Baxter (2011) stressed that such instances are opportunities for (re)exploration and (re)negotiation of meanings. She described transformative dialogue as occurring when a dominating discourse loses its privileged position and discourses previously at odds with one another cease competing, making the creative development of new meanings possible. There are two forms of transformative dialogue: hybrids and aesthetic moments. *Hybrids* are the result of new meanings emerging from the mixture of two or more discourses that maintain their distinctness from each other. *Aesthetic moments* are brief periods wherein two or more discourses merge together in such a way that they become an entirely new system of

meaning and a sense of wholeness and completion is felt by interlocutors. Transformative dialogue is often characterized by conversational flow and a deep respect for the diversity of discourses.

Fifth, in RDT 2.0, Baxter (2011) introduced contrapuntal analysis as a qualitative data analysis methodology of assessing talk or written text for the presence and interplay of opposing discourses. Baxter and Montgomery (1996; Montgomery & Baxter, 1998) did not provide a specific means of analysis to be used in conjunction with RDT 1.0. They suggested that the theory could be used effectively with many research methods. In contrast, in RDT 2.0, Baxter argued that, for the theory to be used as intended and to uncover as much about the interplay of competing discourses as possible, researchers must use contrapuntal analysis.

Baxter built on the solid foundation of RDT 1.0 but stressed critical elements of the theory in RDT 2.0 in order to push RDT researchers in a new direction. Taken together, the aspects of the theory highlighted in RDT 2.0 help make clear that the theory is intended to provide a means of exploration of the links in the utterance chain, interpenetration of discourses, and the making of meanings. Viewing the communication of people in close relationships as reflecting and informed by competing discourses invites critical exploration and allows one to begin to discern the nuances of meaning-making. To follow, I highlight RDT 2.0's strengths as an interpersonal and family communication theory and its usefulness to researchers.

Strengths of RDT 2.0

The specific strengths and unique contributions of RDT 2.0 for interpersonal and family communication research are numerous (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996;

Montgomery & Baxter, 1998; Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021; Suter & Seurer, 2018). To follow, I underscore five of the most prominent of these for RDT 2.0: (a) that it is explicitly focused on communication; (b) that it serves as a means to explore talk in detail and discover how meaning gets made; (c) that the course of time is accounted for in the meaning-making process; (d) that it has the potential to bridge divides between rhetoricians and social scientists; and (e) that it can be used to identify circumstances in which new meanings can be made.

First, I indicate why it matters that RDT 2.0 is firmly rooted in communication. Baxter's (2011) focus on discourse put communication at the center of RDT 2.0, rather than psychological phenomena (Baxter, 2004a). Focusing on discourse helped to illuminate that which contributes to and results from interpersonal and family communication as well as what such communication may reveal. Unlike other theories that begin with or otherwise borrow from a psychological perspective, RDT 2.0 is, unmistakably, a theory of communication.

Second, in RDT 2.0, Baxter (2011) gave researchers incentive and means to examine the details of talk in order to gain new insight into the co-construction of meanings by people in close relationships. Baxter pushed for in-depth analysis of dialogical interplay and convincingly argues that such analysis yields meaningful results that render interpersonal communication more intelligible. Baxter's addition of contrapuntal analysis as a research method to be deployed in conjunction with RDT gives researchers a tool for investigating the claims that she makes within the theory; a feature that many other theories lack. For example, Hintz and Brown (2020) used RDT 2.0 and contrapuntal analysis to discern the nature of the interplay of discourses of reproductive

normativity and reproductive autonomy that informed and were reflected in narratives of childfree Reddit users. The researchers' analysis revealed that this interplay involved such discursive practices as countering, negating, and hybridization.

Third, the fact that Baxter (2011) meant for RDT 2.0 to be used to investigate how meaning-making takes place over the course of time is an additional strength of the theory. Researchers are able to use the theory to understand communication in the moment and in the past, and the connections between them. Baxter's consideration of time even allows researchers to explore the link between past and/or present communication and communication expected to occur in the future. For example, Suter et al. (2015) used RDT 2.0 to explore how lesbian and bisexual comothers make meaning of motherhood. The researchers found that comothers' talk was informed by and reflected past and anticipated future utterances regarding motherhood from their culture and from interpersonal interactions. In very few, if any, other interpersonal communication theories is the relevance of both long-since articulated utterances and anticipated future utterances accounted for like they are in RDT 2.0.

Fourth, researchers' use of RDT 2.0 also helps to break down the barriers between the social scientific and rhetorical studies sides of the communication studies discipline. Scharp and Thomas (2019) described how Baxter's "humanistic thinking" about Bakhtin's theory of dialogism led to her development of a communication theory that "blends humanistic and social scientific approaches to understanding the world" (p. 151). According to Suter and Seurer (2018), when researchers allow the theory that ultimately resulted from this blend, RDT 2.0, to inform their research, they must consider "how micro-level relational talk within the family [as well as interpersonal relationships

generally] intersects with macro-level socio-cultural discourses to construct meaning” (p. 251). Few communication theories have the capacity to unite the two major sides of the discipline of communication studies in mutual appreciation.

Fifth, RDT-informed research has revealed the enactment of dialogically-rich circumstances in which alternative meanings can become prominent. In such circumstances, the rules and hierarchies that regularly govern behavior in a society are temporarily suspended and significant shifts in the centripetal-centrifugal struggle between opposing discourses are likely to occur. For example, Hudson’s (2015) autoethnography of conflicting family stories regarding her family’s abandonment by her mother allowed her to reassess inherited narratives, examine cultural discourses of motherhood, call into question the concept of a “good mother,” and reframe her own identity. Using RDT 1.0, researchers have also found the enactment of relationship rituals to be an additional situation pregnant with the possibility of alternative meanings (Baxter, 2011; e.g., Baxter & Braithwaite, 2002; Baxter et al., 2009; Braithwaite & Baxter, 1995; Bryant, 2006). For example, Baxter et al., (2009) used the theory to inquire about the meanings of remarriage ceremonies for stepchildren and found that remarriage ceremonies that were perceived as excessively or insufficiently traditional, did not honor the stepchild’s original family or stepfamily, and failed to incorporate the stepchild in the lead up to and enactment of the ceremony were not experienced as meaningful to stepchildren. Using RDT 2.0, researchers could investigate the specifics of the interpenetration of discourses during relationship rituals and illuminate the ways in which certain forms of communication temporarily suspend the normal operations and hierarchies governing everyday life, as well as the ways in which communication can be

used within such times to create new meanings; a claim that can be made about no other communication theory.

These five strengths of RDT 2.0 render evident the unique value of the theory for the study of interpersonal communication. Researchers who utilize RDT 2.0 in their work ensure it is centered in communication, will result in meaningful insight into the nature and influences of the talk of people in close relationships, will likely be lauded by social scientific and rhetorical scholars alike, and may involve the exploration and possible discovery of rare circumstances during which people's communication with one another can change the ways they relate. I chose to use RDT 2.0 as a guide for the present study, in part, because of these strengths. To follow, I detail additional reasons that RDT 2.0 was a good guide for the present study.

Alignment of RDT with My Aims for the Present Study

Several of the characteristics of RDT 2.0 that I have outlined above made it an effective guide for the present study of the communication of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values: (a) communication is at its core; (b) it directs researchers to explore the impacts of societal discourses, such as those related to religious beliefs and values, and their power relative to one another; (c) it acknowledges the potential of counterdiscourses to resist dominant discourses found in conservative Christianity; (d) it allows researchers to assess the ways in which discourses voiced in the past and anticipated to be voiced in the future, both in one's culture and by individuals with whom one is in relationship, such as one's family, influence and are reflected in one's own talk; (e) it allows for in-depth analysis of the interplay of discourses and the discursive practices that characterize the process of meaning-making;

and (f) it accounts for the possibility of transformative dialogue in times of relational transition, change, and disruption, such as when one comes to adopt religious beliefs and/or values that differ from those of one's family members. To follow, I provide additional reasons why using RDT 2.0 as a lens through which to examine the communication of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values is particularly apt. First, I discuss how my exploration of the topic for the present study led me to consider RDT 2.0 as its theoretical guide. Second, I discuss aspects of the unique relational context of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and/or values that made this relational context amenable to RDT-informed research.

First, I describe how the topic of the present study led me to regard RDT 2.0 as a possible guide for the present study. For example, in a recent study of parent-adult child communication informed by interpersonal acceptance-rejection theory (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002; Rohner, 2008; Rohner, 2016; Rohner & Lansford, 2017) regarding religious belief differences, Morgan (2020) called for future research on this topic to be informed by RDT 2.0. She argued, "For an adult child coping with religious difference, meaning is constructed in the continuous linking of [distal and proximal] utterances" (p. 165). Thatcher (2011) made clear that RDT can be used as a lens through which to examine communication regarding differing religious beliefs and values and develop an understanding of the interplay between religious discourses. In the present study, RDT helped illuminate these discourses further as well as those unique to the families and/or parent-child relationships of the study's participants.

Second, unique aspects of the relational context of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and/or values lent this relational context to RDT-informed research in particular. The difficulty, conflict, and changes in meaning(s) over time that often characterize the relationships and communication of conservative Christian parents and their children who do not hold their religious beliefs and/or values is one unique aspect of this relational context (Chinitz & Brown, 2001; Colaner et al., 2014; Morgan, 2020; Scharp & Beck, 2017). Morgan (2019) identified conflict/disagreement between parents and their children as one of the most frequently reported of 16 types of turning points regarding the amount of acceptance that children who came to develop religious beliefs that differed from those of their parents felt from their parents. By perceiving such conflict through the lens of RDT 2.0, as an opportunity for new meanings to be created, I was able to shed new light on the experience of having and communicating about differing religious beliefs and values in families. Because Baxter (2011) emphasized in RDT 2.0 that meanings, such as the meaning of a relationship, can change over time as centripetal-centrifugal struggles between discourses occur, and that the theory provides a way of making sense of these changes, its use as a guide in the present study is warranted.

Another unique aspect of the relational context of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and/or values is the ways in which conservative Christians use language to communicate with and around one another to negotiate identity and belonging. Linguists (e.g., Bruehler, 2018; Notman, 2017) have shown that U.S. American Evangelical Christians often speak to one another in *Christianese*, a linguistic variant that allows them to signify and negotiate their identities

as Christians and their belongingness in Christian communities. Using RDT 2.0 as a guide in the present study entailed the analysis of the specifics of the talk of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values, yielding a detailed understanding of the discourses within Christianity regarding what it means to identify with and belong to a Christian family.

The relational context of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and/or values is also unique because of the potential of distal-already-spoken discourses within U.S. American Christianity, discourses voiced in the past by U.S. American Christians, to influence the beliefs, values, and talk of both parents and children. Exclusivity is one prominent distal already-spoken discourse in U.S. American Christianity, manifested in the notions that (a) one must subscribe to a particular set of religious beliefs, especially with respect to the divinity and/or salvific power of Jesus of Nazareth, in order to gain salvation and enter heaven and that those who do not share these beliefs are lost and/or damned eternally to hell (e.g., Edwards, 1741); and (b) the Bible and Christian tradition are the only authoritative information sources that ought to inform one's religious beliefs (Bell, 2011; Boone, 1989; Hayward, 2020; Jelen et al., 1990; Trinitapoli, 2007). Another distal already-spoken discourse in U.S. American Christianity is inclusivity, which is made manifest in the notions that (a) all people, regardless of their specific religious beliefs, may eventually gain salvation and enter heaven (Bell, 2011; Christian Universalist Association, 2021; McClymond, 2018; Vincent, 2006; Zahnd, 2017); and (b) in addition to the Bible and Christian tradition, one can also legitimately utilize reason and experience to inform one's religious beliefs (Bell, 2005, 2011, 2014; Rohr, 2009, 2019; Second Vatican Council, 1965). Studying the

communication of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values from an RDT-informed perspective allowed me to determine whether and how these contrasting distal-already-spoken discourses inform and are reflected in their talk as well as whether conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values develop hybrid meanings or experience aesthetic moments as they discuss their religious belief differences.

Given the history of RDT 2.0 and how it is currently understood and engaged, along with the potential for its use to help illuminate the process of socialization into the religious identity of conservative Christian families, I believed that RDT 2.0 would be an excellent theory to guide the present study. The theory was born of a constitutive, dialectical approach to interpersonal communication and currently entails acknowledgement and identification of the various discourses that inform and are reflected in interpersonal communication as well as the in-depth examination of the ongoing competition of various discourses, the power dynamics at play in the competition of those discourses, and the impacts of such competition on interpersonal communication and relationships. The features of the theory were developed expressly for empirical exploration of the distinctiveness of specific relational contexts and so that insight might be gained into ongoing communicative processes such as socialization. Thinking about successful and unsuccessful socialization of children into the religious identity of their families by their conservative Christian parents, and the relational and communicative impacts thereof, led me to create the research questions below to direct my inquiry.

Research Questions

In the present study, I examined the ways conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs interact and negotiate their relationships at meaningful turning points in light of their religious belief differences. I identified the cultural and relational discourses that are reflected in their communication about their religious belief differences over time and illustrate the ways in which these discourses interplay and animate the meanings of their family identities. In doing so, I also assessed the relative power of these discourses and the impact that their centripetal-centrifugal struggle has on the meaning-making process for the adult children and their conservative Christian parents. My chief purpose was to provide insight as to whether and how the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children regarding their religious belief differences, and the discourses reflected therein, plays a role in the adult childrens' conceptions of themselves, their parent-child relationships, and their families by investigating the competition between various cultural and religious discourses. By undertaking the present study, I endeavored to produce knowledge that will be useful for both scholars and professionals who counsel individuals and/or families. Therefore, to help me achieve my goals, I posed the following research questions:

RQ 1: What discourses inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values?

RQ 2: How, if at all, do the discourses that inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values interplay to create meaning for such adult children?

Adopting the RDT 2.0 theoretical perspective gave me the ability to make important and unique contributions to the knowledge of the lived experience of families. I was able to illuminate the cultural and relational discourses that animate family members' talk, including the interplay of these discourses and how the meaning that emerges from this interplay influences family member relationships. With this knowledge, families will be able to make better sense of their past interactions, be more cognizant of the ways that their communication is informed by discourses, and recognize the multiplicity of discourses that may contribute to meaning-making. Professionals who may work with these families, such as family therapists and clergy, can use this knowledge to help families contending with differences in religious beliefs and/or values among their members to develop and maintain respectful ways of communicating with one another that improve the quality of and affirm their family relationships.

CHAPTER TWO: METHOD AND PROCEDURES

In the present study, using RDT as a theoretical guide, I aimed to uncover the interplay of discourses present in parent-child communication regarding the religious belief and value differences of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values. In this chapter, I discuss the methodology that I used to accomplish this goal. First, I provide a rationale for situating the present study in the postmodern critical paradigm. Second, I acknowledge my own positionality as the researcher in the present study. Third, I detail the means by which I co-generated data. Fourth, I provide a description of the data analysis procedures that I used in the present study and will use in a future follow-up study. Fifth, I discuss the ways that I attempted to validate my findings.

Paradigmatic Rationale

First, as noted in Chapter One, communication scholars with wide-ranging metatheoretical commitments, including post-positivism, interpretivism, and the critical and dialogic paradigms, have used RDT. Baxter, the creator of RDT, supported the use of the theory within interpretive and dialogic paradigms (Baxter, 2011), but more recently argued for the postmodern critical approach as the best fit for studies guided by the theory (Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021), as have other scholars using the theory in their research (e.g., Anzur & Myers, 2020; Halliwell & Franken, 2016; Hintz & Brown, 2020; Suter & Seurer, 2018). To follow, I first echo the paradigmatic limitations on RDT-informed research. Second, I clarify why I adopted the postmodern critical approach for the present study. Third, I acknowledge and consider the potential impact of my own positionality as the researcher in the present study.

Paradigmatic Limitations on RDT-informed Research

Baxter (2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015) described the shortcomings of RDT-informed studies undertaken within the post-positive and interpretive paradigms and, without overtly discounting researchers' use of the theory within the dialogic paradigm, provided reasons as to why RDT is, fundamentally, a critical theory. She explained that researchers using RDT from post-positive or interpretive standpoints sought to detect the presence and significance of dialectical tensions animated in relational talk and/or understand how participants' talk reveals the interplay of opposing discourses. For example, Sahlstein (2006) took an interpretive approach in an RDT-informed study of the communication of romantic couples in long-distance dating relationships. Sahlstein identified a specific dialectical tension animating participants' talk (certainty-uncertainty) and discovered that participants managed this tension using three types of communication strategies (balance, denial, and segmentation), each involving the act of making plans. Another example is an RDT-informed interpretive study undertaken by Pettigrew (2009), who examined the use of text messaging by people in close, dyadic interpersonal relationships. He also identified a specific dialectical tension animating participants' talk (autonomy-connection) and discovered how participants managed it (by using text messaging), along with participants' perceptions of text messaging as a communication channel. While researchers using RDT from a post-positive or interpretive perspective can produce valuable new knowledge, Baxter (2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015) pointed out that taking the next step of examining the specific nature of the interplay of discourses present in talk would reveal the ways in which meaning is developed through discursive competition.

Baxter and Norwood (2015) claimed that scholars using RDT from a post-positivist lens tend to be focused on three main dialectical tensions (autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and openness-closedness), so as to more easily make predictions and generalize findings. Focusing on these three main dialectical tensions at the expense of others results in a limited understanding of the many forms of discursive struggle. While Baxter and Norwood asserted that interpretivism aligns with the goals that motivated the initial incarnation of RDT much more closely than post-positivism, the authors also pointed out that scholars using RDT from an interpretivist lens fail to account for the power of discourse or the “fragmented, contested nature of meaning” (p. 280), key aspects of what Baxter (2011) labeled RDT 2.0. Baxter and Norwood (2015) acknowledged that RDT 2.0 is designed for exploring the ways that taken-for-granted and emergent discourses clash with one another, qualities that would seem to make the dialogic paradigm the most obvious fit. However, the authors ultimately suggested that the most important aspect of the theory is that it “directs [scholarly] attention to issues of struggle and power” (pp. 280-281), and that the critical paradigm (and the postmodern critical approach in particular) is, therefore, the best fit for RDT 2.0.

The Postmodern Critical Paradigm: The Best-Fitting Paradigm for the Present Study

As Baxter and Asbury (2015) explained: “The postmodern project is less about understanding how stable institutional and ideological structures constrain the everyday world and more about critically resisting *seemingly* stable systems of meaning and taken-for-granted constructions of the world” (p. 192, emphasis added). Scholars who adopt the postmodern critical paradigm are uniquely directed to consider (a) the power differential

between opposing discourses; (b) the potential for existing meanings to become entrenched as well as for new meanings to emerge; and (c) the dangers of monologic totalitarianism (Baxter & Asbury, 2015; Suter, 2016). These aims align well with RDT 2.0 (Suter & Seurer, 2018). As a result, RDT 2.0 can be used appropriately by family communication scholars who, like me, acknowledge the false binary of public and private spheres and heed the call for more critical research from within the postmodern perspective on the impact of cultural assumptions (and resistance, critique, and transformation thereof) on family communication and relationships (Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Scharp & Thomas, 2019; Suter, 2016). My goals for the present study are well-aligned with the directives of postmodern critical theory, so I situated the present study and my positionality within the postmodern critical paradigm.

Data Generation Procedures

I worked with participants in order to co-generate data for the present study. In this section, I first identify the criteria for participant involvement. Second, I describe the ways that I recruited participants to take part. Third, I detail my interview procedures, including the turning points interview framework used, the ethical issues I took into consideration, and the means I used to transcribe the data.

Participants

Working together with volunteer participants, I endeavored to generate data regarding the communication of adult children and their conservative Christian parents regarding meaningful differences in their religious beliefs and values. First, participants in the present study were required to be at least 19 years old to ensure that they have reached the legal age of adulthood in the state of my university. Second, participants were

only eligible for participation if they self-identified as an adult child of at least one conservative Christian parent. If prompted for a definition of a conservative Christian, I echoed the descriptions provided by participants in a previous study who self-identified as conservative Christians (see Footnote 1, p. 7). Third, participants also needed to (a) regard their own religious beliefs and/or values as meaningfully different from the religious beliefs and/or values of at least one of their conservative Christian parents; (b) have previously communicated with at least one of their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and/or values; and (c) perceive that such communication has, at times, impacted how satisfied they felt in their relationship with their conservative Christian parent(s) and how much they felt like a part of their families.

Recruitment Procedures

Second, upon receiving IRB approval, I engaged in purposeful sampling, a method used to obtain “a meaningful sample that fits the parameters of the project’s research questions and goals” (Tracy, 2020, p. 102), to recruit such adult children to be interviewed. Purposeful sampling facilitated my engagement and co-generation of data with participants who have lived experiences relevant to the purpose and research questions of the present study (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Tracy, 2020). I continued to recruit and interview participants until I reached theoretical saturation at 30 participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018), a state in which “new [data adds] little, if any, new value to the emergent analysis” (Tracy, 2020, p. 227). A researcher determines that theoretical saturation has occurred when they can no longer find new and meaningful categories or characteristics within categories in a rich data set (Morse, 2015).

Following IRB approval, I utilized two kinds of purposeful sampling to recruit participants: convenience and snowball sampling (Tracy, 2020). With convenience sampling, researchers notify people in their social networks of the opportunity to participate in research, and with snowball sampling, researchers encourage participants to pass along the call for participants to other people they know who may be qualified and interested (Baxter & Babbie, 2004; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020). First, I sent the call for participants through text messages, email, and public posts and private messages on social media. I also posted the call on the Canvas pages of the classes I was teaching at the time. I put the call on flyers and posted them around the campus at my university as well. Within the call, I included my phone number and email address and asked interested parties to contact me. I also explicitly requested that the call be forwarded to potential participants, yet, in an effort to protect individual privacy, made clear that recipients of the call are not to provide me with the names of other potential participants. Due to funding generously provided by the Diana Carlin Research Fellowship and by my university department, I compensated each participant for their involvement by emailing them each a \$10 Visa eGift card. Student participants had the opportunity to choose whether to be sent an eGift card or receive research credit in communication studies classes, depending on the policies of their instructors.

Second, once participants agreed to take part in the study, I provided them with a consent form via email fully informing them of the nature and aims of the study, the scope of their involvement, the potential risks and benefits of their involvement, as well as the means by which I would protect their anonymity and the data I co-generated with them (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Their signatures on these forms indicated their

intentions to participate in full. I made it clear to participants on this consent form that I would allow them to cease their involvement in the present study at any time without penalty.

Interview Procedures

I undertook one-on-one, audio-recorded, semi-structured, in-depth, retrospective, turning points interviews with the study's participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020). Inspired by phenomenological philosophy, semi-structured interviews involve asking pre-prepared questions as well as questions that depart from participant responses, with the goal of letting participants describe their experiences with relative freedom (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In in-depth interviews, researchers encourage participants to describe their experiences in as specific detail as possible and pursue lines of questioning that provide data about what participants think and feel (Tracy, 2020).

I chose to undertake one-on-one audio-recorded semi-structured in-depth retrospective turning points interviews for several reasons. First, I chose to do so because they have been used in many previous interpersonal and family communication studies (e.g., Baxter et al., 1999; Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Baxter & Pittmann, 2001; Becker et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2003; Wang & Nuru, 2017), including studies of parent-child communication and relationships (e.g., Braithwaite, Waldron, et al., 2018; Breshears, 2010; Golish, 2000). Second, I chose to do so because turning points interviews amplify participant voices, help clarify meaning-making, account for relationships that do not progress in stages, and are a useful way of illustrating changes in relationships over time (Baxter, 2011; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Creswell & Poth,

2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Parcell, 2013; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Tracy, 2020; Tracy & Muñoz, 2011). Third, interviews are advantageous because they allow for rich description of lived experiences and events in value-laden contexts (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Fourth, interviews are also flexible and allow the researcher to serve as the primary knowledge-gaining instrument, even as they attempt to understand the world through the eyes of participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Tracy, 2020). Sixth, interviews can also have therapeutic value for participants (Rossetto, 2014), which may have been especially important for the present study, given the emotional difficulty and identity-related challenges associated with communicating and relating with a conservative Christian parent as a child with differing religious beliefs and/or values (Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022).

Baxter (2011) points out that, from a RDT perspective, research interviews are, themselves, speech acts, and, as such, are characterized by the interplay of cultural discourses, such that meaning-making and identity work occur as interviewer and interviewee communicate with one another. Thus, given my inherent lack of access to the complete interactional history of adult children participants and their conservative Christian parents and the difficulty of being able to observe such communication in real time, I must acknowledge that the interviews I undertook did not provide direct insight into the nature of the competition of discourses that animates such communication. Nonetheless, RDT is squarely in alignment with this proposed methodology. In fact, most RDT researchers collect data via one-on-one audio-recorded semi-structured in-depth retrospective interviews (e.g., Baxter et al., 2004; Baxter et al., 2002; Braithwaite & Baxter, 1995, 2006; Marko Harrigan & Braithwaite, 2010; Norwood, 2013; Scharp &

Thomas, 2016; Seurer, 2015; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009), and some of these are turning points interviews (e.g., Braithwaite et al., 1998; Sahlstein et al., 2009).

I undertook interviews via video conferencing software, such as Zoom, Skype, and FaceTime, and, when video conferencing was not possible or inconvenient for participants, telephone (Hanna & Mwale, 2017; Tracy, 2020). I recorded all interviews using digital recording devices (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015) and a smartphone application. Undertaking interviews using video conferencing software is often more convenient and comfortable for both interviewees and the interviewer and can help limit distraction and disruption (Hanna & Mwale, 2017). Only the audio from these interviews was recorded, as I was most interested in participants' talk.

Participant interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol I developed with RDT, my research questions, and turning points methodology in mind (See Appendix C; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020). To do so, I reviewed interview guides that other RDT researchers have used (e.g., Thomas et al., 2017), ones that I have used in the past when studying similar phenomena (Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022), and one that involved turning points (Oliver-Blackburn et al., 2022). I also discussed the present study with Baxter, the creator of RDT, and with Kristina Scharp, an RDT scholar, who provided helpful suggestions for how to interview the participants (L. Baxter, personal communication, January 24, 2020; K. Scharp, personal communication, June 8, 2020). Before I finalized this interview protocol, I pretested it with a person who meets the criteria to participate in the present study. I monitored their reactions to the questions during the interview, asked them about the quality of the questions after the interview

was complete, and made some small yet necessary changes to the interview protocol at this person's suggestion.

Turning Points

Bolton (1961) first defined turning points as “points of transformation,” ranging from “small” to “dramatic,” during which significant change occurs “in actors’ definition of themselves and their relation to others” (pp. 236-237). Goodall (2000) described turning points as moments in a person’s life that are of particular consequence and filled with unique meaning for those that live them. According to Bullis and Bach (1989), turning points may alter meanings of people and relationships as well as institutions and organizations. Because turning points take place throughout the lifecourse, turning points interviews are most common in narrative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Indeed, turning points have been identified as having characterized (auto)biographical stories since at least the time of Augustine (Denzin, 1989).

Turning points interviews continue to be used throughout the social sciences (e.g., Androutsopoulou & Stefanou, 2018; Michalsen, 2019) and are commonly undertaken using Huston et al.’s (1981) retrospective interviewing technique (Mongeau et al., 2022). Turning points are a useful alternative to prescriptive stage-based models of relationship progression that do not account for complex, non-linear relational dynamics (Baxter et al., 1999; Parcell, 2013). During a turning points interview, a researcher explains the concept of a turning point to a participant and then works with them to plot on a graph and name the turning points that the participant recalls experiencing in a particular relationship (Baxter et al., 1999; Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Mongeau et al., 2022; Parcell, 2013). The researcher might say something akin to: “A turning point is a meaningful

event or experience in your life that had considerable consequence for your relationship and is important for understanding your relationship today.” Typically, the course of time is represented in months along the abscissa (x) axis of the turning points graph, and a relational quality is represented along the ordinate (y) axis of the turning points graph, such as commitment to or sense of closeness in the relationship, as a percentage. For example, if closeness is the relational quality of interest, 0 percent would mean “not close at all” and 100 percent would mean “as close as it is possible for people to be” (See Figure 2 for the turning points graph used in the present study).

Plotting turning points gives the researcher an indication of the participant’s sense of the relationship at the time of each of the turning points (Baxter et al., 1999; Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Mongeau et al., 2022; Parcell, 2013). When the plots on the graph are connected by lines, a visual depiction of the participant’s perception of the trajectory of a relationship emerges. Each time a turning point is identified, named, and plotted, the researcher asks the participant questions about what led up to and occurred during the turning point, how and/or why the turning point influenced the relationship, and any other questions relevant to the study. Through this interview technique, participants are given the opportunity to make sense of their lived experiences by richly describing instances that have been important to the trajectory of their relationships and explore their considerable meaning (Baxter et al., 1999; Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Mongeau et al., 2022; Parcell, 2013).

Through a recent experience interviewing participants as part of a research team studying turning points and the discursive construction of the stepparent role (Oliver-Blackburn et al., 2022), I gained an appreciation for the structure that turning points bring

to an interview as well as how the graphs served as visual evidence of how varied and turbulent stepparent-stepchild relationships can be. Along with the other members of the research team, I also coded turning points identified by participants and assessed their valence. Doing so showed me that turning points are often multifaceted and rarely, if ever, hold a singular meaning for people. Using turning points in the present study allowed my participants and I to focus on the most meaningful moments in the course of their relationships with their conservative Christian parents and visually represent how these relationships changed over time.

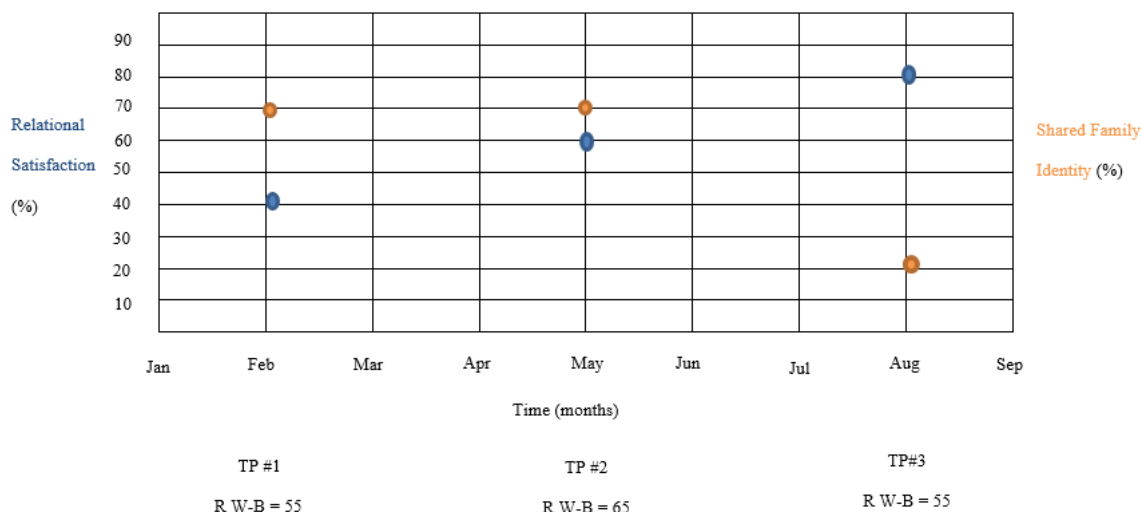
Braithwaite, Waldron, et al. (2018) and Wang and Nuru (2017) are good examples of how to undertake turning points interviews. Both sets of researchers asked participants to reflect on and discuss pivotal moments in their family relationships, used a graph to plot the participant responses, asked probing questions about each of these moments, audio-recorded the interviews, and transcribed the interview recordings before engaging in data analysis. I did the same in the present study, but with respect to turning points in relational well-being tied to communication regarding parent-child differences in religious beliefs and values and from an RDT-informed perspective. Morgan (2019) and Worwood et al. (2020) have recently demonstrated the value of turning points for tracing the development of parent-child relationships and children's development of religious beliefs that differ from those of their parents over time. In addition, scholars (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986) have long recognized that relational development is dialectical; parties communicatively navigate changes in their relationships as they create a shared sense of who they are together and what they mean to each other. Baxter and Erbert (1999) asserted that changes in a relationship are often brought on by dialectical

tensions perceived by those in that relationship, and that turning points interviews allow researchers to explore such relational changes and the meaning that people make from them. Baxter (2011) and other RDT scholars (e.g., Carr & Wang, 2012; Marko Harrigan, 2009) have suggested that turning points interviews be used in future RDT-informed research. Undertaking turning points interviews allowed me to shed light on the competition between discourses that have, over time, animated the communication between conservative Christian parents and their children and given their relationships meaning. For these reasons, and because Baxter (2011) and Parcell (2013) both emphasized that, in RDT, meanings, such as the meaning of a relationship or the meaning of turning points within a relationship, can change over time as centripetal-centrifugal struggles between discourses occur, and that turning points interviews provide a way of making sense of these changes, its use as a interview framework in the present study was warranted.

In interviews I undertook as part of the present study, I asked participants to identify and describe every turning point related to the well-being of their relationships with their conservative Christian parents that involves their communication regarding their differing religious beliefs and values. The participants and I plotted each turning point as it was identified by the participant and gave each one a name before beginning an in-depth discussion of that turning point and the communication the participant associated with it. The relational quality of relational well-being was represented on the turning points graph using an ordinate axis on both sides (see Figure 2). As stated in the previous chapter, relational well-being can be conceived of as a combination of relational satisfaction and shared family identity (Colaner et al., 2014). For example, in Colaner et

al.'s (2014) exploration of the links between relational well-being and parent-child religious difference, the researchers focused exclusively on the constructs of relational satisfaction and shared family identity to assess relational well-being. The ordinate axis on the left side of the turning points graph indicated the percent of relational satisfaction at each turning point, and the ordinate axis on the right side of the turning points graph indicated the percentage of shared family identity at each turning point. Participants plotted a percentage for each aspect of relational well-being at each turning point. The average of the two plotted percentages at a given turning point yielded the percentage of relational well-being.

Figure 2: Example Relational Well-Being Turning Points Graph with Two Ordinate Axes



The design of the turning points graph used in the present study was inspired by Baxter's (2011) critique of the turning points approach. She noted that assigning a single metric of relational change to be examined a priori inherently limits what researchers can discover. To solve this problem, Baxter suggested that researchers "shift to a floating Y-axis, in which the informants identify for each turning point what the metric of change is"

(2011, p. 98). However, if the metric of relational change is allowed to differ across turning points, researchers could not use the turning points graph to observe changes in a specific metric of change over the course of time. While the design used in the present study does not allow for changes in any and all metrics of relational change to be plotted, as Baxter desired, it does allow for the visual depiction of changes in more than one aspect of a single relational metric. This design is, perhaps, a first step toward the kinds of turning points graphs Baxter envisioned.

Interview Questions

To begin each interview, I first invited the participant to explain the nature of their religious beliefs and values and to tell me the story of how they came to develop those religious beliefs and values and communicate about their religious beliefs and values with their conservative Christian parent(s). Doing so allowed for focus on temporal, social, and meaning-laden events relevant to the research topic (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020). Once the participant told me their story, I asked them open-ended questions about the content of their communication with their conservative Christian parent(s) regarding their religious belief and value differences, the manner in which they have communicated with their conservative Christian parent(s) about their religious belief and value differences, and specific turning points in their relationships with their conservative Christian parent(s) that involved such communication. While the prepared questions in the interview protocol guided me, I also asked follow-up questions to provide clarity or other questions that seem important to ask in the moment (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Salmons, 2015; Tracy, 2020). I expected each of the interviews to last about one hour, given past

experience. Although a few interviews took under 50 minutes, a considerable number of them ended up lasting more than two hours, and a few interviews lasted for nearly three hours. The average length of an interview for the present study turned out to be approximately one hour, 58 minutes.

Ethical Considerations

Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) provided helpful ethical recommendations for interviewers by which I abided for the present study. Brinkmann and Kvale encourage interviewers not to think of these ethical considerations as problems for which to find a single solution, but as ongoing concerns to be aware of throughout the research process. They include informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the researcher's role. In addition to gaining participants' signed consent, I repeatedly reminded participants that they could, at any time, pause or stop the interview, or cease their participation in the present study altogether. I also told them that I intended to include participant quotes in the study manuscript, and to eventually submit that manuscript as my doctoral dissertation and one or more portions of it to scholarly journals for publication. I also indicated on the consent form that I may utilize the data that participants and I co-generate for the present study in subsequent studies.

To ensure confidentiality, I informed participants that I would store the recordings and transcriptions of the interviews, turning points graphs, and demographic information sheets on password-protected devices, to which I, alone, have access, for no more than five years. I also informed participants that their names would be replaced with pseudonyms in the manuscript, and that all other potentially identifying information, such as the names of other people or places, will be redacted from the manuscript. In terms of

consequences, I sought to minimize the risks associated with participation for participants, including by offering comforting words to participants who became noticeably upset during our interview and suggesting that upset participants take a break from or end our interview. As the researcher, I remained mindful of my role and responsibilities to extend genuine empathy to participants, act with integrity, and allow ethical concerns to outweigh scientific ones.

Data Transcription

I transcribed the words spoken during each interview using an audio transcription software called Descript Pro (<https://www.descript.com/transcription>). Transcription represents a further shifting of data from audio to text form, but it often makes data more accommodating to analyze (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I checked each of the generated transcriptions against the audio recording to ensure accuracy, a procedure known as fact checking (Tracy, 2020), and added relevant nonverbal communication in brackets according to my own hearing and recollection (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Changing the interview data in this way is a means of preparing it for analysis that is common in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020) as well as RDT-informed research generally (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Suter & Seurer, 2018; e.g., Carr & Wang, 2012; Norwood, 2013; Scharp & Thomas, 2016; Seurer, 2015; Suter et al., 2011; Suter et al., 2015; Thatcher, 2011). After that, I analyzed the interview transcriptions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020). While transcription represents an additional step away from the actual communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values, the

ability to assess the data in written form allowed me to more closely examine participants' words in an effort to better discern the meanings of their statements (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Tracy, 2020). However, as I engaged in transcription, I remained mindful of the fact that it is a process inherently subject to my own interpretations of the intended structure and meanings of participants' statements, such as what words I understand participants to be saying, when I believe that once sentence stops and another begins, or where I choose to put punctuation marks (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Data Analysis Procedures

In order to answer my research questions for the present study, I analyzed the transcribed data in two ways. To answer RQ 1 and RQ 2, I engaged in a contrapuntal analysis to identify the discourses at play in participants' talk and assess the interplay of these discourses to develop a specific understanding of how they compete with one another (Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al., 2021). These two forms of analysis provided new insight into the experiences and communication of parents and children with meaningful religious belief and value differences. In addition to the analysis that I completed for the present study, I plan to undertake an analysis of the turning points that participants identified and create a typology of them in a future study. To follow, I describe the contrapuntal analysis that I completed for the present study.

Contrapuntal Analysis

In response to RQ 1 and RQ 2, I undertook a contrapuntal analysis of the interview data, a form of discourse analysis that was specifically developed to be utilized in RDT-informed research (Baxter, 2011; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021;

Suter & Seurer, 2018; e.g., Carr & Wang, 2012; Norwood, 2013; Scharp & Thomas, 2016; Seurer, 2015; Suter et al., 2015). According to Baxter (2011), “The key to contrapuntal analysis is marked by the term *contrapuntal*, which is a musical term that refers to the playing of contrasting or counterpoint melodies with one another” (p. 152). I intend to engage in contrapuntal analysis in the present study to discover the ways that the interpenetration of various discourses is reflected in the talk of adult children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their conservative Christian parents because contrapuntal analysis was created to allow researchers to identify (a) opposing discourses in recorded talk or written text; (b) the nature of the struggle for dominance between such discourses; and (c) how meaning is made in the process of the centripetal-centrifugal struggle between such discourses.

Researchers using contrapuntal analysis must first consider recorded talk or written text in light of the concept of the utterance chain, investigating the talk or text for the influence of discourses voiced in the past or presumed to be voiced in the future, both within the context of a relationship and that of a larger culture. At this stage of the analysis, researchers seek to identify the discourses at play in units of talk or written text, being sure to search for both manifest and latent discourses. There is no specified length of talk or written text that constitutes a unit of analysis, allowing researchers to assess whatever “segment of text [is] necessary to answer the analytic question” (Baxter, 2011, p. 161). The opposing discourses that researchers identify must be recognizable by study participants, as well as members of these participants’ larger cultures, as competing with one another (Baxter, 2011). Participants must also understand transformative discourses

identified by researchers as no longer in competition with one another, even as members of their larger culture view such discourses as continuing to compete.

Second, to complete a contrapuntal analysis, researchers must assess talk or written text for its dialogic contractiveness/expansiveness and in terms of the talk or written text's position on a theoretical continuum between monologue and dialogue in its most ideal form (Baxter, 2011). Making these assessments entails paying close attention to and pointing out the various discursive practices employed that characterize monologue, diachronic separation, and/or synchronic interplay, which I discuss in a later section.

Identifying Discourses

Following Baxter's (2011) recommendation, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process of thematic analysis as a guide for identifying the discourses that inform and are reflected in a text. Baxter has called themes "the constitutive elements of discourse" (Baxter et al., 2012, p. 60) and maintained that they can thereby be regarded as discourses themselves for the purpose of contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011). I incorporated elements of this process with additional recommendations for thematic analysis made by Baxter (2011), Braun and Clarke (2019), Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), and Manning and Kunkel (2014). For example, Baxter (2011) reminded RDT researchers that some themes may be more easily identifiable than others, and that one must consider the cultural and interpersonal discourses that render units of text intelligible, in addition to that which is stated explicitly. Braun and Clarke (2019) made clear that thematic analysis is not a value-free endeavor and that qualitative researchers who undertake it must take an "open, exploratory, flexible and iterative" approach, knowing that it "is not

about following procedures ‘correctly’ (or about ‘accurate’ and ‘reliable’ coding, or achieving consensus between coders), but about the researcher’s reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process” (pp. 593-594). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) stressed the importance of writing analytic memos to oneself detailing the names and working definitions of themes and one’s thoughts regarding each theme. Manning and Kunkel (2014) emphasized that researchers should do multiple cycles of coding before moving into the development of themes. In the present study, I heeded all of this advice with the aim of making clear the discourses that animate the talk of conservative Christian parents and their children who do not hold these parents’ religious beliefs and values.

First, I reread the interview transcripts several times. As I did so, I paid more specific attention to the discourses that are present in participants’ talk as well as the discourses reportedly at play in participants’ interactions with their conservative Christian parents and noted my initial perceptions of the data. Second, I engaged in what Saldaña (2016) called first cycle coding and Tracy (2020) called primary-cycle coding, a phase of thematic analysis in which short units of text are examined and assigned specific descriptive words or phrases that signify the features most interesting to the researcher and/or relevant to the research questions guiding the study. I wrote these descriptive words and phrases as gerunds, to depict the action described, and/or in vivo codes, to indicate and preserve the wording of interview participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Tracy, 2020). I refined these codes throughout the primary-cycle coding phase and, as I began to discern patterns, created a codebook in which broadened codes are listed and defined.

Third, I moved to the coding phase known as secondary-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2016; Tracy, 2020), in which codes are critically examined, organized, synthesized, and categorized into themes and sub-themes. I did not single-code the themes, because, as Baxter (2011; Norwood & Baxter, 2011) noted, discourses may have multiple radiants of meaning that may interpenetrate. Following Owen (1984), I identified themes based on the recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness of concepts and ideas in the interview transcripts around which patterns of shared meaning are organized. If a concept or idea “[captured] the essence and spread of meaning” and “[united] data that might otherwise appear disparate, or meaning that occurs in multiple and varied contexts” (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019, p. 845), I considered that concept or idea to be a theme, especially when it was mentioned more than once by a single participant and/or by more than one participant, or if it was strongly emphasized by one or more participants through nonverbal means such as vocal tone, facial expression, and/or gestures.

The themes that I developed during the secondary-cycle coding phase were not directly informed by concepts or theories used within the social sciences but do partially reflect discourses previously identified by RDT scholars (i.e., openness-closedness; disclosure-privacy; Baxter, 2011). I recognized the heuristic value of considering what others have previously found and, where appropriate, utilized established language to bring clarity to my findings in the present study. To this end, I wrote analytic memos detailing my thoughts on the meaning of and relationships between the themes. I also ensured that the themes are internally cohesive, distinct from one another, and accurately reflect the interview transcript data (Tracy, 2020). Finally, I named and defined the

themes and selected exemplars of each of them so as to be able to more adequately discuss and illustrate them.

As instructed by Baxter (2011; Baxter et al., 2012), I paid particular attention to lexical indicators of discursive competition that counter, negate, or entertain an idea or ideology (e.g., *of course; surprisingly; even though; but; (I) still; I (do not) believe; (it) seems; although; however; yet; nonetheless; just; only; apparently; may; might; on the (one or other) hand; a little bit; sometimes*). Such indicators alerted me to the presence of manifest discourses, those that are “explicitly marked in the content of talk” (Baxter, 2011, p. 158). As I suspected, since I asked only one party about their communication and relationships with another party, who was absent from the interview, the discourses evident in participants’ talk were mostly introduced through *reported speech* (Voloshinov, 1927/1987). Baxter (2011) recognized that reported speech may come in the form of direct quotations or paraphrases. Additionally, I discerned the influence of latent discourses, “unsaid, taken-for-granted presuppositions” within participants’ talk by considering “[what]... a listener [needs] to know in order to render [each] textual segment intelligible” as well as “[what] sociocultural and interpersonal discourses need to be invoked to understand what [each] textual segment means” (Baxter, 2011, p. 159). I also utilized my own knowledge as a cultural insider as a sensitizing tool, while ensuring that the discourses I identify are grounded in participants’ talk.

Assessing Interplay

Once I identified the discourses at play in participants’ talk, I determined whether or not these discourses are framed as competing with one another. According to Baxter (2011), “Three kinds of discourse markers... are important in identifying discourses

positioned in counterpoint relation to one another: negation, countering, and entertaining” (p. 166). Negation involves rejecting a discourse in favor of an alternative discourse.

When people subscribe to opposing discourses, negation is often present in their talk with one another. It becomes clear through assessment of their statements that they embrace one ideology at the expense of another. Negation can also appear when an individual indicates, in their talk, that they do not align with an ideology prevalent in their culture. Countering involves replacing a discourse with which one is expected to align with another alternative discourse. Entertaining involves acknowledging a multiplicity of alternative discourses and that any single discourse is contingent and potentially at odds with others. I looked out for negation, countering, and entertaining in order to tell if discourses embedded within participants’ talk were in competition with one another.

Upon identifying the discourses in participants’ talk that are in competition with one another, I assessed the interplay between these discourses and evaluated its dialogic contractiveness/expansiveness. As Baxter et al. (2021) observed, “Heuristic insights afforded by RDT... come from studying details of utterances to determine *how* particular meanings emerge” (p. 13; emphasis in original). Baxter (2011) explained that “the task at this stage of contrapuntal analysis is that of determining whether the text enacts monologue, diachronic separation, or synchronic interplay” (p. 169). Monologue can be imagined as one endpoint of a continuum between it and idealized dialogue. Talk that is closer to the monologue endpoint of this continuum, in which a single dominant discourse is privileged, is said to be dialogically contractive. Baxter (2011) defined monologue as “the point of total exclusion of alternative voices” (p. 170). In addition to deploying the discursive practices of negating and countering, monologue can be

established and/or maintained by making fun of alternative discourses using parody, feigned ignorance, or distortion. Baxter highlighted and described other dialogically contractive discursive practices originally identified by Deetz (1992), such as disqualification, naturalization, neutralization, topical avoidance, subjectification of experience, and pacification. In the present study, I considered whether evidence of these or other dialogically contractive practices, or of monologue itself, exists in the transcriptions of audio recordings of participant interviews.

Diachronic separation and synchronic interplay involve more dialogically expansive forms of talk that “function to voice multiple discursive positions in ways that open up meaning rather than functioning to contract meaning” (Baxter, 2011, p. 173). Talk is considered to be dialogically expansive if it has the potential to shift interaction away from monologue and closer to the idealized dialogue on the continuum between the two. Baxter spotlighted dialogically expansive discursive practices such as entertaining, “lexical choices such as *on the one hand/on the other hand*” (p. 173), and attributing, and suggested that more may be found through RDT-informed research in the future. Attributing is a form of reported speech in which alternative discursive positions voiced by others are brought into and articulated in an utterance, turning these discursive positions into “resources to expand the semantic possibilities of... meaning-making” (Baxter, 2011, p. 174). Baxter also noted that speakers can use the same discursive practices that would serve to promote monologue to instead promote dialogical expansion when they are aligned with marginalized discourses. When so aligned, speakers who use such discursive practices force consideration of alternative discourses, thereby creating the conditions needed to make “dislodging the dominance of centripetal discourses”

possible (Baxter, 2011, p. 173). For example, although making fun of alternative discourses reinforces the dominant discourse, making fun of the dominant discourse allows for marginalized discourses to be considered. In the present study, assessing the text for diachronic separation and synchronic interplay required me to carefully consider the use of dialogically expansive discursive practices such as these.

As previously mentioned (see Chapter One, p. 35), diachronic separation describes changes in the dominance of discourses over time. Without the perspective provided by longitudinal data, diachronic separation can appear like monologue; that is, at any given time, one discourse may be privileged and another marginalized. Baxter (2011) was skeptical of the capacity of retrospective reporting as a means of identifying diachronic separation, given that the participant is reflecting back on a relationship from a single point in time, but still lauded retrospective reporting for the discursive practices it had been used to identify: *spiraling inversion* and *segmentation*. With spiraling inversion, time is the catalyst for the switch in dominance between two discourses, whereas, with segmentation, the catalyst for such a switch in dominance is the topic of discussion or activity in which to engage. Neither spiraling inversion nor segmentation involves the interplay of discourses; in both, opposing discourses remain separate from each other, limiting what Baxter called their dialogic potential.

Unlike diachronic separation, synchronic interplay does, as its name suggests, involve the interplay of discourses. Baxter (2011) explained that synchronic utterances “are laced with carry-over meanings from the past and anticipated meaningful responses from the future” (p. 130), and that “greater dialogic potential... exists when discourses co-occur at the same point in time in the enactment of the utterance” (p. 131). In other

words, the interpenetration of discourses is what makes dialogue possible. Baxter identified four types of discursive struggles that characterize synchronic interplay: (a) *antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle*; (b) *direct-indirect struggle*; (c) *serious-playful struggle*; and (d) *polemical-transformative struggle*.

Antagonistic struggle occurs when two speakers are aligned with opposing discourses that clash with each other, and nonantagonistic struggle occurs when each speaker gives voice to multiple discourses (Baxter, 2011). Direct struggle occurs when two or more distinct discourses are clearly voiced, and indirect struggle occurs when discourses are voiced in an ambiguous manner, such as in disqualification, indirect response, self-deprecation, or hedging. Serious struggle occurs when a discourse is combatted in a straightforward, logical manner, and playful struggle occurs when a speaker parodies, feigns ignorance of, and/or distorts a discourse. Polemical struggle occurs whenever “discourses are in play in a competitive, opposing manner,” as they largely are in “[the] other three dimensions [of synchronic interplay] – antagonistic-nonantagonistic, direct-indirect, [and] serious-playful” (Baxter, 2011, p. 138), and transformative struggle occurs when idealized dialogue is achieved, no one discourse dominates any other, and new meanings can emerge, such as in hybridization and aesthetic moments.

Establishing Validity

Establishing the validity of one’s findings is an important means of achieving credibility and meaningful coherence, two of Tracy’s (2020) eight markers of high-quality qualitative research. For researchers working within the critical paradigm, it is imperative that the voices of participants be amplified, and participants’ lived experiences

accurately represented (Baxter & Asbury, 2015). For these reasons, I engaged in several validity processes: (a) researcher reflexivity; (b) thick, rich description; (c) providing exemplars; (d) constant comparison; (e) negative case analysis; and (f) member reflecting in a focus group. Validity processes such as these are widely used in qualitative research on personal relationships (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Suter, 2009). To follow, I discuss each of them.

Researcher Reflexivity

Tracy (2020) identified self-reflexivity as a core principle of qualitative inquiry and a marker of researcher sincerity, defining it as “[researchers’] careful consideration of the ways in which their past experiences, points of view, and roles impact their interactions with, and interpretations of, any particular interaction or context” (p. 2). Creswell and Miller (2000) identified researcher reflexivity as a “validity procedure [which] is for researchers to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases” (p. 127). Braun and Clarke (2019; Braun, Clarke, & Hayfield, 2019; Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019) explained that researchers engaging in reflexive thematic analysis should make their positionality clear and be reflexive about its potential impact on data interpretation. Suter (2016) suggested that researchers working within the postmodern critical paradigm disclose their positionality with respect to their research and reflexively consider its implications for the research process, results, and interpretations. In an effort to help ensure that my work in the present study is both philosophically consistent and ethically sound, I was compelled to reflect on my own religious history, religious beliefs and values, relevant volunteer and professional experiences, and family communication and relationships, as well as the ways in which all of these have impacted each other,

throughout the entire research process. I acknowledge that I brought my own viewpoint and lived experiences to bear on the present study, even as I made attempts to safeguard the integrity with which I carried out the study.

My Positionality as the Researcher. I am a heterosexual, White, upper-middle class, California-raised U. S. American male and non-denominational liberal Christian in his early 30s, who is partnered through marriage and pursuing a doctoral degree in Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I was raised in a conservative Christian family. Although divorced, my parents both took my siblings and me to church regularly, taught us Bible stories, and encouraged us to adopt their religious beliefs and values. Due in part to attending different churches with my mother and father, I realized from an early age that there are different ways of understanding what it means and looks like to follow Jesus Christ. In my late adolescence, at the invitation of my then-girlfriend and friends, I began attending a different church than either of my parents. I began to understand my faith in ways that were different from how I had been taught or understood it previously. Over time, and after much study and prayer, I came to adopt religious beliefs and values that reflected a view of Christianity centered on logically discerning the meanings of Scripture and their moral implications for how to live one's life for oneself, rather than on unquestioningly following the expectations of my family and Christian community, which were based on traditional interpretations of Scripture. This free-thinking approach was bolstered by what I learned as I entered college and began pursuing an undergraduate degree in philosophy with an emphasis on religious studies.

During my undergraduate years, I volunteered to help lead a youth group at my church, and I was eventually asked to serve as an interim youth pastor. This led to me being hired to be a permanent youth pastor at another church; a position I held during most of the time that I was pursuing a Master's degree in communication studies. In my undergraduate classes, it became apparent that many of the religious beliefs and values that I had recently come to adopt were not held by the majority of American Christians. My experiences in church leadership were also a consistent reminder of this fact. I knew that the pastors and members of the church at which I was working believed in the version of Christianity I had rejected. As a pastor, I tried to share my own religious perspective strategically, respectfully, and carefully, but was eventually asked by the church leadership to step down from my position once my beliefs and values became more known within the church. I was later hired as a youth pastor at another church; one at which I was able to share my beliefs and values more openly while still being cautious about revealing them in totality.

In a manner similar to how I did in my former professional life as a youth pastor, I have to carefully make decisions about how I discuss my religious beliefs and values in my personal life. Initially, I was afraid that my parents and other family members would reject me and/or damn me to hell if I made them aware of my religious views, because I had come to believe quite differently than they had encouraged me to believe as a child. I wondered whether revealing this information would permanently damage my relationships with my family members, as well as whether our differences would impact every future interaction I had with them. When I have made my beliefs and values known to family members, some of what I feared would come to pass has, in fact, occurred,

particularly among the more conservative Christians in my family. My relationships and communication with these family members continues to be influenced by our religious belief and value differences in substantial ways. However, to my surprise and great relief, some of my family members have been open to my perspective (or, at least, have not denounced me for having it) and it has not become a hindrance for our relationships and communication.

The experiences I have described above led to my interest in exploring religious parent-child communication in previous studies (e.g., Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022), and, in the present study as I seek to explore the interplay of discourses present in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their differently-believing adult children regarding their religious belief and value differences. I intend to uncover the manner in which discourses pertaining to religious beliefs and values present within U.S. American culture (and U.S. American Christian culture specifically) compete with one another, the ways this competition is reflected in parent-child communication, and the impacts this competition has on parent-child relationships. Although I have been privy to many religious parent-child conversations, have experienced them firsthand, and have studied them in the past (e.g., Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022), I have not attempted to examine them through a postmodern critical or RDT lens until now, and believe doing so is important, as I articulated in Chapter One.

My pertinent past experiences likely had some influence on the discourses that I identified and my assessment of their interplay, but I did my best to remain self-reflexive throughout the research process. According to Tracy (2020), self-reflexivity involves “sharing one’s motivation to conduct a certain study and engaging in practices that

promote self-awareness [of] and exposure” to one’s “role and impact in the scene” throughout the research process (p. 273). In order to be self-reflexive, I interrogated my own biases and considered the extent to which they have influence on the methods I used in the present study. I also took notes on and considered participants’ responses to me during our interactions to see how I, as a research instrument myself, might be affecting the participants. In order to be self-reflexive, I wrote about the present study in the first-person. Writing in the first-person helped me avoid obscuring my presence in the scene from readers and served as a reminder to them of my potential influence. By practicing self-reflexivity, I hope to assure readers that I have striven to be honest, sincere, and transparent about the present study, and that I only attest to that which originates in the data I co-generated with study participants.

Thick, Rich Description

As mentioned in a previous section of this chapter, interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015), especially turning points interviews (Baxter et al., 1999; Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Mongeau et al., 2022; Parcell, 2013), provide participants with the opportunity to richly describe their lived experiences. Researchers who include these descriptions, and “describe the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail” as well, help to ensure the validity of their findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Creswell and Miller (2000) said that doing so “creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study,” and can entail “bringing a relationship or an interaction alive between two or more persons; or providing a detailed rendering of how people feel” (p. 128). According to Tracy (2020), a practice related to thick, rich

description is uncovering and relaying tacit knowledge to study readers. Tacit knowledge refers to “the body of implicit and unarticulated meanings floating just below the surface [of participant interaction]” (p. 275), just as 90 percent of an iceberg floats below the waterline. Tracy highlighted that such key cultural values and understandings can be gleaned from paying close attention to nonverbal cues, rather than participants’ talk alone, an insight which Baxter (2011) provided as well.

Although unable to observe participants’ interactions with their conservative Christian parents directly for the present study, I made note and was mindful of the nonverbal cues of participants during interviews. I also considered the behaviors in which participants recalled themselves and their conservative Christian parents engaging during their interactions. I allowed these observations and accounts to inform my analysis of the interview transcriptions. Subsequently, in the results chapters of the present study, I attempted to provide thick, rich description of participants’ communication and relationships with their conservative Christian parents. I made efforts to describe the context of the turning points that participants identified within those relationships as well, and to include details that would give readers a visceral sense of participants’ feelings and experiences. It is my hope that, by including this information, readers are better able to assess for themselves whether the findings laid out in the present study are credible.

Providing Exemplars

Suter (2009) and Tracy (2020) listed providing exemplars among the validity processes most used in qualitative research on personal relationships. Suter (2009) pointed out that providing exemplars of participants’ communication as a means of rendering evident the connections between the data and a researcher’s interpretations is a

well-established practice in this field, dating back to the 1970s. Exemplars are “selected segments of data that [researchers] use to advance an argument by *demonstrating* and *illustrating* its claims” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, emphasis in original). They are meant to “serve as *embodiments* of an inductive construct or claim” (Tracy, 2020, p. 245, emphasis in original). Manning and Kunkel (2014) provided a clear explanation of their heuristic value: “By presenting multiple data exemplars that illustrate a concept or theme in qualitative work, the intersection of those data also help to make verbally elusive ideas intelligible through feelings that resonate and circulate throughout the exemplars” (p. 20). These authors also illustrated the ways that exemplars can illuminate the depth and/or complexity of participants’ emotions as well as the ways in which participants engage in meaning-making. Lindlof and Taylor (2019) suggest that, by providing exemplars, researchers are indirectly signaling the importance and/or uniqueness of participants’ talk.

Given the validity support that exemplars provide, I included multiple exemplars for every theme and sub-theme constituting each of the discourses that I identified as informing and being reflected in the talk of the participants in the present study (see Chapters Three and Four). Additionally, I used exemplars to bring to light the interplay of these discourses. By reading exemplars of participants’ talk, readers are able to check these exemplars against my interpretations in order to judge the validity of the findings. Readers can also access participants’ expressions of their thoughts, feelings, and recollections, rather than relying solely on my report of them.

Constant Comparison

Suter (2009) also listed the constant-comparative method among the validity processes most used in qualitative research on personal relationships. Constant comparison was initially introduced as a part of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967). However, as Lindlof and Taylor (2019) stated, “It is possible to adhere to one or two of [grounded theory’s] tenets, [such as the constant-comparative method], and forgo the others” (p. 321). Lindlof and Taylor describe the constant-comparative method as “a formal, iterative process of coding and conceptualization” (p. 321). To engage in constant comparison is to repeatedly check emerging categories or codes against raw data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Suter, 2009). Researchers must be willing to change categories or codes as they encounter “new data altering the scope and terms of analytic framework” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Constant comparison ultimately results in more meaningful categories and codes (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

Suter (2009) holds up her own study “of how lesbian couples manage dialectical tensions as they enact relationally significant rituals” (Suter et al., 2006) as an example of one in which the constant-comparative method was employed. This study lends credence to the use of constant comparison in the present dialectical study. As I described in a previous section of this chapter, in an effort to identify the discourses that inform and are reflected in participants’ talk, I engaged in a multi-cycle coding process. During this process, I utilized the constant-comparative method. I paid special attention to make sure that the codes I developed have their origins in the transcribed text, “[compared] each incident of a code to other incidents,” and continuously rewrote category definitions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 322) so that readers would perceive them to be credible and meaningful.

Negative Case Analysis

Negative case analysis is “the process where investigators first establish the preliminary themes or categories in a study and then search through the data for evidence that is consistent with or disconfirms these themes” (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Qualitative researchers have a variety of other names for this process, such as seeking negative (Miles & Huberman, 1994) or disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000), deviant case analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), and analytic induction (Kidder, 1981). The search for disconfirming evidence is aligned with the social constructivist viewpoint, affirming the multiplicity and complexity of reality (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Gibbs (2007) advised that when a researcher identifies disconfirming evidence, they should attempt “to understand why [this disconfirming evidence] occurred and what circumstances produced them” (p. 96). According to Lindlof and Taylor (2019) and Manning and Kunkel (2014), doing so often leads researchers to make revisions of existing categories or create entirely new ones. Lindlof and Taylor (2019) also explained that undertaking a negative case analysis should ultimately make for stronger, less refutable data interpretation.

I undertook a negative case analysis for the present study, seeking data that did not fit with my initial codes and themes. Doing so prevented me from “cherry-picking data examples that only fit early explanations and ignoring discrepant stories or points of view” (Tracy, 2020, p. 229). I sought to ensure that the voices of both the participants in the present study and their conservative Christian parents were fairly and completely represented. In the process, I hope to have bolstered the validity of the findings of the present study.

Member Reflecting in a Focus Group

The final effort that I made to establish the validity of my findings was organizing and facilitating a focus group of participants for the purpose of member reflecting (Birt et al., 2016; Doyle, 2007; e.g., Klinger, 2005). As part of the original participation consent form, participants provided their consent to participate in this focus group. The focus group took place in-person and at a time that was most convenient for all participants.

Member reflections, like member checks, involve discussing theory, data, analysis methods, and/or findings with the participants in a study and asking for their feedback and suggestions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Tracy, 2020). However, as Tracy (2020) argued, member reflections differ from member checks in that, rather than ensuring that one's research findings correspond to participants' viewpoints, the purpose of member reflections is to create "a space for [participants to lend] additional insight and credibility" to one's findings through a process of collaboration and elaboration (p. 278). As a result of this process, new data is produced which can enhance one's analysis and provide one with a more in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences, as well as with a greater appreciation for the meaningfulness of one's findings for participants. Using appropriately simplified language, I explained my findings to participants and asked them whether or not these findings resonated with their lived experiences. Member reflecting can reveal a researcher's misunderstandings or faulty assumptions and give participants an opportunity to correct them (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). Member reflecting can also provide researchers with assurance that participant voices are properly represented as well as an indication of how population members may receive the findings. When one or

more participants indicated that one of my findings did not resonate with their lived experiences, I asked them to explain why they felt this way, considered their answers, and then reevaluated my findings in light of the data generated from the individual participant interviews. Had extensive revision of my findings been necessary, I would have organized and undertaken an additional member reflection focus group at a later date, but that was not the case.

While most member reflections occur on an individual basis, doing them in a focus group has many advantages. Focus groups have been used in social science research since the 1980s (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). They allow the voices of multiple participants to be heard at one time and give participants the opportunity to interact with one another and either validate or clash with one another, creating an environment in which the researcher can observe collective meaning-making through communication in real time (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Manning & Kunkel, 2014; Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Tracy, 2020). Participants in well-facilitated focus groups are often more relaxed and comfortable than those in one-on-one or dyadic interviews, which can result in a more free-flowing discussion during which details that might not otherwise come to light are revealed (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Carey, 1994; Lederman, 1990; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Researchers facilitating focus groups also get to hear the ways that language is used among participants, which may provide additional insight into their communication (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Tracy, 2020).

Focus groups are also especially effective means of exploring emotional experiences (Tracy, 2020), and navigating a relationship with a conservative Christian parent can be emotional for children who do not share the religious beliefs and/or values

of that parent (Worman, 2020; Worman & Kartch, 2022). Tracy (2020) explained that “[participants’] stories are validated, extended, and supported by similar others” in focus groups (p. 190). She also pointed out that the fact that “focus group participants learn from and support one another” makes them potentially “transformative – raising participants’ consciousness about certain issues or helping them learn new ways of seeing or talking about a situation” (p. 190). Moreover, focus groups facilitators working within the critical paradigm can make focus groups transformative by actively confronting participants who “espouse viewpoints that reflect problematic power relations or structures” by mirroring them, probing them, or using counterfactual prompting, thereby stimulating participants to self-reflect (pp. 199-200). The potential of focus groups for participant transformation makes this validation strategy align well with the philosophical underpinnings of the present study.

Facilitating a focus group also helped me to circumvent the issues with traditional member reflections identified by Birt et al. (2016) and Tracy (2020). For instance, focus groups reduce the power distance between researchers and participants, which may result in participants being more willing to question or correct a researcher (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Moreover, undertaking a focus group will allow me to ask specific questions about my findings and gain more immediate insight into the consensus views of the participants. Also, while the myth that people will be unwilling to talk about sensitive topics in a focus group persists, Morgan and Krueger (1993) insisted that people in focus groups are often eager to discuss topics that are quite personal and emotional, and Jarrett (1993) indicated that people in focus groups may even experience catharsis when meeting people with similar lived experiences and hearing their stories. Additionally, focus

groups lend themselves quite well to dialogical research because of the access to a variety of viewpoints that they offer (Padilla, 1993).

I had two concerns about facilitating member reflection in a focus group. One has been shared by Birt et al. (2016). They warned that “[group] coercion can make it difficult for [a] single disconfirming voice to be expressed” (p. 1804). Although Morgan and Krueger (1993) identified the idea that focus groups tend to produce conformity as a myth, as the facilitator of the focus group, I worked to prevent this issue by explicitly establishing an environment of openness and nonjudgment to make participants as comfortable expressing themselves as possible. I also ensured that each participant could contribute their perspective to the discussion and be heard throughout the focus group (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). My other concern has been shared by Tracy (2020), who wrote that focus group facilitators may listen inattentively, or, with or without intent, paraphrase participant’s statements in ways that diminish their meaning or suggest that they are not to be taken seriously. Tracy recommended that focus group facilitators avoid these common focus group facilitation challenges by listening to recordings of one’s previously-ran focus groups and learning from one’s past mistakes. I do not have any recordings of the focus groups I have previously ran, and I had only one member reflection focus group for the present study, so I was mindful of these potential pitfalls throughout the focus group in order to avoid them.

CHAPTER THREE: DISCOURSES IN COMMUNICATION OF CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN PARENTS AND ADULT CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND VALUES

Summary and Overview of Results

In the present study, my aim was to investigate the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values in order to identify the discourses that inform and are reflected in their talk, the nature of the interplay of these discourses, and the meaning of Christian family identity constructed from this interplay. To guide the present study, I posed the following research questions:

RQ 1: What discourses inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values?

RQ 2: How, if at all, do the discourses that inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values interplay to create meaning for such adult children?

I begin this chapter by providing an overview of the two results chapters (Chapters Three and Four), which correspond to the respective research questions. Next, I report the results of my first research question. Subsequently, I summarize and present my conclusions from Chapter Three findings.

Overview of the Results Chapters

Chapter Three consists of the results pertaining to research question one, in which I ask what discourses inform and are reflected in the talk of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values. I identified two prominent discourses that animated the adult children's talk about their communication and relationships with their conservative Christian parent(s) (see Table 3, p. 85). Chapter Four consists of the results pertaining to research question two, in which I ask about the nature of the interplay of the discourses that inform and are reflected in the talk of the adult children and their parents, their power relative to one another, and its influence on participants' perceptions of what it means to be in a good Christian family (See Table 4, p. 130). What follows are the results for research question one. I end the dissertation with Chapter Five: Discussion.

Chapter Three Results

I identified two prominent discourses involved in a struggle to be reflected in and inform the talk of adult children of conservative Christian parents about their communication and relationships with their conservative Christian parents: the discourse of righteousness and exclusion (DRE) and the discourse of openness and inclusion (DOI). In this chapter, I describe these discourses one at a time for the sake of clarity, with the understanding that they are inherently linked to and are in ongoing competition with one another (Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al., 2021). I begin with the dominant, centripetal discourse that is reflected in and informed participants' talk before moving on to describing the subordinate, centrifugal discourse.

The Discourse of Righteousness and Exclusion

The communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values, as described by participants in the present study, is informed by and reflects the centripetal discourse that I labeled as righteousness and exclusion (DRE). As previously mentioned, a centripetal discourse is one that, in a discursive struggle, is central and taken-for-granted in a given culture (see Chapter One, p. 34). This discourse is based in both relational and cultural understandings of what it means to be a good Christian family. When participants described their most meaningful interactions with their conservative Christian parents regarding their differing religious

Table 3: Summary of Discourses Identified

Discourse	Themes	Exemplar
<i>Righteousness and exclusion (DRE)</i> Dominant (centripetal) discourse voiced mainly by participants' conservative Christian parents via reported speech	<i>Family as a cohesively-believing unit</i> Christian families have the same religious beliefs.	"My parents told me that I shouldn't be having doubts [about Christianity]" (Helen, 37:35-37:41).
	<i>Family as a cohesively-practicing unit</i> Christian families engage in the same religious practices.	"[My mother] forces me to go to her church" (Gary, 3:14-3:28).
	<i>Family as a cohesively-valuing unit</i> Christian families have the same socio-political values.	"[According to my parents,] there wasn't a way for me to love gay people, really, and follow the Bible. There wasn't a way for me to believe that my sister made the appropriate decision when she got her abortion. And so, there was just not a lot of room for people to just be." (Tanya, 23:12-23:25)
<i>Openness and inclusion (DOI)</i> Marginalized (centrifugal) discourse voiced mainly by participants themselves	<i>Family as a means of discussion</i> Christian families are able and willing to discuss differing religious beliefs and values with one another.	"I wish I could have that full transparency with [my mom] and don't think that I can.... I think that's what I would change, is that I could be fully transparent without it harming her emotionally." (Tanya, 1:27:40-1:28:03)
	<i>Family as a means of acceptance</i> Christian families accept members with differing religious beliefs and values.	"The today version of me would've loved to... [discuss] the facts of my childhood, [which were] mostly good, actually, and then articulate that [message of] "But here's where we diverge," and have [my parents] take that in and respond to it, in a "not right or wrong, but understanding" sort of way.... Couldn't have happened, really, no. (Brian, 1:14:14-1:14:49)
	<i>Family as cohesive despite difference</i> Christian families maintain a sense of unity even when members have differing religious belief and values.	"It is not easy, but it is entirely possible for good Christian families, like any other, to stay together and loving despite individual differences in beliefs and values" (Martin, 1:25:06-1:25:14).

beliefs, they articulated the messages they received from their parents about what a good Christian family is and what its members are expected to believe, practice, and value. All participants reported that being or at least presenting oneself and one's family to others as

righteous, upstanding, and set apart from and superior to individuals and families not perceived by conservative Christians as righteous and upstanding to be the dominant understanding of what a good Christian family ought to be. It was clear from their statements that participants were socialized by their parents, and sometimes other, especially older, members of their family of origin, as well as by their churches, communities, and conservative Christian culture writ large, to prioritize meeting these expectations, thereby preserving the collective face of their families. In my analysis, I identified three themes that characterize the DRE: (a) family as a cohesively-believing unit; (b) family as a cohesively-practicing unit; and (c) family as a cohesively-valuing unit. Each of these themes were present at the distal and proximal already-spoken and distal and proximal not-yet-spoken links in the utterance chain.

Family as a cohesively-believing unit. First, the discourse of righteousness and exclusion was most evident in participants' talk of their parents' expectation for members of good Christian families to share the same, or very similar, conservative Christian religious beliefs. Participants drew upon distal and proximal already- and not-yet-spoken regarding this expectation, but distal already-spoken were most prevalent in participants' talk. Recall that (a) the terms *distal* and *proximal* are in reference to the distance of these discourses in time from a given utterance, or turn at talk, in the present, where *distal* refers to discourses voiced by generalized others within a given culture and *proximal* refers to discourses voiced within the context of a given relationship; and (b) the terms *already-* and *not-yet-spoken* refer to whether an utterance has been made or is expected to be made, respectively (see Chapter One, pp. 33-34). For example, Eliza, a White, non-binary trans-feminine, pansexual, 27-year-old Daoist and student in a Christian seminary,

said that the conservative Christianity with which they were raised “was so built on history and so built on using an ancient text, and then the opinions of people who are long dead, to inform what you believe, and that’s supposed to stay static essentially” (17:15-17:32; parenthetical notations are interview recording timestamps. All participant names have been changed.). Eliza added that being in seminary has afforded them the opportunity to:

criticize and critique what [they] used to believe as a Christian and ask questions that before [their] Christianity inside of [them] would’ve informed [them]: “You shouldn’t ask these questions because this is kind of a heretical way of thinking, or a way of thinking that is not approved either by God or by the church” (17:58-18:21).

Another example came from Helen, a White, female, bisexual/queer, 24-year-old agnostic. Helen explained that sharing the conservative Christian religious beliefs and values of her family “had always been expected and a given growing up” (40:22-40:29). She said that she perceived, at times, that “being religious was a hundred percent correlated with being a part of the family” (34:41-34:49). Helen said of herself:

There was nothing about me yet that didn’t fit the mold of my family and nothing that I saw in my family that was disparate from me either. I also was a conservative Republican at the time, and a conservative Christian. I was straight and with a boyfriend of two or three years, and I got good grades. Everything ticked my family’s boxes. (33:48-34:17)

Helen conformed to the expectations of her parents to such a degree that expressing her doubts about her religious beliefs to her mother made her feel “steeped in the guilt of

potentially leaving [her] beliefs” (32:42-32:50). Helen said that she had always been told that she “shouldn’t be having doubts” about the religious beliefs she was raised to hold (37:35-37:41). To Jonah, a White, male, heterosexual, 33-year-old theist, his parents made their expectation that he subscribe to the religious beliefs and values of his family evident from the very beginning of his life. He explained that, by virtue of being named after a biblical character, his parents’ expectation for his religious beliefs and values was forever tied to his sense of self. When asked how important his religious beliefs were to his parents when he was growing up, Jonah said:

I think they were just expected. I think it was always an expectation that I would just sort of follow along. [My parents] gave me the name of [Jonah], so they instilled in me strong biblical values, in my very namesake.... So, it was always kind of expected and encouraged within that expectation. (14:39-14:53)

Jonah added that this expectation of his parents was something that he was born into and part of “the way that [he had] always been raised” (5:56-6:02).

Participants’ talk about their religious belief and value differences with their parents often included conservative Christian parents downplaying the seriousness of participants’ questions and doubts about Christianity or otherwise making expressing them difficult for their children. I see this demonstrated in some of the exemplars above, but in many more participant utterances as well. For example, when describing why the differences in religious beliefs between he and his parents are meaningful to him, Corey, a White, male, heterosexual, 42-year-old who identifies as spiritual but not religious, alluded to distal and proximal already-spoken instructions about why it is bad to question or debate the truth of conservative Christianity. He said:

[My parents] don't feel like they can be themselves around me, because I do challenge and I do question, and you don't do that. You don't challenge. You don't question. It just is. If you had to challenge it and question it, it's not faith. It's not belief. (15:52-16:06)

Corey went on to say that his willingness to question and challenge his family's religious beliefs and values "caused a rift between [him] and his parents" and alienated him from the rest of his family members as well (16:32-16:46). He said it has made him into "the black sheep of the family" and that, as a result, his family members "don't want to include [him] in things," such as church services or holiday celebrations, anymore (16:15-16:29). In another example, Tiffany, a White, female, bisexual, 28-year-old agnostic, recalled that she was afraid that confessing her doubts about Christianity to her mother would cause her mother too much emotional distress. She said, "I felt like I was hurting her feelings by doubting. It was like I was breaking her heart when I was doubting." (23:12-23:19). Tiffany explained that her mother's responses to her questions and doubts caused her to dial back her questions and become strategic about what she asks her mother about their family's religious beliefs. Tiffany said that she came to realize:

Sometimes I just need to remind myself [that] I don't have to ask her all the questions that come into my head, because I think that might hurt her. I'm asking from a place of curiosity, but it might affect her. Because for her, some of my questions could seem like I'm trying to make her doubt her religion or change her mind. So, I've kind of taken a step back asking some of the things that I want to

ask, because I don't want her to think I'm putting her religion down. (42:36-43:06).

Another example came from Kelley, a White, female, heterosexual, 33-year-old who described herself as a Christian mystic. Kelley said that when attempting to describe her questions and doubts about Christianity to her parents, she found that there were “tons of [instances when she had] been like ‘Oh, whoops! I can’t talk about that!’” (43:30-43:34). Specifically, Kelley recalled becoming skeptical of the virtues of the purity movement, but not feeling free to ask her mother, “‘Why did you decide to buy me a purity ring? Why were you so against me dating?’” (43:33-44:01)³. Kelley also recalled her parents bristling whenever she would talk with them about the Christian ideas that she had been learning in her college classes which did not conform to their own notions of Christianity. She explained that there was a prohibition on “just the idea of doubt in general” in her family and that their rule was: “You don’t ever talk about doubt, or doubting things, or people, or whatever. You, for sure, don’t talk about people’s sexual orientation or anything on the LGBTQ spectrum. Nothing. We do not talk about that.” (44:46-45:08).

Additional examples were found in the proximal already- and not-yet-spoken that were reflected in and informed participants’ talk regarding how conservative Christian parents would feel if their children communicated that they did not share their parents’ religious beliefs. Mariah, a Black, female, heterosexual, 42-year-old Pentecostal Christian, empathized with parents in such circumstances, saying that “some situations

³ The purity movement was a movement in the U.S. American Evangelical church that, from the 1990s until the early 2000s, promoted strict precepts, especially to young, unmarried Christian women and adolescent girls, about their need to eschew sexual desires and actions, date and/or engage in courtship in accordance with strict rules, and, in particular, maintain their virginity until their inevitable marriage (Gish, 2018; Klien, 2018; Pikel, 2018; Valenti, 2009).

are unenviable positions to be in when your children grow up and they completely reject everything that you have taught them. Parents can feel like a failure, or they feel like they're taking it [personally]." (1:47:27-1:47:41).

Another example came from James, a White, male, heterosexual, 47-year-old self-described "hopeful agnostic" (2:10-2:12), who said that this was the case with his mother, that expressing his agnosticism to his mother was "the hardest part for her" (11:06-11:11). James explained that his mother's conservative Christian beliefs were the result of a close relationship that she had with her own conservative Christian parent, and that his rejection of their religious beliefs "felt [to James's mother] like she was failing her dad in some way" (11:11-11:15).

In addition to insights into navigating religious differences, participants also had advice for conservative Christian parents. When reflecting on her experience with her own conservative Christian parents, Tara, a White, female, heterosexual, 31-year-old agnostic, suggested that such parents may perceive themselves as failures if their children do not come to accept their religious beliefs and values. Tara provided advice for conservative Christian parents, saying:

So, for parents, I think they need to allow their kids to have the freedom, otherwise it's not authentic. It's not going to work. So, I think that's one thing. But the other thing is it's not about you. Don't take this personally. This is often terrifying for your child, and it is usually not a rejection of you, that they're asking you questions. It's usually not anything that you did wrong. It's not anything like that. It's not a failure, because, unless they are a computer program that you were programming to think a certain thing, you don't control how they're

going to think, and you can't. Don't make it about you. Your kid is scared. Don't give them more reasons to be scared. (2:06:01-2:06:47).

Overall, cultural discourses regarding the need for adult children to share their parents' religious beliefs, some tracing back to the founding of Christianity, managed to inform and be reflected in participants' talk. The strong responses by participants' parents to the possibility that their children might develop differing religious beliefs indicates the seriousness with which they took their responsibility to pass on their religious beliefs to the next generation as well as the dominance of the DRE.

Family as a cohesively-practicing unit. Second, the discourse of righteousness and exclusion was exhibited in participants' talk concerning their parents' expectation for members of good Christian families to regularly partake in Christian rituals, such as attending church, studying the Bible, praying, and receiving the holy sacraments, especially baptism, confirmation, and communion. Participants drew upon distal and proximal already-spoken and distal and proximal not-yet-spoken regarding the expectation to partake in Christian rituals, with distal and proximal already-spoken being referenced most frequently.

All participants indicated that their parents took them to church regularly when they were young children and expected them to continue to attend church regularly in adolescence and adulthood. Some parents expressed the expectation that their adult children continue to attend the exact same church as their parents, or at least a church of the same denomination. For example, Gary, a Black, male, heterosexual, 22-year-old Pentecostal Christian, recalled that when he told his mother about his decision to attend a Pentecostal church rather than continuing to attend a Catholic church, his mother refused

to accept it. Gary said, “I got a lot of revolt [from my mother]. She started telling me to remember that you were baptized in a Catholic church. ‘Remember who you are. This is not you, [Gary].’” (3:14-3:28). He added that he and his mother still argue about his decision and that his mother still “forces [him] to go to her church” whenever he visits her (3:32-3:39).

For some participants, not sharing the same religious beliefs and values as their conservative Christian parents was not the only reason that they no longer wished to attend church. One example came from Laura, a Black, female, heterosexual, 23-year-old Lutheran. Laura described her conservative Christian mother as someone who “really valued church” (7:37-7:41) and took Laura to church with her “whenever [Laura] was not in school” when she was growing up (5:54-6:02). Despite this, Laura never felt comfortable going to church with her mother. She said, “I feel like, when I’m in that church, I’m being controlled or forced to do something” (9:15-9:23). This feeling was made worse when an elder at Laura’s mother’s church took an inappropriate interest in Laura when she became a teenager, “something that [Laura] found disgusting” (11:31-11:52). Laura expressed interest in going to other churches but was not “given the freedom and [was] not being allowed” by her mother to do so (16:15-16:20). Laura recalled, “It would be devastating for me. I would just feel, ‘This is not right.’” (16:28-16:34). Laura was only given permission from her mother to seek another church after “there was this incident that happened, and [her mother] was like, ‘Okay, you can now go to the church of your choice’” (11:20-11:32). Laura did not reveal details about the nature of this incident, but she remembered that it was the catalyst for her exclaiming to her

mother, ““Mom, if this is the type of people, the church where you want me to go, then I’m not going!”” (11:52-11:59).

Some participants did not wish to attend the same church as their parents because they perceived that their parents’ motivation for wanting them to do so was saving face with other conservative Christians. For example, Brian, a White, male, heterosexual, 63-year-old who describes himself as spiritual but not religious, said that he “attended church, literally, since the time [he] was born” (2:46-2:50) and was brought up by his conservative Christian parents to be “the perfect church boy” (58:13-58:17). Brian said that his upbringing was “primarily centered around church and religious beliefs” (1:04:18-1:04:27), and that his parents “very much encouraged [him and his siblings] to participate in the youth stuff at church” (15:30-15:34). Brian described being involved in church as “one of the most important facets of [his] parents’ life” (1:06:02-1:06:08). He said that his parents would usually take him and his siblings to church twice a week, and that when they were not at church, his family would often socialize with other families from their church. According to Brian, attending church as a family was part of his parents’ efforts to keep up appearances and try to appear as the type of family worthy of gracing “the cover of *Life Magazine*, very Norman Rockwell-ish” (2:52-2:58).

In addition to church attendance, many participants made mention of their conservative Christian parents’ expectation that they spend time studying the Bible. For example, Tara described participating in “family Bible time” with her family-of-origin. Every morning, she and her family members would gather to “sing songs and then read the Bible and pray” (9:15-9:20). Tara’s parents led her and her siblings in this practice “back in [her] childhood years” and “tried to do that when [she] was home” from college

as well (9:25-9:35). Tara said that “family Bible time was really important when [she] was growing up and just kind of lifted up [by her parents] as ‘This is what good families do’” (9:04-9:11). The “family Bible time” became central to when and how Tara and her parents communicated with each other. She explained:

[My parents and I] had lots of conversations where [the Bible] just would come up, and that was the guiding framework that we had in all of our conversations. If I was stressed out about something, or I was worried about something, or if I was fighting with my siblings, or anything like that, it was just swooping throughout every aspect. (9:31-9:55)

Cheyenne, a White, female, heterosexual, 25-year-old who simply identifies as a Protestant Christian, provided another example of Bible study as a Christian ritual in which she was expected to partake. Having been homeschooled by her mother, Cheyenne recalled her mother designing her school curriculum to include Bible study. She said that she engaged in the practice daily with her mother and siblings. According to Cheyenne, “My mom would do Bible studies and devotions and stuff with us to work on. It was a part of our schooling.” (10:46-10:53). This daily Bible study put Cheyenne on a path to pursuing a degree in biblical justice at a Bible college.

For some participants, Bible study was part of a strict religious structure instituted and maintained by their conservative Christian parents. One example came from Breanne, a White, female, gay, 48-year-old theist. Breanne described the household in which she was raised by her conservative Christian parents as having a strict religious structure, which included daily devotional work and Bible study. She explained:

It was a religious structure. You got up and we did daily devotions as a family. And then when you're older, then you did devotions on your own, and that was every day. And then we went to church every Sunday. Then we went to Monday night Bible study every Monday.... I was encouraged to memorize bible verses to participate.” (10:15-10:48)

Bible study was so integral to Breanne's parents' understanding of what members of good Christian families do that, when she stopped going, she struggled to explain her decision to her parents. She recalled, “I was still reading the Bible, but I was just like, ‘Just because I don't go to church or go to Bible study.... I still have a relationship with God’” (20:38-20:48).

Participants in the present study also highlighted their parents' expectation that they regularly pray. For example, this expectation was explained by Maria, a Latina, female, heterosexual, 37-year-old agnostic. Maria stated that, in her family-of-origin, prayer was “an integral part of our daily life” and that its importance “was stressed for as long as [she] can remember” (11:36-11:52). Maria said that before dinner each night, she and her family members would hold hands around the table as her father led them in “a prayer thanking God for the food and all our blessings” (12:04-12:11). She explained, “It was just what you did. There was not even a question of if we were going to do it, or if I was. I didn't want to disrespect or disappoint my parents by saying anything.” (12:43-12:55). Very similar prayer rituals were described by most participants as being expected of them as well, usually conducted before meals, as in Maria's case, and/or at bedtime before going to sleep.

In some participants' families, prayer was presented by their conservative Christian parents as the answer to all of life's challenges. For example, Jonah recalled his parents forcing prayer on him to the point that he "kind of became hateful of prayer" (1:04:39-1:04:41). He said of growing up in his parents' household, "I would have to pray. Even if I didn't believe, I would have to pray, no matter what." (1:04:31-1:04:35). To Jonah, prayer was presented by his parents as the solution to every problem. He explained:

Any problem I had was encouraged to be handled through prayer, like that was it.

There were times when I had severe panic attacks and existential crises, and it was always met by my dad with "Pray about it."... I can see how it would help,

but it did just kind of seemed like a catchall from time to time. (15:44-16:19)

Jonah said that he became frustrated with what he perceived to be his parents' overreliance on the power of prayer and wished that they, especially his father, would have talked with him about the problems that he was experiencing. Jonah said of his father, "He would pray with me, and it was an effort to calm me down. But once I was calm and was not in a state of chaos and panic, he did sort of always leave that conversation." (22:21-22:35). Jonah also lamented, "I just feel like no one ever really gave me any attention with that. It was always met with the same, like, 'Let's pray our way through this.'" (1:46:09-1:46:17). In another example, "It was in praying every night" that Helen said that her parents encouraged her to practice her Christianity (13:38-13:46). She said of her parents, "It was just assumed [that my family members and I would pray]. 'This is how we do things in our house.'" (13:52-13:56). As a result, when

Helen first expressed her doubts about Christianity to her mother, the first topic that she addressed was prayer. She recalled telling her mother:

“It doesn’t make sense to me that Christians say, ‘God answers my prayers.’

Whether you ask for something and you don’t get it, you ask for something and you do get it, you ask for something and it’s ‘Not right now,’ that’s just unfalsifiable. It doesn’t make sense to me.” (31:28-31:43)

Helen said that her mother was not able to directly respond to her doubts about prayer and, rather paradoxically, simply advised Helen to pray about her doubts. Helen found her mother’s responses unsatisfying. She recalled:

When her main recommendation was to just pray about it, I think that I probably was still pretty reticent. Like, “I’m having kind of serious doubts, Mom. This isn’t just my like, ‘Sometimes I don’t know if God is real.’” I was starting to pull out some bricks of that foundation. Like, “Yeah, the whole idea of prayer doesn’t really make sense to me,” and “I haven’t really had God answer specific things,” and like, “Why?” (36:38-37:10)

After this time, Helen said that she still “tried to pray even though [she] didn’t feel things” (42:12-42:14) but wished that she had received from her parents “acceptance and acknowledgement of [her] religious identity, where that’s not whether [she prays] about something” (1:53:06-1:53:17). Based on her own experience, Helen provided the following advice for conservative Christian parents whose children do not come to hold their religious beliefs:

I know it’s a hard thing to do when it feels like the reasons for trying to convert [your children,] or to recommend praying and things like that, are because you

want to help them and because you love them. But the best way that you can love them is to respect their autonomy and their space and to let them figure things out on their own. (2:06:56-2:07:19)

Participants reflected on how their conservative Christian parents expressed the expectation for their children to engage in traditional Christian rituals as well. For example, Winston, a White, male, gay, 28-year-old atheist stated when describing his upbringing, “It was very important [to my parents] that I did all the rituals of religion and went to church” (8:43-8:49). He explained that his evangelical community perceived partaking in Christian rituals to be a means of affirming, to oneself and others, that one has a deep personal relationship with Jesus. Winston also said that it was the assumption of his parents that he would fulfill their expectations by partaking in these rituals: “It was very much a ‘We know you believe this, because we’ve taught you to believe this. Now, believe this and do it.’” (9:28-9:34). Engaging in Christian ritual was so important to Winston’s parents that he recalled doing so long after his own religious beliefs began to differ from those of his parents, just to please them. He said:

I would never have voiced this, or really had the language to voice it, but I was always a step removed within myself from any religiousness or any other rituals that I went through. I was always, “I’m going to do this because I have to do this, because there’s no other choice.” But I was never invested in any of it at all. (20:02-20:20)

Another example came from Derek, a White, male, heterosexual, 32-year-old self-described “hopeful agnostic” (1:07:42-1:07:49). Derek received “four of the seven

sacraments” when he was a child (5:50-6:01), due more to a sense of expectation than personal piety. He remembered:

Growing up, I didn’t really have much of a choice when it came to things like the seven sacraments.... There’s baptism, and, obviously, my parents wanted that done, and I’m not going to argue as an infant. Then, in second grade, at my [Catholic] school at least, you do confession, and then your first Holy Communion. (14:40-15:06).

Derek went on to explain that his older siblings and other classmates at his school all partook in the sacraments, so he did, too. He said:

It just happened. I didn’t have an option. And, looking back, I don’t know what I would’ve.... If I had said, “I’m not doing this,” then it might have caused some issues, but it was just part of my school, so I didn’t. Going to church and doing all that was very important [to my parents], and if you missed, it was a big deal. (16:42-17:03).

In another example, Nina, a White, heterosexual, 43-year-old agnostic, experienced this expectation from her mother when the two talked about having Nina’s daughter baptized. Immediately following the funeral service for her grandmother, the pastor who had conducted the service approached Nina and asserted that she needed to get her daughter baptized. Nina was taken aback by the pastor’s assertion and timing. When Nina mentioned this to her mother, her mother echoed the urgent need to have her daughter baptized. Nina said:

I brought it up later to my mother, because I was rightfully very upset about [what the pastor said].... And her comment to it was, “Oh, well, it’s a way of saving

[your daughter].” And I’m like, “She’s 14 months old. What has she done that she needs saving from? She’s literally still in diapers.... I’m not worried about it.”

Then [my mother] was like, “Well, [the pastor’s] just trying to save [your daughter’s] soul, and you need do these things.” (36:10-36:56).

Overall, participants’ talk was informed by and reflected cultural discourses with respect to the need to practice Christian rituals. Again, the roots of cultural discourses evident in such talk can be traced back to Christianity’s founding and Holy Scripture, such as the need for prayer or taking communion. Participant’s talk of being forced to or given no choice but to partake in Christian rituals suggests that these cultural discourses had a powerful impact on their relationships with their parents.

Family as a cohesively-valuing unit. Third, the discourse of righteousness and exclusion was reflected in participants’ talk concerning the expectations for children in good Christian families to subscribe to the same socio-political values as their parents, particularly with respect to political ideology, LGBTQIA+ identity and/or rights, and issues such as abortion, immigration, and racism. Participants drew upon distal and proximal already-spoken, utterances voiced in conservative Christianity writ large and by their conservative Christian parents, respectively, and distal and proximal not-yet-spoken, utterances that participants anticipated might be made by their parents or in conservative Christianity writ large, respectively, regarding the expectation to share in their families’ values (See Chapter One, p. 34 for an explanation of the parts of the utterance chain.).

Many participants indicated that their conservative Christian parents expected them to embrace conservative political ideology. For example, based on his experience

with his conservative Christian parents, Winston observed that political conservatism and conservative Christianity are “so incredibly linked” that “everything in their religion is political” (1:04:50-1:05:04). He said that, in his family-of-origin, “Anytime politics got brought up, which was very often, [his parents] had a tendency to spout off about something and expect a bunch of bobbing heads to be like, ‘Oh, yeah, you’re right. You’re so smart.’” (52:44-52:59). He added that after he eventually voiced his dissenting political values to his parents, politics became a difficult subject for them to address together. Winston explained, “It put everybody on edge. Everyone was tiptoeing around a little bit, because, again, we can’t get into a fight at the Olive Garden because we’re a respectable family.” (53:09-53:18). Clearly, Winston’s parents communicated what they believed to be the political values that a good Christian family ought to hold. Cheyenne provided another example of conservative Christian parents communicating expectations for the political values embraced by children in conservative Christian families.

Cheyenne described her parents as “very politically conservative, both socially and economically” (6:28-6:34) and said that they “actively try to get [her] to adopt their political values” (17:40-17:47). She said that her parents, especially her father, see little distinction between being a Christian, an American, a nationalist, and a capitalist.

However, through her own study, Cheyenne developed an understanding of Christianity that led her to become “anti-nationalism” (11:48-12:08), wary of the “scarcity mindset, in terms of money and resources” promoted by capitalism that prevents people from sharing with those less fortunate (12:45-13:55), anti-racist, and filled with a sense of responsibility to be “actively trying to help the world to become a more stable and better place for people” (15:03-16:10). She said that her parents struggle to understand and

accept that she has come to see their political values as being potentially destructive to the cause of Christianity and that “being Christian isn’t the same thing as being politically conservative” (7:05-7:08).

For some participants, their conservative Christian parents’ expectation that they embrace conservative political ideology entailed expectations to support or not support specific political figures and policies. One example came from John, a White, male, heterosexual, 24-year-old atheist. John described himself as “not a crazy political guy” (13:43-13:46) yet still found himself struggling with his conservative Christian parents’ expectation that he embrace conservative politics, especially during the Trump administration, which occurred around the time that I co-created data with participants for the present study. John described his parents as “very conservative in their political mindset” (24:39-24:44) and explained that, to his parents, “Trump was a very big one, where it’s like, ‘God wants him in office.’ They didn’t think that entirely, but they did vote for him. They supported a lot of what he did.” (13:33-13:42). John said that he did not understand his parents “seeing, Trump, for instance, like ‘Trump’s a pretty Christian guy,’” and said to them in response, “‘No, there’s no way that man’s a Christian, with the things he’s said about people. He’s on a [TV] show that literally judges people!’” (14:13-14:25). John also recalled having arguments with his parents during which he would attempt to combat his parents’ conservative attitude with respect to the need for intervention by the federal government to increase the minimum wage and better regulate the housing market. Recalling one such conversation, he said of his parents:

They’re like, “Well, we’re retired now, so you guys can do whatever you want.”

I’m like, “Here’s the thing, I can’t even rent an apartment and I’m getting paid

way above minimum wage. And before minimum wage was enough to buy a house, right? And college was like....” My mom pulled out her spreadsheet [from] when she was in college for [the purpose of determining] what she had to pay to go to nursing school: \$420 a semester. And I had to explain [that] one semester now at [that school], with scholarships and everything, was, like, three or four grand. (24:44-25:13)

One of the most prevalent expectations that participants’ conservative Christian parents communicated was with respect to their children’s socio-political values regarding LGBTQIA+ identity and rights. One example came from Tiffany, who described the time that she came out as bisexual to her mother. Tiffany explained that their conversation ensued after she had attended a church service during which the topic of homosexuality was addressed. Tiffany recalled that, in their conversation, her mother told her that “homosexuality is a sin” and that “God is against it” (16:02-16:12). In response, Tiffany said that she “just flat-out stated to [her mother] that [she is] bisexual and was just immediately met with both ‘That’s a sin’ and ‘That’s not a thing’” (15:17-15:27). Tiffany explained that, in the eyes of her mother, bisexuality does not really exist and is simply a way for gay people to remain partially closeted. Tiffany’s mother accused Tiffany of lying about her own sexual identity, making her feel “angry” and “very unseen” and “invalidating [her] and [her] experiences” (16:34-16:54). An additional example of conservative Christian parents communicating the expectation that their children adopt their same values with respect to LGBTQIA+ identity and rights came from Eliza. Eliza described having conversations with their father about a variety of queer identities, such as homosexuality, pansexuality, and transgender identity, and about

the legality of same-sex marriage. Eliza said that, in the context of these conversations, their father “will often cite the Bible for why he believes something” but not listen to Eliza when they use their knowledge of biblical scholarship to dispute their father’s reasoning (7:05-7:26). Eliza explained that their father “has been trained to respond to these issues from the point of view of the way that conservative Christians translate and interpret these issues,” and that “it’s so entwined with homophobia that you can’t separate them” (7:26-7:42). Eliza followed by lamenting:

I can’t use the Bible to argue him out of being homophobic, and I can’t use rationality or science to argue against the way that he views the Bible. So, it’s very difficult to have those conversations and not have things get heated. (7:42-7:58).

Another example came from Corey, whose conservative Christian parents voiced their expectation that he share in their condemnation of homosexuality as well. Corey explained that, like his mother before him, he was raised to believe “If you’re gay, you’re going to hell. There’s no hope and no saving you. It’s fire and brimstone; follow the Word.” (9:29-9:37). He described his parents’ attitude about LGBTQIA+ identity and rights as “very othering and very fear-based” (7:38-7:43). Corey recalled that when his uncle, who was gay, passed away, his parents’ first response was to speak matter-of-factly about his uncle’s eternal destination. Corey said:

My uncle recently passed away, who was homosexual and had been married to a man in a beautiful relationship for 11 years. My mom and dad happened to be at my house when the call came that he died, and the first thing my mom said [was] “Well, I just talked to him the other day and he was worried if he was going end

up in hell because of his lifestyle.” Not, “Oh my God, my brother just died,” but “Well, too bad for him. He was gay.” I guess, [my parents] just [embrace] this very strict adherence to the words in the Bible.... (7:57-8:31)

Another expectation that participants’ conservative Christian parents commonly expressed pertained to acceptable socio-political values regarding issues such as abortion, immigration, and racism. An example regarding abortion came from Tanya, a White, female, bisexual, 38-year-old Daoist. Tanya said that her conservative Christian parents made the expectation that she and her siblings share their values regarding abortion very clear by taking her and her siblings to anti-abortion rallies outside of health clinics when she was growing up. She explained that “[doing] the pickets for the abortion clinics” was a way that her parents “really drove home” their anti-abortion values (1:19:17-1:19:31). Tanya also told the story of how her parents responded when her sister later had to have an abortion due to an ectopic pregnancy. Tanya was present when her sister revealed this information to her parents. Tanya recalled that, upon receiving this news, her parents became very upset and chastised her sister, saying, ““Any abortion at any time is murder”” (22:45-22:48). Tanya said of her parents’ response, “That was just against my understanding of what loving another person is,” and added that it contributed to her becoming “really jaded” about the religious beliefs with which she was raised (22:51-23:03). She said that the message that she received from her parents was that, if she was going to continue to be a Christian, “there wasn’t a way for [her] to believe that [her] sister made the appropriate decision when she got her abortion” (24:19-24:25). An example regarding the expectation that some participants’ conservative Christian parents communicated to their children vis-à-vis the issues of immigration and racism came from

Brian. He characterized his conservative Christian parents as “anti-immigration,” adding “which is weird because all [of] their parents are immigrants” (14:04-14:10). He told the story of when, during a family Thanksgiving gathering, he confronted his brother-in-law for telling a racist, anti-immigration joke. Brian explained that he felt compelled to share what he thought about the joke because, “it became evident to [him], at that time, that that wasn’t in line with the person [he] was becoming” (37:58-39:34). Brian’s parents came to the defense of Brian’s brother-in-law, “standing up for his beliefs” (39:38-39:42). Brian tried to explain to his parents, from a Christian perspective, that being racist and anti-immigration is wrong, but they rebuked him. Brian recalled his mother “just totally digging in the other way” and saying, ““No, the Bible doesn’t say anything about that sort of attitude”” (39:42-39:49), which Brian knew to be untrue. Corey provided another example of a participants’ conservative Christian parents’ communicated expectation that their children adopt their racist values. He explained that his parents passed down interrelated messages about Christianity and racism through generations. He said:

I was... raised [to believe] that people of color were less than, and I don’t know how that ties into Christianity, but I’m sure that [it does] somehow, because my grandfather on my mom’s side... was extremely racist, and the thing that she ascribed to him was religion. That got passed on to her, [the idea] that somehow, in a weird way, [people of color] can’t be Christians because they’re not fully human or something. I don’t know. I just always have associated, even from early years ... my parents’ closed-mindedness and othering being a result of their conservative Christian beliefs. (35:05-36:02)

Corey said that his parents were prejudiced against Black people in particular, and that he began to question his parents about their racism after he found himself going “from never having really been around an African American person, or a person of color, to being the only White guy in [his college] dorm” (34:22-34:34) and “learning that these are really good people” who “are not thugs” (34:43-34:49). Upon returning home from his first semester of college, Corey recalled asking his parents lots of questions about “[their] way of life and [their] values and the way [he] was brought up” vis-à-vis people of color (34:03-34:11), with “the big one” (34:11-34:15) being “What do you mean ‘Black people are thieves and robbers, and can’t speak, and are all about Ebonics, and the only way that they could ever get through college is by playing sports?!’” (33:49-34:00).

Overall, cultural and relational discourses managed to inform and be reflected in participants’ talk of their conservative Christian parents’ expectation for their children to share their same socio-political values. Although participants’ parents invoked cultural discourses to support their socio-political stances, participants referenced relational discourses to explain the details of their parents’ expectation and how it included supporting specific political figures and policies as well as voicing a particular stance on the issues of abortion, immigration, and racism.

As I demonstrate with the exemplars above, the DRE informed and was reflected in participants’ talk concerning their communication with their conservative Christian parents. Most of these exemplars are attempts at countering, a “kind of disclaiming... by which some discursive position replaces or supplants an alternative discursive position that would have normally been expected in its place” (Baxter, 2011, p. 167). This demonstrates the dominance of the DRE. In participants’ families, following the

expectations of their conservative Christian parents, to adhere to the religious beliefs, practices, and values of their families, is the norm. It represents taken-for-granted cultural and relational discourses that assert that being a good Christian family means being righteous, upstanding, and set apart from and superior to others, or, at least, appearing to be.

The Discourse of Openness and Inclusion

The communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values, as described by participants in the present study, is also informed by and reflects the centrifugal (marginalized, non-dominant; see Chapter One, p. 34 for an explanation of the parts of the utterance chain) discourse of the religiously inclusive Christian family: the discourse that I labeled as openness and inclusion (DOI). The discourse of openness and inclusion is based in alternative cultural understandings of what it means to be a good Christian family. When describing meaningful interactions with their conservative Christian parents regarding their differing religious beliefs and values, participants also voiced several messages about what and/or how good Christian families are expected to be and provide for their members. All participants reported that they desire to be and/or wish they could have been in Christian families in which they felt safe to talk about religious belief and value differences with their conservative Christian parents without judgment, to receive acceptance and support from their parents and other family members, and to maintain a sense of family togetherness. The remarks of participants made evident that they came to recognize unconventional notions of what a Christian family could be, despite having been socialized into their conservative Christian families. In my analysis, I identified three

themes that characterize the DOI: (a) family as a means of discussion; (b) family as a means of acceptance; and (c) family as cohesive despite difference. These themes were each represented at the distal and proximal already-spoken and distal and proximal not-yet-spoken links in the utterance chain.

Family as a means of discussion. First, the discourse of openness and inclusion was clearly reflected in and informed participants' talk of their desire for good Christian families to be characterized by free and open conversation about religious belief and value differences among family members, especially parents and children. Participants drew upon distal and proximal already-spoken, utterances voiced within their culture writ large and by their conservative Christian parents, respectively, and distal and proximal not-yet-spoken, utterances that participants anticipated might be made by their parents or within their culture writ large, respectively, regarding this desire (See Chapter One, p. 34 for an explanation of the parts of the utterance chain.). For example, Tanya lamented the fact that her fear of her mother's response kept her from being open with her mother about what she believed. She stated:

I still wish that my mom's whole hope didn't rest on me being a Christian. I wish I could have that full transparency with her and don't think that I can, with her hope being that high. And so, I think that's what I would change, is that I could be fully transparent without it harming her emotionally. (1:27:40-1:28:03)

Tanya also said that she wished that, with respect to talking about her differing religious beliefs and values with her mother, that she "would have been braver sooner" (1:26:55-1:27:00), and that if she were to go back in time, she "would encourage [herself] to speak up more, in gentle ways, about the questions [she] had and the things that were hard for

[her],” so that there would be “less assumptions on both parts and it was just a more open conversation” (1:27:17-1:27:33). James offered another example of an expressed desire for more open and free dialogue about religious belief and value differences with conservative Christian parents. When I asked him what, if anything, he wishes that he or his parents would have said or done differently in times when they communicated with each other about their differing religious beliefs and values, James said:

I wish they had curated these conversations a long time ago.... I think everybody should have [really] literate conversations about religion and God.... Rather than just saying, “This is the thing,” [I wish that] they created a world where we were able to engage in a free flow of ideas. And my mom did, in a lot of ways, except for religion. (1:27:33-1:28:05)

James also recalled his mother throwing away a copy of the Book of Mormon that he had been given by a friend and otherwise shielding him from the influence of religious belief systems that she considered cults. James explained, “She was so worried that they were going to corrupt me or something” (1:28:04-1:28:22). He said of his mother’s protective efforts, “I don’t feel like she stagnated my beliefs, but I wish there [had been] more of a literate sort of conversation with everybody [in my family] about what God was and how those things work” (1:28:23-1:28:33). James said that his mother did not have a “willingness to engage in those conversations” (1:28:35-1:28:38) and questioned whether either of his parents were “equipped” with sufficient knowledge and ability to have them with him (1:29:42-1:29:49). He admitted, nonetheless, that he “certainly would love the idea of a world where [he and his parents] can have a reasonable conversation about God and what all those things mean” (1:28:43-1:28:51).

Some participants indicated that they eventually, due to a variety of circumstances, were able to speak to their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and values in ways that they could not have previously. Many of these participants reported recently becoming more comfortable challenging their parents' religious beliefs and values. For example, Nina said that, with respect to her differing religious beliefs and values, she did not feel free to speak her mind around her mother until recently, when a shift in the power dynamics in her family occurred as a result of her mother becoming dependent on her. Nina said that she had long been "afraid of hurting her [mother] or not projecting what she wants or being dependent on her" but is now "working on the boundaries to make [herself] free from that system" (13:46-14:13). Nina said of now feeling safe to assert her religious beliefs and values in front of her mother, "I'm satisfied because I feel like I have to project less.... It feels better because I feel like I can legitimately and openly be who I am." (14:34-14:58). She expounded on the ways that she now asserts her religious beliefs and values to her mother, saying:

We've been in conversations [about our religious beliefs and values] where I pointed out [to my mother], "You're not just going to ignore mine because they don't align with your own religious beliefs." So, I think that popped it open. But it's more about me being authentic and telling her my values. Like, "Yeah, you can come over for Christmas, but we're not doing Christmas as religion, or as religious. We're celebrating Hallmark. That's what we do." (15:17-16:10)

Nina explained that she feels ambivalent about this recent change in her relationship with her mother because her mother "doesn't want to hear it, because it's not the way that she

wants it” (17:19-17:30), saying, “It feels good and [freeing], but our relationship.... It’s positive for me, but it’s not really positive.” (18:15-18:27).

Overall, participants such as these made apparent in their talk their desire for free and open parent-child interaction vis-à-vis religious belief and value differences. Participants’ talk of this desire was informed by and reflects cultural discourses beyond those in conservative Christian culture, as well as relational discourses, regarding what being in a good Christian family should be.

Family as a means of acceptance. Second, the discourse of openness and inclusion was also invoked by participants who articulated their desire for good Christian families to accept members with differing religious beliefs, values, and/or identities. Participants drew upon distal and proximal already-spoken, utterances voiced in conservative Christianity writ large and by their conservative Christian parents, respectively, and distal and proximal not-yet-spoken, utterances that participants anticipated might be made by their parents or in conservative Christianity writ large, respectively, regarding this desire as well (See Chapter One, p. 34 for an explanation of the parts of the utterance chain.). For example, Brian expressed a desire for his parents to accept his differing religious beliefs and values regarding divorce. Brian said that he did not realize the extent to which he had been rejected by his conservative Christian parents until they refused to attend his wedding to his second wife. Subsequently, Brian and his parents became estranged. When talking about his mother’s response to his second marriage, Brian said:

I honestly think that my mother is a very prideful person, and she uses her religious beliefs as a way to bolster her pride, I guess. And so, I think my divorce

was a stain on her family, on her reputation. And she wanted nothing to.... She just didn't want to appear.... I don't think it was a hundred percent about appearance, but it was probably a lot. (1:05:24-1:05:50)

He said that after many years and the help of a therapist, he came to realize that he had done everything within reason to reconcile with his parents and that he would likely never receive their understanding or acceptance. Nevertheless, Brian admitted:

The today version of me would've loved to [be able to] say, "Hey, Mom! Hey, Dad!"... and [acknowledge] the facts of my childhood, [which were] mostly good, actually, and then articulate that [message of] "But here's where we diverge," and have [my parents] take that in and respond to it, in a "not right or wrong, but understanding" sort of way, and [for my parents to then] maybe even volunteer how they felt God would speak into that. God, wouldn't that be awesome?! [Laughs]. Couldn't have happened, really, no. None of us were equipped to have that conversation, which is sad also. (1:14:14-1:14:49)

Brian contrasted his biological family with the family that he has through his second wife, saying of his parents-in-law, "They love me. They embrace me, unconditionally." (1:15:36-1:15:39). Brian also added, "If you really want to have a relationship with people, or even get your point across, you've got to meet people where they are" (1:16:53-1:16:59). Another example came from Breanne, who said that she did not receive acceptance from her parents either. She explained, "They made it very clear that they did not accept me, for being a lesbian, into their Christian world" (27:15-27:37). She said that the only way that she would feel one hundred percent like a part of her family would be "if [she] was straight and was living the life that [her] parents expected of [her]:

going to church, having a Christian man and multiple kids, and being a housewife.... I think that would be the only way that I would've been acceptable.” (29:30-30:02).

Breanne made it clear that this lack of acceptance was not her idea of a good Christian family when she explained:

I want to live with love, and I want to be loved. But I also have to have peace, right?... [My family members] don't give love; they give love conditionally, in my eyes.... And that's not the Christian way. That's not how I was raised. That's not how they raised me. And I was just like, “This is not how I want to live my life.” (2:01:08-2:02:02).

Some participants indicated that their conservative Christian parents eventually came to accept their differing religious beliefs and values, at least in some measure. For example, Laura said that acceptance of her religious beliefs, values, and identity by her conservative Christian parents was important to her, and that feeling like she is one hundred percent a part of her family would mean that people like her “are recognized by [their] families and being accepted and blessed. It would mean feeling very, very comfortable.” (16:44-17:02). Laura said that, in time, her mother accepted her and her decision to join a different church, and that her mother's acceptance made her completely satisfied in their relationship. Laura recalled the impact it made, saying:

For the first time, I heard her saying, “If this is what is happening if you go to my church, [that you feel disgusted and uncomfortable,] then you just go to the church [at which] you feel comfortable.” So, her giving me the permission was like, “Wow! It's finally done. The rain is over!... I wouldn't feel right, joining

another denomination without my parents' blessing, you see? So, I felt nice, like,
 "This is my mom." (27:19-28:23)

Laura revealed, "It has not been easy, having to convince her and all, until she finally accepted [me]" (41:54-42:03) and admitted, "If she really did [accept me] or she was just afraid of the situation, I really don't know too much, but it felt nice" (31:27-31:34).

Overall, participants rendered evident that being accepted for having differing religious beliefs and values is part of what they desired for good Christian families. Cultural discourses beyond those in conservative Christian culture, in addition to relational discourses, managed to inform and be reflected in participants' talk regarding what good Christian families should do.

Family as cohesive despite difference. Third, the discourse of openness and inclusion was reflected in and informed participants' desire for good Christian families to be able to remain cohesive despite religious belief and value differences among individual members by emphasizing shared family identity and making efforts to remain united. Participants drew upon distal and proximal already-spoken, utterances voiced in their culture writ large and by their conservative Christian parents, respectively, and distal and proximal not-yet-spoken, utterances that participants anticipated might be made by their parents or in their culture writ large, respectively, regarding these assertions as well (See Chapter One, p. 34 for an explanation of the parts of the utterance chain.).

Many participants described the importance they placed on having and maintaining shared family identity, some of whom did so after realizing that their family members still saw them as an aspect of their shared family identity. For example, Tara

said that it is important for shared family identity that members perceive and communicate to one another the following message: “Our family would not be complete without [you]” (19:26-19:30). Tara explained that, to her, having a shared family identity is all about family members “being embraced for who [they are] and recognized for the unique contribution that [they] make to [their families]” (19:17-19:26). She expounded on this idea, saying, “I think an element, too, would be trust, a lot of trust. If I am truly embraced as a member of our shared family identity, there will be implicit trust that they have in me as a person.” (19:31-19:46). She also described a time when one of her parents violated her trust, causing her to question her own sense of shared family identity. Tara stated:

If things are bad enough, and I don’t fit into the family enough, for my dad to call someone who doesn’t even live in the same state and say, “Hey, can you check up on her? We’re worried for her, but she doesn’t want to talk to us,” or “We feel like we can’t talk about this.” It’s, “Okay, do I feel like I don’t belong if that happens? Am I on the path of becoming the child that is dead to you for her beliefs?” (49:22-49:46)

Despite, at times, fearing that her parents’ actions were signaling that they no longer perceived her as factoring into their shared family identity, Tara eventually came to view her parents’ concern as confirming her place within her family instead, and to appreciate it. She said that, after a period of estrangement, being able to have a long conversation with her parents and brother about the religious trauma that she experienced because of how her parents raised her helped her to perceive herself as being “back in the group” (1:36:43-1:36:49). Tara said of her mother:

In the midst of all this [questioning], I know that the fact that she is pursuing these conversations [about my differing religious beliefs and values] means she does want me to be a part of the family, here and in the afterlife.... I recognize that she's saying these things out of deep fear for my soul and my well-being. It doesn't mean "I'm kicking you out of the family." It's "The very reason I'm having this conversation is because you are a part of my family, even if it was really screwed up and messed up." (1:10:01-1:10:32)

Kelley served as an example of a participant emphasizing shared family identity as well.

She said of sharing a sense of family identity:

I think inquiry is a big part. I would like to be asked.... Where people actively seek out information, or ask how you're doing, or people are just interested in each other's lives. To me, that shows, like, "Yes. You are a part of a family. We are interested in each other. Yes, we love each other." (35:52-36:18)

Like Tara, Kelley eventually came to see her family's involvement in her life and questions about her differing religious beliefs and values as enacting and affirming their shared family identity, while simultaneously acknowledging the relational difficulty that these actions caused her. Kelley explained that the perspective she gained by studying to become a marriage and family therapist in graduate school and learning about enmeshed families helped her to see that, dysfunctional as her own family may be, they were including her in what her family does together. She stated that she felt like a part of her family "because they did want to know [about her]. They did want to be a part of [her life]." (39:54-39:58). Kelly said of realizing this about her family, "I felt a little bit like, 'Oh, I'm wanted. I'm wanted in these spaces where we just celebrate someone's birthday,

or whatever, or we go to dinner.... I felt that I was wanted, which was nice.” (40:11-40:31).

Some participants, such as Eliza, emphasized shared family identity until they could no longer stand to do so. Eliza stated that early in the process of their religious belief change, even though their doubt about their family’s deeply held religious beliefs made them different from their family, they still considered themselves to be a part of their family. Eliza explained:

Being in this position of having doubts about what the rest of my family believed, it instilled this slight sense of not belonging, not being able to just easily accept what my family accepted, [but] it wasn’t so much not feeling a part of the family as an increase of awareness of being different from my family in that sense.

(32:14-32:40)

They went on to say that they continued to emphasize their shared family identity until their discomfort with their parents reached a turning point. Eliza stressed that it was the way that their parents treated them, not differences in religious beliefs and values per se, that caused this turning point. They said of that time:

I realized it’s not just [that] we’re going in different directions or that I feel like I don’t agree with [my parents] on important things. Now I find it unpleasant to live with [them]. I find it unpleasant to be [their] child in this situation and to have [them] treating me in this way and viewing me this way, as though [my parents] get to make these decisions for me and decide what’s right for me.... There was no returning to those earlier levels of satisfaction and belongingness because that relationship just didn’t exist that way anymore. (1:00:26-1:01:13)

Many participants gave voice to their desire for family unity despite religious belief and value differences as well. One example came from Claire, a White, female, bisexual, 27-year-old Pagan. Claire said that she wished that her family would have been able to maintain a greater sense of unity by not letting the fear of difference drive them apart. Speaking specifically about her adoptive mother, Claire stated:

I wish that she had just been able to reflect on her own stance more before just reacting.... I think she really feels like she was operating out of a place of fear, so I understand. But if she had been able to have this reflection on “Why do I think the things I do? Why might somebody else not think the things that I do, other than they’re just a bad person or something? And how does that all go together?” before just reacting to what somebody else is doing or saying, even if you don’t like what somebody else did or said, I think it would’ve made a big deal for us, as far as us all remaining, like, a united thing and staying together. (1:31:48-1:32:26).

In another example, a similar sentiment was expressed by Martin, a Hispanic, male, 57-year-old agnostic. Martin explained that he has “come to appreciate the importance of maintaining strong family bonds despite differing religious values” (1:23:44-1:24:01) and asserted that, in his view, “It is not easy, but it is entirely possible for good Christian families, like any other, to stay together and loving despite individual differences in beliefs and values” (1:25:06-1:25:14). Martin added that his hope for his own family was to find ways to “appreciate the bond that exists beyond religion,” by “[focusing] on [their] shared values of love, respect, and support for one another” and “[putting] aside

[their] theological disagreements to simply enjoy each other's company" (1:26:11-1:26:39).

Some participants expressed their desire for family unity despite religious belief and value differences after having gained a new perspective on their relationships with their conservative Christian parents. An example came from Nina, who expressed her desire for her family to remain united despite the fact that her religious beliefs and values differ from those of her mother. Nina suggested that, since emotionally maturing and becoming a mother herself, she has come to terms with the role that she has played in her relationship with her mother over the years. She said:

I wish that we could have been more open and understanding. And I'm not always going to say that it was her that needed [to be] that. I wish that I had the tools to be more open and understanding, and to be free to be who I was and have that not weigh so heavily. (29:39-30:02)

Nina explained that she and her husband "have come to a point where [they've] realized that [they] can maintain a good relationship with her [mother]" and that they make efforts to do so, such as inviting her to share meals with them (25:51-26:09). Nonetheless, Nina admitted that trying to keep her family together in this way has not been easy, saying, "I can't control anybody else [but myself], so I don't know. It's kind of hard." (30:55-31:01). To Nina, the efforts that she makes with her mother are worth it. Reflecting upon them, Nina asked herself the question, "Am I satisfied with the way things are and the work [I have done]?" and answered it with:

I'm not satisfied that I don't have a relationship with my family [in] the way that I think I should.... But [my mom's] not violating my expectations anymore and I have more control over my own life and my own beliefs. (20:01-20:26)

Overall, cultural discourses beyond those in conservative Christian culture, as well as relational discourses, were able to inform and be reflected in participants' talk concerning their desire for good Christian families to be able to remain cohesive despite religious belief and value differences. By stressing the importance of shared family identity and making efforts to remain united, participants showed that their understanding of a good Christian family is one in which difference does not tear its members apart.

The DOI was articulated by participants as an alternative, centrifugal discourse in which good Christian families are positioned as being a means of open talk of religious belief and value differences and of acceptance of such differences, as well as able to maintain cohesiveness despite such differences. In describing their lived experiences, participants in the present study illustrated that this discourse was present in their talk with their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and values, and that this discourse is an important aspect of how they make meaning of Christian family identity. The dominant DRE was resisted by the DOI.

Summary and Conclusions

The answer to the first research question of what discourses inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values became evident as I analyzed the data: the discourse of righteousness and exclusion (DRE) and the discourse of openness and inclusion (DOI). The themes that constructed these discourses were articulated at both

cultural and relational links in the utterance chain (distal already-spoken, proximal already-spoken, proximal not-yet-spoken, and distal not-yet-spoken). A number of researchers have explored the communication of family members across religious belief and value differences (e.g., Boggs, 2016; Colaner et al., 2014; Lewis, 2012; Mahoney, 2005; Morgan, 2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Roer-Strier et al., 2009; Scharp & Beck, 2017; Worwood et al., 2020). However, despite researchers calls to do so (e.g., Morgan, 2020; Thatcher, 2011), to date, no researchers had examined family communication regarding differing religious beliefs and values strictly from an RDT-informed perspective prior to the present study.

Thatcher (2011) provided evidence that taking a dialectical approach to the examination of talk about differing religious beliefs is an effective means of shedding light on both the cultural and social discourses that inform and are reflected in such communication and how people in interpersonal relationships invoke these discourses in their talk. In doing so, he invited future researchers, like me, to “move beyond the mere recognition of difference” using “the types of data and analyses that can lead to a greater understanding of how meaning emerges as individuals negotiate dialectical tensions” (p. 402). Additionally, at least one call has been made for researchers to take an RDT-informed approach, specifically, to discovering the discourses that inform and are reflected in parent-child communication regarding religious differences because doing so uniquely allows researchers to reveal the links in the utterance chain at which cultural and relational discourses are present (Morgan, 2020). These results serve as an initial answer to this call. In this last section, I demonstrate the heuristic value of RDT for investigating communication across religious belief and value differences by highlighting its

usefulness for identifying and describing the discourses that conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values voiced as they communicated with each other about these differences, as well as where in the utterance chain these discourses inform and are reflected in their talk. To follow, I summarize my findings vis-à-vis these discourses and consider their implications, first together and then separately.

Discourses at Play

Both discourses that animated participants' talk provide insight into the lived experiences and relationships of conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values as they communicatively navigated these meaningful differences. The DRE was collectively formed by three themes: (a) family as a cohesively-believing unit; (b) family as a cohesively-practicing unit; and (c) family as a cohesively-valuing unit. The DOI was collectively formed by three themes as well: (a) family as a means of discussion; (b) family as a means of acceptance; and (c) family as cohesive despite difference.

The discourses of righteousness and exclusion and openness and inclusion bear a resemblance to what Thatcher (2011) identified as the discourses of Christianity and of secular pluralism, respectively, in his RDT-informed study of the talk of members of Alcoholics Anonymous about their experiences with the organization. It seems that Thatcher decided a priori, based on his prior knowledge of Alcoholics Anonymous and relationships with its members, that these two discourses inform and are reflected in members' talk. Thatcher (2011) provided only the following explanation of how he identified these discourses and their themes:

Initially, I read through the transcripts to locate each instance of identifiable tension between Christian discourse and spiritual pluralism discourse. I identified Christian discourse by direct references to specific steps the Alcoholics Anonymous fellowship claims to have come directly from the Oxford Group, instances when focus-group participants employed the term “Christian” as a direct identifier, and reference to Christian religious texts, Christian-based religions, and figures associated with these religions (e.g. Jesus Christ). I identified spiritual pluralism discourse by references to religious openness, arguments against the mention of specific religions, religious texts, and practices in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and the employment of ambiguous terms in place of more specific names or concepts associated with religions or religious deities. (pp. 393-394)

I argue that the DRE can be roughly mapped onto Thatcher’s Christian discourse, and the DOI can be roughly mapped onto his religious pluralism discourse. Their similarities to each other help to corroborate the findings that serve as an answer to the first research question of the present study and indicate that cultural discourses about religious beliefs and values, particularly regarding conservative Christianity and openness and acceptance of religious plurality, permeate aspects of U.S. American culture outside of families as well. The themes of the DRE suggest that the conservative Christian parents in the present study who voiced this discourse believe that good Christian families are involved with that which the Alcoholics Anonymous members in Thatcher’s (2011) study considered to be Christian (church; the Bible; Jesus Christ; etc.). The themes of the DOI suggest that the adult children with differing religious beliefs in the present study, like

some of the Alcoholics Anonymous members in Thatcher's study, wished to have their own religious identities, beliefs, and values acknowledged and respected by those who would, through their language and actions, reinforce a dominant Christian discourse.

Having identified the discourses that inform and are reflected in the talk of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values further illuminates how parents attempt to socialize their children into their family's religious identity, as well as how and why children resist, refute, and/or reject such socialization attempts; the themes of the DRE imply the rules by which one must abide in order to achieve and maintain Christian family membership, and the themes of the DOI suggest the alternative to following these rules. Identifying these discourses also helps meet what Phillips and Soliz (2020) argued is an existing "need for scholars to more consciously consider and situate their research within several socio-cultural factors that have direct influence on the interpretation, implication, and application of family communication scholarship" (p. 265). The presence of these discourses underscores Phillips and Soliz's (2020) assertion that it is "communicative processes and relational ideologies that constitute the family as it is constructed through social-cultural influences" (p. 259), as well as the challenge and complexity of bridging identity differences in families with members who are meaningfully different from each other. At both the distal and proximal links in the utterance chain, participants and their conservative Christian parents echoed and indicated anticipation of cultural and social discourses as they communicated with each other about their differing religious beliefs and values, and the ways that they did so had considerable impacts on their parent-child relationships and understanding of their family identities.

The findings guided by the first research question provide further evidence to support Sillars's (1995) claim that understanding family values is important for understanding family functioning. Like in many families in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Worwood et al., 2020) and in more mainstream Christian denominations (Beit-Hallahmi, 1991; Mullikin, 2006; Park & Ecklund, 2007; Roccas, 2005), the themes of the DRE make clear that the conservative Christian parents of the participants engaged in efforts to socialize their children into their family's religion by attempting to get their children to adopt particular values and practices in addition to particular beliefs. These findings also make plain that cultural and relational discourses are relevant to older family members making choices about how to teach younger members the importance of religious beliefs, values, and practices for sustaining their family identity.

The Discourse of Righteousness and Exclusion

Participants indicated that the DRE was characterized by the understanding that a good Christian family is one that holds to conservative Christian religious beliefs, practices, and values. The DRE was given voice by participants' conservative Christian parents attempting to socialize their children into their family's religious identity. Many previous researchers have shown that socialization into the religious identity of a family occurs when older family members, especially parents, repeatedly communicate their expectations for younger family members, especially children (Phillips & Soliz, 2020; Rittenour, 2020; Sillars, 1995). As Rittenour (2020) explained, "Just as exists within macro-cultures, families are micro-cultures whose messages, [including those about religious difference,] culminate to teach members how to believe and behave" (p. 228).

The fact that the discourse of righteousness and exclusion (DRE) informed and was reflected in the talk of adult children of conservative Christians regarding their communication with their parents about their religious belief and value differences suggests that this holds true for families headed by conservative Christians.

The results that answer the first research question in the present study contribute to this body of knowledge on families socializing younger members into their family's religion by illuminating the content of messages conservative Christian parents communicate to their children to socialize them, as well as whether and how these messages are influenced by, to borrow the phrasing of Rittenour (2020), their macro-culture (distal already- and not-yet-spokens) and/or their micro-culture (proximal already- and not-yet-spokens). The influence of distal already-spokens on the conservative Christian parents' voicings of the DRE regarding the need for salvation and to act in accordance with particular biblical interpretations and with Christian tradition (e.g., Edwards, 1741) is evident in participants' accounts of the expectations that their parents communicated to them; their parents had clearly internalized messages from cultural sources outside of the parent-child relationship and relayed them to their children. The influence of distal not-yet-spokens on the conservative Christian parents' voicings of the DRE is evident in the stories that participants told in which they mentioned their conservative Christian parents' expressions of concern about being judged because of their children giving voice to the DOI, whether by God or other conservative Christians, including other family members; their parents showed that they were worried about what will be said of them in the future by others. The influence of proximal already- and not-yet-spokens on the conservative Christian parents' voicings of

the DRE is evident in participants' reports of their conservative Christian parents communicating how they feel or would feel about the participant's differing religious beliefs and of them telling participants to remember the lessons that they taught the participant when the participant was younger and/or to remember the person they raised the participant to be; in these reported utterances, the parents are referring to the impacts that circumstances have or would have on the meaning of their relationships with their children with differing religious beliefs and values. Knowing this is important because, as Baxter (2011) said, "Meaning-making happens in the utterance chain" (p. 50). The fact that each link in the utterance chain influenced conservative Christian parents to voice the DRE shows how thoroughly they impacted the meaning-making process and the socialization efforts of conservative Christian parents.

The Discourse of Openness and Inclusion

Participants indicated that the DOI was characterized by the understanding that a good Christian family is one in which conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values can talk about their religious belief and value differences freely and openly with each other, communicate mutual acceptance, and remain united despite their differences. The DOI was given voice by participants attempting to explain or defend their differing religious beliefs and values to their conservative Christian parents, which suggests that cultural and relational discourses do, in fact, lead younger family members to question the lessons regarding religious beliefs and values that older family members have taught them, and, sometimes, to develop religious identities that do not correspond to the religious identities of their parents and other family members. Although researchers have previously revealed that parent-child

communication about their differing religious beliefs may require considerable forethought and planning on the part of children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their parents (e.g., Lewis, 2012; Worman & Kartch, 2022; Worwood et al., 2020), participants' voicings of the DOI can be thought of as an outcome of such planning (i.e., what children with differing religious beliefs and values draw upon in order to present alternatives to their parents). These results contribute to this body of knowledge by making clear that children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their parents consider discourses other than those they have been raised to accept and, if they come to adopt such discourses, make use of those discourses in their attempts to present and justify their differing religious beliefs and values to their parents.

These results also reveal the influence of each link in the utterance chain on participants' voicings of the DOI, just as they revealed the influence of each link on participants' conservative Christian parents' voicings of the DRE. The influence of distal already-spoken on participants' voicings of the DOI is evident in participants' articulations of their desires for free and open discussion of and acceptance of religious belief and value differences within their Christian families, as well as in their articulations of their desire for their families to remain cohesive despite their religious belief and value differences; these possibilities were not presented to participants by their parents or other family members, so they must have come from outside participants' families. The influence of distal not-yet-spoken on participants' voicings of the DOI is evident in participants' statements about what Christian families could and should be like; in such utterances, participants allude to or speculate about what might be said about Christian families in the future. The influence of proximal already- and not-yet-spoken

on participants' voicings of the DOI is evident in participants' expressions of how they felt or would feel about being unable to speak openly with their parents, not being accepted by their parents, and being in families that are incohesive because of religious belief and value differences; in such utterances, participants are referring to the impacts that these circumstances have or would have on the meaning of their relationships with their conservative Christian parents and of their Christian family identities. The fact that each link in the utterance chain influenced participants to voice the DOI shows that they had a considerable impact on the meaning-making process as well.

Overall, the analysis in which I engaged in an effort to answer the first research question yielded new and valuable insights into what and how cultural and relational discourses influenced the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values regarding these differences. I revealed that participants recognized yet largely rejected the dominance of the DRE voiced by their parents, with its strict expectations for what a good Christian family believes, practices, and values, and voiced the DOI in response, a call for good Christian families to be characterized by free and open discussion of differing religious beliefs and values, acceptance of members with differing religious beliefs and values, and unity despite members' differing religious beliefs and values. I also showed that conservative Christian parents' voicings of the DRE and participants' voicings of the DOI were influenced by each link in the utterance chain, demonstrating that parent-child communication about religious belief difference may entail consideration of relevant past and anticipated utterances, both within and outside of the parent-child relationships. In the next chapter, I describe the interplay between these two discourses and its impact on

how conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs and values make meaning of being a good Christian family.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCURSIVE INTERPLAY IN COMMUNICATION OF CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN PARENTS AND ADULT CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND VALUES

Summary and Overview of the Chapter

In the previous chapter, I described two prominent discourses that informed and are reflected in the talk of adult children of conservative Christian parents about their communication and relationships with their conservative Christian parents: the discourse of righteousness and exclusion (DRE) and the discourse of openness and inclusion (DOI). However, uncovering the details of discursive interplay by inductively examining utterances is the primary goal of researchers using contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al., 2021). Such examination sheds light on how some discourses get marginalized while others become dominant. In this chapter, I provide an answer to research question two: “How, if at all, do the discourses that inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values interplay to create meaning for such adult children?” I describe the nature of this discursive struggle and the relative power of each discourse before examining the microlevel discursive practices that characterized the meaning-making process with respect to Christian family identity. I treat participants’ talk about their communication and relationships with their conservative Christian parents as sites where discourses interpenetrate, thereby, providing the possibility of discovering how meaning was made and engaged by participants and their parents. I begin by describing the nature of the interplay and positioning of the discourses.

Chapter Four Results

In my analysis of the interview data, I found that the interplay of the discourses that informed and are reflected in participants' talk regarding their communication with their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and values manifested in (a) polemical interplay, including diachronic separation in the form of spiraling inversion and synchronic interplay in the forms of negating, countering, and entertaining; and (b) transformative interplay, including synchronic interplay in the form of a discursive hybrid.

Overall, the DRE attempted to reinforce cultural understandings of good Christian families as those characterized by shared religious beliefs, practices, and values, whereas the DOI destabilized the DRE by framing good Christian families as those characterized by open and free discussion, acceptance, and cohesion despite differences in religious beliefs and values among members. To follow, I provide a description of each of these forms of interplay before illustrating their occurrence in the present study with the help of example utterances.

Polemical Interplay

Polemical interplay is the most common type of interplay (Baxter, 2011). Discursive interplay is said to be polemical when the discourses are in competition with one another (see Chapter Two, p. 70). It involves discourses on unequal footing; some are dominant, and others are marginal. Forms of polemical interplay include diachronic separation and synchronic interplay, each with their own forms. I describe diachronic separation and synchronic interplay in turn to follow, illustrating their relationships to the utterances of the participants in the present study.

Table 4: Summary of Discursive Interplay

Polemical Interplay				Non-Polemical Interplay	
Discourses compete				Discourses stop competing	
Diachronic Interplay	Synchronic Interplay				
One discourse voiced within a single utterance	Multiple discourses voiced within a single utterance				
Diachronic Separation	Polemical Synchronic Interplay			Transformative Synchronic Interplay	
Dominance of discourses changes over time	Discourses voiced within a single utterance compete			Discourses come together to create new meaning	
Spiraling Inversion	Negating	Countering	Entertaining	Discursive Hybridity	
Shift in dominance takes place between two discourses for a particular activity or subject	Acknowledging an alternative discourse so as to reject it	Disclaiming an expected discourse and supplanting it with an alternative discourse	Suggesting that the discursive position that they have taken is but one of several viable discursive positions	Discourses come together to create while remaining distinct	
“ The blinders were coming off... and [I began] really questioning the bubble that I had grown up in and [perceiving the] toxicity of the way that I was raised, [after] having been exposed to multiple cultures, and even being judged [by my parents] for taking on aspects of different cultures that were not welcomed at my home, such as the way I dressed and having both my ears pierced and the manner in which I spoke at that point in my life.” (Corey, 32:41-33:11)	““Whatever you [two] believe, I don’t believe that. I believe the opposite.” (Winston, to his conservative Christian parents, 43:22-43:28).	““Look, I always believed this one way, [but then] I became disenfranchised with the church.... And I started really studying [the Bible]. And the more I understand it, the more I’m not convinced [Christianity is] the answer anymore. And as much as it would be cool if I did believe, I don’t.” (James, to his conservative Christian mother, 1:05:47-1:11:20)	“You’re not going to go to hell [when you die]. I mean, I don’t know God. I don’t know for sure, but I just don’t think some people [who are] spreading curiosity and acceptance and love would be damned by any god.” (Nina, 38:58-39:35)	<i>Arguing that avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values allows for a sense of family cohesiveness to be maintained</i> “[My parents and I] don’t have to talk about things openly, and just so long as [they] let me be, I’m happy to also do the same for [them], and be like, ‘Yeah, I support you. If you are happier and more at peace and are able to treat others kindly as a result, I’m very supportive of you doing this and participating in this way.’” (Tara, 1:51:51-1:52:35)	<i>Arguing that distance can increase relationship satisfaction</i> Relationship satisfaction, I consider, has gone up because I am further away and I.... It is “Out of sight, out of mind.” I have grown, but there’s no turning point that I can really identify where this distance has made me more at peace with living and letting live, as opposed to there always being this [sense that] “They need to see things my way or I need to see things their way. Until that happens, we can’t be on good terms.” Boundaries have happened, have been able to be developed. (Corey, 1:05:03-1:06:05)

Diachronic Separation

Diachronic separation, which occurs when the dominance of discourses changes over the course of time (see Chapter One, p. 35, and Chapter Two, pp. 68-69), is one form of polemical interplay that I recognized during my analysis of the interview data. When I considered participants' utterances individually, I found that they had given voice either solely to the DRE or solely to the DOI in some utterances, making these utterances internally monologic. However, as Baxter (2011) pointed out, "In general, it is always helpful to imagine a given textual utterance as part of a larger conversation – in this way, a researcher is ongoingly reminded of the utterance chain of which a textual utterance is part" (p. 160). To review the utterance chain, in a process known as unfolding, following the example of Thomas et al. (2017), I asked myself, while considering each individual utterance: *What is known about what a good Christian family is and is not that might prompt this utterance as a response?* and *What future responses about what good Christian families are and are not might this text be anticipating?* I then discovered that the competition between the DRE and DOI was diffused across participants' utterances in a nonantagonistic struggle. To follow, I describe what I found by engaging in this process: spiraling inversion.

Spiraling Inversion. As participants told me their stories, they often voiced the DRE when describing their religious beliefs and values as young children and then voiced the DOI when describing their religious beliefs and values later in their lives. This is an example of *spiraling inversion*, one of two types of diachronic separation (Baxter, 2011). Spiraling inversion happens when, over time, a shift in dominance takes place between two discourses for a particular activity or subject; in other words, when there is

“a back and forth pattern over time in the dominance of first one and then another for a given topical or activity domain” (Baxter, 2011, p. 127). The other type of diachronic separation is known as *segmentation*, which occurs when one discourse is centered within one specific domain and an alternative discourse is centered within another domain. In my analysis, I did not discover any segmentation. One example of spiraling inversion is Corey’s story of internalizing his parents’ racist values, which he associated with their conservative Christian religious beliefs, while he was growing up. Later, he recognized goodness in people of color when he went away to college and was exposed to racial and ethnic diversity (see Chapter Three, pp. 101-102). Over time, Corey switched from privileging the DRE by adopting his parents’ religious values vis-à-vis race to privileging the DOI by rejecting those values and expressing his rejection to his parents. As he put it when describing this switch:

The blinders were coming off... and [I began] really questioning the bubble that I had grown up in and [perceiving the] toxicity of the way that I was raised, [after] having been exposed to multiple cultures, and even being judged [by my parents] for taking on aspects of different cultures that were not welcomed at my home, such as the way I dressed and having both my ears pierced and the manner in which I spoke at that point in my life. (32:41-33:11)

Corey provided details of how he expressed his rejection of his conservative Christian parents’ racism. He remembered:

I was speaking in slang and had my ears pierced, and I’m sure that there was some [disparaging] comment made by my parents [about race]. I, probably, was wearing sagging pants or something, and I’m sure some comment was made by

my parents. And then, I, probably, snapped back [to them], “You have no right to say anything. You were born and raised here [in this isolated all-White town].

Your grandparents were born and raised here. You have no idea what the world looks like or what people are like.” I, probably, was a little bit holier-than-thou, if I’m remembering correctly, and, also, defensive, because they were attacking this new person that I’ve become. (36:29-37:04)

Unlike with most participants’ utterances that exhibit spiraling inversion, some participants’ utterances switched from giving voice to the DRE to giving voice to the DOI and back again more than once over the course of time. One example came from Mason, a White, male, bisexual, 31-year-old atheist, who shared, “It’s probably relevant that it’s a source of great shame for [my mother] that I left [her conservative Christian religious beliefs and values]” (1:08:51-1:08:58). He said that he had embraced his parents’ religious beliefs and values until the last few years of his life. Then, Mason revealed to his mother that he “didn’t believe in supernatural things” anymore (1:01:41-1:01:44). She responded by trying to make him feel guilty. Mason recalled that she called him too prideful, saying to him, ““You think you know everything! You think that you know better than God! You think that you’re above God! You just think you’re so good and you need to be taken down a peg.”” (1:04:59-1:05:10). Mason said that he now found this remark ironic, given that, at this time in his life, he was struggling with depression because of his change in religious beliefs and values and had a very low opinion of himself. However, he implied that the effect of her words on him emotionally was profound, saying that, upon hearing them, he felt guilt, anger, and a “morass of unhealthy different feelings,” that he “didn’t feel justified, vindicated, or righteous, or anything like

that,” and that he thought that he “shouldn’t have said anything [to his mother]” because doing so “didn’t serve any purpose” (1:06:50-1:07:28). Mason said that the quality of his mental health continued to diminish after this conversation, in part, because he took his mother’s criticism to heart. He said that it contributed to him “[hitting] rock bottom pretty shortly after that” by attempting suicide (1:10:18-1:10:21). He explained:

It wasn’t as a [direct] result of that conversation, but it was that, in addition to everything else, you know? That [conversation] would’ve been [in] November, 2018. The reason I remember is because [it was] in [the] spring [of] 2019 [that] I was hospitalized for a suicide attempt. That was the rock bottom.... [At the time,] I got it in my head that I was a toxic person and that everyone in my life would be better off without me around, including my parents, and that they were so disappointed and ashamed of me that it would be better if I just hadn’t existed, but I can’t travel back in time, so the next best thing is just to not exist anymore. I felt like that was what [my mother] wanted. (1:10:24-1:11:37)

Mason said that, after he survived the attempt that he made on his life, his perception of himself and his relationship with his conservative Christian parents changed because a medical student at the hospital at which he was recovering encouraged him to read the book *The Body Keeps the Score* (van der Kolk, 2014). He said:

I read the whole [book] in about a day. The reason it was influential for me is because reading that book helped me understand that many of the memories that I had of my parents, my mom and my stepdad, specifically, they were traumatic memories. I came to see how the religious beliefs that I was raised with were really abusive, the practices that they had, the physical stuff.... I always thought,

“It’s normal to hit your kids. That’s what good parents do to keep their kids in line. That’s how you teach them to be good adults.” And I was like, “You hit them, and, if they misbehave, you hit them harder, you know?” And [when] I was in the [hospital], I realized [that] that wasn’t true and that that wasn’t normal. I mean, I had had instances where I had broken bones and things like that [because of my parents’ physical abuse]. I had marks on my body from being injured [by] my mother and my stepdad. And a lot of it was about religion. Like I said [earlier], religion was ingrained in everything. And it’s like, “‘This is what God wants us to do,’” you know? [As The Bible says,] ‘Spare the rod, spoil the child.’”⁴ And a lot of it was about, “‘Honor your father and your mother’” and being respectful and a lot of that stuff.⁵ They emphasized obedience and respect so much that any little expression of my own personality or identity was just thrown to the ground, you know? It was [*The Body Keeps the Score*] that really helped me. That was the beginning of seeing how unhealthy that all was. Looking back on that conversation, [my mother’s] reaction to [my revelation of my differing religious beliefs] and how that went, I didn’t see it at the time, but it was the start of me understanding and being able to accept [that my mother and stepfather are] not right. It wasn’t, anymore, like, “I’m not sure if they’re right

⁴ It is a common mistake among Christians to believe that the phrase “Spare the rod, spoil the child” is biblical, and it has long been used by Christians as a justification for corporal punishment and physical abuse of children (Bartkowski, 1995; Bartman, 2002; Carey, 1994). The closest Bible verse to this phrase is Proverbs 13:24, which says, “Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011).

⁵ The command “Honor your father and your mother” is repeated a few times in the Bible. It first appears in Exodus 20:12, in which God gives Moses the fifth of ten commandments for the Israelite people to follow: “‘Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you’” (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011). Thereafter, it appears as a reminder of this commandment and/or the promise associated with keeping the command.

and I'm wrong." It was the beginning of me being able to feel confident that they were wrong. It was really important. (1:12:32-1:15:17)

When I asked Mason how, if at all, this new perspective on his childhood experiences changed the ways that he related to his parents, he said:

[It] totally did. I became much less forthcoming with [my mother]. I began decreasing contact. Once I realized how unhealthy [my mother and stepfather's child abuse] was, I did not let my children go over [to my parents' house] alone anymore. I had before. I'm ashamed of it now, but [my children] spent time alone at their grandparents' house, you know? I don't let that happen anymore. I don't even let them be there unless I'm in the room with them. More recently, we just don't go there at all. (1:15:21-1:15:59)

Nonetheless, Mason also said that, after another recent conversation, in which he confronted his mother about her abuse of him and about the self-hatred that he said that she had instilled in him as a part of her conservative Christian values, although he was still angry at his mother, he also felt "this deep sense of compassion for her" because "she was acting out of her own pain, the way that [he had] done so many times" and that he recognized that she "made destructive decisions because that was what she knew" and "what felt right to her" (2:04:43-2:04:55). He recalled ending this recent conversation by saying to his mother, "I love you, I care about you, and I hope that we can talk more" (2:03:41-2:03:46). Additionally, when I asked him how much he felt like a part of his family today, he acknowledged, "For better or worse, I guess I still am part of the family" (10:46-10:49). In this example, Mason switched back and forth between voicing the DRE and DOI several times. Initially, he voiced the DRE by affirming his parents'

conservative Christian religious beliefs and values. Then, he voiced the DOI, developing differing religious beliefs and values and expressing them to his mother. Following that conversation, Mason again voiced the DRE, becoming ashamed of his differing religious identity and attempting suicide. Post-suicide attempt, Mason voiced the DOI again, recognizing the trauma that he experienced because of the abuse he suffered at the hands of his mother and stepfather due to their religious beliefs and values. Next, Mason voiced the DRE once again, reducing contact with his parents and not sharing his beliefs and values with his mother. Finally, Mason voiced the DOI once again, confronting his mother while having compassion for her, ending that conversation by affirming his love for his mother and wishing to speak with her more, and acknowledging himself as still being a member of his family.

Overall, participants demonstrated shifts in the two discourses that I found to have informed and be reflected in their talk regarding their communication with their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and values that they privileged over time. Whether a single shift or multiple shifts occurred, participants' utterances exhibiting spiraling inversion demonstrate what deviating from their conservative Christian parents' expectations pertaining to their religious beliefs, practices, and values meant to the participants, with all of them eventually coming to center the DOI.

Synchronic Interplay: Negating, Countering, and Entertaining

Synchronic interplay is a form of interplay that occurs when multiple discourses are voiced within a single utterance (see Chapter One, p. 35, and Chapter Two, pp. 68-69). Polemical synchronic interplay was the most common form of interplay that I

recognized in participants' utterances during my analysis of the interview data. Baxter (2011) explained that "a speaker's talk can be examined for the ways in which the speaker's position is aligned or disaligned with respect to various value positions (discourses) at play" (p. 165), and that when "two speakers align with different [discourses].... the [antagonistic] struggle of these discourses might lead to what some would be tempted to call a conflict" (p. 131). I engaged in such examination by considering what Baxter called "discourse markers... important in identifying discourses positioned in counterpoint relation: negating, countering, and entertaining" (p. 166). I then discovered that all three of these discourse markers could be used to describe the competition between the DRE and DOI exhibited in participants' utterances. To follow, I describe these discourse markers and provide examples of how they manifested in participants' utterances.

Negating. When participants gave voice to the DRE, they often did so to refute it and supplant it with the DOI. This is an example of *negating*, the act of acknowledging an alternative discourse so as to reject it (Baxter, 2011). Sometimes, negation is achieved through reported speech, whereby a speaker directly or indirectly attributes the voicing of a discourse to another speaker and then subsequently voices a rejection of that discourse. For example, a speaker might say, "I'm old enough to have my own notions about the Divine. I don't think I need to share my parents' religious beliefs and values." Unless the need to share one's parents' religious beliefs and values was referenced prior to this utterance, the speaker could be understood to be negating a discourse of religious cohesiveness within families, even though it is unclear from their utterance to whom the voicing of this discourse should be attributed. Because I interviewed participants for the

present study without their conservative Christian parents present, reported speech is the only means by which the utterances of participants in the present study display negation. Negation is easiest to identify when it occurs in response to someone voicing a different discourse. One example of this kind of negation came from Tanya, who gave voice to and then dismissed the DRE when telling the story of the first time that she communicated with her mother about her differing religious beliefs and values. Tanya said that the two were having a conversation when she expressed her desire to date a man they both knew was not a Christian. Tanya provided her mother's response to this information before going on to describe how she rejected her mother's response, saying:

[My mother] knew that [the man I wanted to date] wasn't a Christian, so she told me that she was going to call a pastor friend of ours to have him talk some sense into me. And I looked at her and I was like, "I am an adult, and this is a decision I want to make. I don't care who you call. I'm going to make the decision that I want to make for myself."... That was the first time I ever gave her any [pushback]. There may have been a hint of a pushback about LGBTQIA stuff, but not in a big way. That was our first real "You're not going to use the Bible to keep me in line" moment. (36:54-37:46)

Another example came from Winston, who told me the story of what happened when he came out as gay to his conservative Christian parents. He prefaced this story by describing it as an "extinction-level event" in his relationship with his parents (41:14-41:18) and saying that "all hell broke loose" due to his identity disclosure (43:19-43:23). Winston said that he went into the conversation with the mindset of a political debater, ready to combat his parents' "very adamant," religiously informed stance against same-

sex attraction and marriage (42:26-42:45). Part of his reason for approaching the conversation as a win-lose situation, he explained, was because, at the time of his coming out, the U.S. Supreme Court was soon going to rule on *Obergefell v. Hodges*, a case whose outcome would effectively establish whether same-sex couples have a legal right to marry, which was a contentious socio-political issue that his parents often discussed. As a result, Winston said of his coming out, “that broke loose the dam of the gay thing, the religious thing and the political thing, all at once, which was not a great combination for having a healthy relationship with your parents” (22:09-23:19). In fact, it was not Winston’s intention to come out to his parents in this conversation. He recalled, “I just saw red and there was no thinking; there was just word vomit” (46:29-46:34), that he “wasn’t holding back” (47:09-11), and that, “It was mostly just: ‘I am in the right.... I figured out the world’s problems and [my parents] have kept me in the dark for way too long and oppressed me’” (47:50-48:06). Winston said that he and his mother were arguing about the legal right of same-sex couples to get married, loudly enough that his father and sister “were able to hear it from across the room” (43:16-43:19), when his mother asked him, “‘Well, are you gay?’” (22:31-22:32). Winston said that he responded by saying, “Well, yeah, but that’s not the point” and continuing to make his argument in favor of same-sex marriage rights (22:32-22:37). He said that, from that point on:

The conversation just kept getting louder. And [my mother] definitely pulled out the liberal college card, [saying to me,] “You’re being indoctrinated. You’ve fallen away,” or whatever language she would use. It just escalated from there.

She made it very clear that this was unacceptable.... She was like, “The whole kit

and kaboodle, that stuff [that you're learning,] is warping your mind.” (44:30-44:56)

Winston also remembered telling his parents, at some point in the conversation, ““Whatever you [two] believe, I don't believe that. I believe the opposite.”” (43:22-43:28). He explained his hostile behavior towards his parents by saying:

My family is very much about damage control and trying to appear to be neutral and at peace, and happy, because that's what a good Christian family should be, so any amount of anything that [I] could [do to] get [my parents] going and get them riled up and lose that façade [of a good Christian family] was a win for me, at the time, so I was feeling pretty good about myself, in that moment, in that regard. (48:24-48:44)

In hindsight, Winston admitted that he was “not the most mature person at the time” (43:28-43:30), that he did not think that he handled the situation in the best way, and that he thinks that the approach that he took to the conversation that he had with his mother led to an unsatisfying outcome. He lamented:

As [with]... the vast majority of political debates, especially in this country, it's never.... Nobody wins it. It's just like we all leave re-entrenched in our own belief and in our own righteous anger. That is very much what occurred [after the conversation that I had with my mother]. (42:47-43:02)

Winston's win-lose framing of the situation and, in particular, his statement, ““Whatever you [two] believe, I don't believe that. I believe the opposite.”” constitute an indisputable case of negation. Baxter (2011) identified the phrase “I don't believe” as an obvious indicator of a rejection of a discourse by a speaker. Winston invoked the DRE by

referring to his parents' religious beliefs and values, only to then dismiss it entirely and privilege the opposite, the DOI.

Some participants, such as Brian, demonstrated negation by voicing an alternative discourse without specifying specifically to whom they were attributing this discourse, or whether this discourse can be attributed to anyone in particular at all. When I asked Brian how important his religious beliefs seemed to be to his conservative Christian parents when he was growing up, he explained that his parents were proud of him when he shared the same religious beliefs as them, because it made them look good to other Christians. Brian said:

I think [my parents' pride in my religious beliefs] had a lot to do with how they looked in their social circles as the parents, right? If you [have] a kid in jail, and you go to church, you're a pariah, right? Which is the weirdest thing to me, too.

But I think it.... There's a lot of how they looked as part of that. (24:43-24:58)

In this utterance, Brian gives voice to the DRE when he talks about the stigma that conservative Christian parents may experience if people in their church find out that their child is experiencing circumstances which might suggest that they have done something contrary to conservative Christian values. Baxter (2011) called such a notion a "meaning kernel" (p. 167). In the interview, Brian did not attribute this notion that having a child in jail makes one a pariah to anyone in particular; he treated it as a known truth about people in churches, that, in the example Brian cited, the parents of the jailed individual will be judged by other churchgoers. No mention of judgment by churchgoers due to an association with a person charged with or convicted of a crime was previously made by Brian or me during the interview. Therefore, the notion that having a child in jail makes

one a pariah is likely to be part of a larger discourse of what it means to be a good Christian family, and Brian's introduction of this meaning kernel created the opportunity for him to negate it. He did so by stating that he perceives Christians doling out judgment to be "the weirdest thing" for Christians to do, thereby favoring the DOI.

Overall, from these examples, I conclude that negating occurs in some participants' utterances regarding their communication with their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and values, with participants initially giving voice to and then rejecting the DRE in favor of the DOI. Participants' utterances exhibiting negation demonstrate how clearly some adult children of conservative Christian parents articulate their disdain for their parents' expectations pertaining to their religious beliefs, practices, and values, as well as how forceful the clash of the DRE and DOI can be.

Countering. As many participants gave voice to the DOI in their utterances, they replaced the DRE, the discourse that they, as members of good Christian families, are expected to voice, with the DOI. This is an example of *countering*, the act of disclaiming an expected discourse and supplanting it with an alternative discourse (Baxter, 2011). Baxter identified a number of words that serve as lexical indicators of countering, for example, "although," "however," "but," "yet," "nonetheless," "even," "still," and "surprisingly." She explained that when one of these words is present in an utterance, the speaker is likely to be countering an explicit or implicit expectation. For example, many participants implicitly countered the DRE with the DOI when expressing their desires to stay part of their families or to keep their families together despite their differing religious beliefs and values. Tiffany did so twice, quite succinctly, stating, "For [my

mom], *even* if I live a good life, [if I] don't believe in Jesus, then it's not enough" (9:26-9:33, emphasis added) and "I just want to have a good relationship with my mom, *despite* our different views [on religious beliefs and values]" (37:39-37:43, emphasis added). In the former utterance, Tiffany countered the implicit DRE, which would suggest that one cannot be accepted as a member of a good Christian family without believing in Jesus, with the DOI by suggesting that living a good life should be enough to make one eligible for acceptance in a good Christian family. In the latter utterance, Tiffany countered the implicit DRE, which would suggest that having differing views on religious beliefs and values prevents good family relationships, with the DOI by suggesting that it is still possible for her and her mother to have a good relationship. Another example of countering in this way came from Eliza, who admitted:

It feels like there are missed opportunities [to reconnect with my conservative Christian parents], because I think that, *even now*, if my parents did have a change of heart, I.... It would not take a great deal of difficulty in overcoming my negative feelings. I don't want to make it sound like I have hostility or a grudge against my parents that's a resentment-based thing. I really don't. It's more a question of "I would like for things to be better, *but*, because there's such a fundamental disagreement and misunderstanding of [the meaning of] those principles [emphasized in Christianity, my parents and I are] at an impasse." (1:20:04-1:20:48, emphases added)

In this utterance, Eliza countered the implicit DRE, which would suggest that negative feelings that all parties are likely to feel after one reveals one's differing religious beliefs and values to one's conservative Christian parents cannot be overcome and that

fundamental disagreement between parents and their children regarding the meaning of Christian principles would make relating too exceedingly difficult, with the DOI by asserting that she could overcome her negative feelings if her parents' attitudes changed and that she would like to have a better relationship with her parents.

Some participants also countered the DRE with the DOI when describing the process of change that occurred with respect to their religious beliefs and values. One example came from James. James said that he once explained the process of his religious belief and value change to his mother by saying to her:

“Look, I always believed this one way, [*but* then] I became disenfranchised with the church [and] with a lot of these things. And I started really studying [the Bible]. And the more I understand it, the more I’m not convinced [Christianity is] the answer anymore. And *as much as* it would be cool if I did believe [in Christianity], I don’t. And I can’t be anything other than honest about what I think or believe, or it would just be a lie anyway....” I can’t not be this. I could try, *but* I would just be full of shit. If God does exist, I can’t trick Him.... Once that information’s been plugged into my brain and I have that data set to work with, I have to account for that data set. Now that I’m going to do that, my hermeneutical horizon, *as solid as it was*, has evolved now.⁶ And I can’t unsee that thing.... You’re not going to convince somebody that their experience was wrong.... You can try. You [can] try to convince yourself otherwise, *but* that’s not being

⁶ The concept of a hermeneutical horizon, first introduced by Gadamer (1975), refers to a person’s limited ability to understand or interpret a text, or Reality itself, based on their own existing knowledge and standpoint. It is a concept to which biblical scholars, theologians, and philosophers of epistemology and phenomenology have commonly referred ever since (e.g., Wright, 1982; Geniusas, 2006; Veress, 2015; Yong, 2017; Sannikov, 2018).

intellectually honest about where you're at. And that's the funny part:

[conservative Christian parents will say], '*But* please do it because it makes me feel better' or something.'" (1:05:47-1:11:20, emphases added)

In this utterance, James countered the implicit DRE multiple times. First, in the initial sentence, James countered the DRE, which would suggest that one should not deviate from the conservative Christian religious beliefs of one's family for any reason, with the DOI by suggesting that he had a good reason for doing so. Second, James countered the DRE, which would suggest that it would be good if James believed in Christianity, with the DOI by asserting that he does not believe in Christianity, that he cannot say that he believes in Christianity without lying, and that if he were to try to do so, he would be disingenuous. Third, James countered the DRE, which would suggest that his interpretations of the Bible and of Reality itself should forever remain fixed, with the DOI by acknowledging that he must account for the implications of the knowledge that he has acquired from studying the Bible for his interpretations of the Bible and of Reality. Fourth, James countered the DRE, which would suggest that he should try to convince himself not to account for his new experiences, with the DOI by asserting that to do so would not be intellectually honest. Fifth, James countered the DRE, which would suggest that he should do what he can to not change his religious beliefs away from those held by his conservative Christian family members because it will make them happy, with the DOI by suggesting that the idea that it is possible to do so, especially for that reason, is comical. This example represented the experience of these children in that, like most other participants who countered the DRE with the DOI when describing the process of change that occurred with respect to their religious beliefs and values, James did so to

illustrate that he perceived himself to have had little agency in the process of religious belief and value change.

Many participants countered the DRE with the DOI when emphasizing their need for free and open communication with their parents with respect to religious beliefs and values. One example was provided by Nina, who countered the DRE both when giving it voice implicitly and when giving it voice explicitly, all within a single utterance. She acknowledged:

[In my] relationship with [my mother], there's not really a place to ask questions [of my mother about religious beliefs and values], *and* I need to be able to have questions and have them answered and have them validated.... I do know that it probably would've been very much easier, in my life, to just sign away everything and go with [my mother's religious beliefs and values] and just agree with [them] and stay along on the way, *but* that's just not what's.... That's not me. I used to think [I asserted my differing religious beliefs and values to my mother] because [I was] being difficult, because that's the way [my mother] liked to play it off: "You're just being difficult. You're the black sheep. You don't like.... You're different than all of us." *But* I [now recognize that I] have to have that room [to question others]. For me, when you start shutting down any questioning, it sets off a really... almost like a fight or flight response in myself.... If you can't question, you can't [get answers to your] questions.... I don't believe [that] everybody has the answer, *but* when you shut it down and that's the way it is and there's no other questions about it, then that sends off a very red alert. (22:41-23:58, emphases added)

In this utterance, Nina first countered the implicit DRE, which would suggest that asking questions about religious beliefs and values is not good, with the DOI by asserting her need to do so, and to have her questions validated and answered. Second, Nina again countered the implicit DRE, which would suggest that her life would be easier if she went along with her mother's religious beliefs and values, with the DOI by insisting that doing so would violate her sense of herself. Third, Nina countered the DRE explicitly voiced by her mother, who Nina said suggested that Nina was asserting her differing religious beliefs and values just to be contrarian, with the DOI by saying that she did so because she needs to be able to question others. Fourth, Nina countered the implicit DRE once more, which would suggest that only conservative Christian parents have the correct answer(s) vis-à-vis questions about religious beliefs and values, with the DOI by declaring that she does not believe this to be true and that acting as if it were true that only conservative Christian parents possess such answers is bad.

Overall, the examples above make clear that, in a variety of circumstances, countering occurs in some participants' utterances with respect to their communication with their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and values. These participants mostly countered the DRE with the DOI using words that Baxter (2011) indicated were lexical identifiers of countering, with one using the phrases "as much as" and "as solid as (blank) was" to juxtapose and counter the DRE with the DOI and another doing so using the word "and." The countering present in the utterances of participants is indicative of what these participants perceive as being expected of them and of their communication before, during, and after they developed religious beliefs that differ from those of their conservative Christian parents.

Entertaining. In their utterances, some participants voiced consideration for the DRE as a possible meaning of being a good Christian family. Most often, this happened when participants expressed that they felt guilty for causing their parents emotional pain by rejecting the religious beliefs and values of their families and for disclosing information which led to strained parent-child relationships. This is an example of *entertaining*. Speakers are said to be entertaining when they suggest that the discursive position that they have taken is but one of several viable discursive positions (Baxter, 2011). Baxter pointed out that, like countering, researchers can spot instances of entertaining in utterances by attending to lexical indicators. For entertaining, such lexical indicators include the words “may,” “might,” “must,” “could,” and “apparently,” as well as the phrases “it’s possible that,” “it’s likely that,” “it seems,” “it appears,” “on the one/other hand,” and “either (blank) or (blank).” She explained that these words and phrases mark tempered statements that allow for “the possibility of at least one alternative discursive position” (p. 168) However, other scholars who engaged in contrapuntal analysis, such as Scharp and Thomas (2016), have demonstrated that entertaining can occur even when no lexical indicators are present in an utterance, and that this is sometimes the case when someone expresses feeling guilty for not adopting an alternative discursive position. This occurred in much of the entertaining I found in the utterances of participants in the present study. One example of a participant entertaining the DRE in an utterance due to feeling guilty came from Mariah, who said in multiple utterances that she felt guilty for not conforming to the religious beliefs and values of her mother. She explained that she felt this guilt particularly strongly because, around the time that she first started to communicate with her mother about her differing religious

beliefs and values, her father died, so she did not want to disappoint her only remaining parent. Some of these utterances made up Mariah's story of the first time she communicated with her mother about her differing religious beliefs and values, a time when she was "pushing against" her mother's strict religiously informed rules (36:03-36:06). She said that, in her family, with respect to her and her siblings, "There was a lot of prohibition on where we could go and where we couldn't go, [and the] people we could [and could not] be around" (35:30-35:36), and that these rules were enforced differently by her mother based on gender. Mariah said that when she was still in high school, she questioned her mother's religiously informed decision not to let her go to a school dance despite giving her brother permission to go. She recalled asking her mother, "Why can't I go to a school dance? [I know that] I can't go to house parties. This is something that the school is putting on. I like to dance. Everybody's going to be there. Why can't I go?" (35:18-35:30). Mariah recalled the emotions that she experienced after questioning her mother and how she managed those emotions, saying:

I felt guilty for pushing against [my mother's decision to not let me go to the dance], because my dad had just passed, so [I was] trying not to be a bad or problem kid [at that time]. All [of] my emotions were really in check. I loved my mom and the fact that she listened [to my questioning], but I still kind of felt like an outsider [to my family] somewhat, because [I was] like, "Well, is something wrong with me because I want to go?"... I felt bad for putting [my mother] in that position. (36:03-37:14)

Later, Mariah provided more details about what she was feeling after this incident, saying:

[I was] still feeling that burden, that yolk of not being accepted, like I totally did something against God. But [I was] still validating my own feelings and my own self because I was not [feeling] convicted [of my actions]. That was a huge thing growing up, conviction. “If you’re [feeling] convicted [of your actions], then it’s a sin to you.” (39:58-40:18)

In the first utterance about her feelings, Mariah entertained the DRE by voicing (a) her feelings of guilt; (b) her perception of herself as being “a bad or problem kid” for questioning her mother; (c) her need not to express what she was feeling to her mother; (d) the idea that questioning her mother may indicate that she does not love her mother; (e) her perception of herself as somewhat of an outsider to her family; and (f) her consideration of whether something may be wrong with her. In the second utterance about her feelings, Mariah entertained the DRE by voicing her feeling of being burdened by unacceptance as well as her concern that she “did something against God.” However, Mariah then drew from the DOI by voicing (a) the validity of her perception of herself as a victim of an unfair policy, and of her behavior informed by this perception; and (b) a justification of herself and her actions. Mariah made clear that she believed that she was right to question her mother’s decision as well as to feel guilty for doing so; that both discursive positions could be reasonably occupied.

Other participants entertained the DRE in their utterances when they confessed to or alluded to harboring some measure of fear or concern about going to hell when they die. One example came from Nina. When I asked her to provide advice to the children of conservative Christian parents with differing religious beliefs and values, Nina did so as if she were speaking to one directly, saying:

Don't worry about defining yourself or your family in the way that you think that they're supposed to [be defined]. And don't worry about.... Because you asked a question of a Buddhist, [that] doesn't mean that you're going to get in trouble [with God]. You're not going to go to hell [when you die]. I mean, I don't know God. I don't know for sure, but I just don't think some people [who are] spreading curiosity and acceptance and love would be damned by any god. (38:58-39:35)

Corey also entertained the DRE when expressing his concerns more deliberately. He said:

Whether I was starting to veer away from [the conservative Christian religious beliefs and values with which I was raised] or not, that's ingrained in you, and when you have people holding it over your head that you're going to go to hell [when you die], you're like, "Well geez, even if I think that there's a 0.00001 percent chance that's true, I need to consider that, because I don't want to burn for eternity." (44:31-45:03)

In these utterances, Nina and Corey both entertain the DRE while still maintaining the DOI. They both express their uncertainty about whether hell really exists and if people really go there after they die, and they both treat the discursive position that hell does exist and that people may go there as legitimate.

Some participants expressed their desire for their conservative Christian parents, or for conservative Christian parents writ large, to entertain the DOI. This occurred most often in utterances in which participants provided advice for conservative Christian parents whose children do not share their same religious beliefs and values. An example of a participant who gave such advice to conservative Christian parents broadly came from Tiffany, who said that they should "try to be a little bit more open-minded, asking

questions rather than saying yes or no” vis-à-vis the differing religious beliefs and values of their adult children because these adult children, like her, are “not going to change their minds” about their religious beliefs and values (45:04-45:15). Another example came from Tara, who quipped:

I think parents need to realistically think, “Do I actually want my child to develop their own thoughts, their own feelings, their own faith, or do I want them to be a robot that has no autonomy and no free will? If I actually think that they need to choose, then I need to allow them to do that.” (2:05:24-2:05:43)

Breanne provided an example of a participant who expressed their desire for their own conservative Christian parents to entertain the DOI. When I asked her if there was anything that she wished that her conservative Christian parents would have said or done differently during their interactions pertaining to their religious belief and value differences, she replied:

I mean, that’s asking them to change who they are, right? [Chuckles]. I feel bad for them. You know, they’re very limited. But that same limitation.... It’s controversial to me. [My father] happened to go from one extreme to another and he found God. And now [he’s] alive, and I’m grateful for that, that it’s working for him. He doesn’t have a [relationship with me, his] daughter, but it’s working for him. I wish he would listen to other Christians, instead of [saying], “Nope, this is it. This is what I believe, and no one’s going to be my friend unless you believe this as well.” (1:31:14-1:31:58)

A small number of participants indicated in their utterances that, at some point after they revealed their differing religious beliefs and values and their support of the

DOI to their conservative Christian parent(s), one or more of their parents did entertain the DOI. These participants mostly used reported speech to show this. The degree to which these participants said that their parents used reported speech varied greatly, with some suggesting that their parents came to entertain the DOI considerably, as did the reasons why their parents came to entertain it. Some participants whose parents entertained the DOI also suggested that their parent(s) came to entertain it to an increasing extent over time. An example of a participant whose conservative Christian parent entertained the DOI to a small degree came from Kelley. Kelley said that her conservative Christian mother began to entertain the DOI at the end of one of their conversations about their differing religious beliefs and values. Kelley said that in this conversation she revealed her thoughts about being involved with a church to her mother. In addition to telling her mother about the challenging experiences that she and her husband, a former pastor, had faced at the last church where her husband worked, and that they were both in the process of healing from the religious trauma that they experienced there, Kelley remembered:

I was also [saying to my mother,] “Well, I’m also still healing, just in general, from the things that I’ve learned over the years from religion, or from religious teachers, or whatever.” That was news to her, and she had not ever thought that could be a possibility. I know that she knows that people have been hurt by the Church, but, in that conversation, it was [my mother coming to terms with the idea:] “You [and your husband], specifically, have been hurt [by the Church], and you, specifically, have been hurt [by the Church].” And [my mother and I] got into it more, but it was a light bulb moment for her, just, “Oh, my child has not

had a wonderful experience and she is having to heal in some way,” which, I would imagine, would be very difficult to have to hear as a parent.... For her, it felt like I had, maybe, shattered something [in her mind] in a small way, [causing her to think about the issue in a way] that she hadn’t thought of before. (6:41-7:51)

Kelley said that although she was glad to have shared this information with her mother, it also became clear to her that her mother “couldn’t figure out what [Kelley] meant” (16:56-16:58) and did not understand that the religious trauma that she had experienced went well beyond her recent experiences with church. Kelley said that she tried to clarify her meaning for her mother to no avail, saying:

[I told my mother,] “Certain doctrine and certain theological stances that I have been taught my whole life,” and [then] I started to say “by you,” but I was like, “by the church and by church adjacent organizations, and stuff you guys taught us at home.... A lot of those things were not actually helpful for me. And some of it was actually harmful, like the beliefs that I was taught. [They] were harmful, and I’m trying to sort that all out....” So, we then had a long conversation.... In the conversation, she was like, “Oh, okay. This is a lot to process.” But she was respectful and could see that it was harmful for me in different ways. And so, she was okay. And that’s, honestly, where we left it. That is how it ended. That is, we talked for two hours about it. It was a very long time. And really, that is where it ended and where it stayed.... It was wrapped up nicely with a bow and we have not talked about it since. That was like a standalone conversation. She never followed up. (17:54-20:50)

An example of a participant whose conservative Christian parent entertained the DOI to a much larger degree came from James. In his interview, James chose to focus mostly on his communication with his conservative Christian mother regarding his differing religious beliefs and values, and explained why by saying:

My dad's a weird one. He has these very conservative beliefs, like he definitely still believes that Jesus is the way to heaven and that you can't do it any other way. However, he has these back doors he allows in his religion.... He would definitely think, "But if you're living your life right, you're doing this thing right...." He had these very ethereal [beliefs. For example,] "But in the end, if you do good, you go to heaven, and if you do bad, you don't...." He was much more ethereal about that. Much more.... Well, *ethereal* might not be the right word [to describe his beliefs], but [my dad was] much more loose about what the meanings [of theological truths] were. And [he] thought, "God will figure it out," which, oddly enough, ironically, might very well be the place I ended up later on. (26:17-27:37)

Overall, these examples highlight the fact that entertaining is present in participants' utterances, including (a) their advice for conservative Christian parents about communicating with their children with differing religious beliefs and values about those differences; and (b) their reports of the speech of their conservative Christian parents regarding those differences. When participants spoke for themselves, some of them entertained the DRE while maintaining their discursive position with respect to the DOI. When participants spoke for their conservative Christian parents, a smattering of them indicated that their parents entertained the DOI while maintaining their discursive

position with respect to the DRE. Participant's utterances demonstrating entertaining show that the interplay of the DRE and DOI was not always as contentious as with negation and countering, and that some conservative Christian parents and some of their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values made efforts to consider alternative viewpoints on what it means to be a good Christian family.

As I have demonstrated above, polemical synchronic interplay is prevalent in the utterances of the participants in the present study, with all three of its forms represented. Participants voiced both the DRE and DOI within a single utterance often and for the purposes of negating, countering, or entertaining the DRE and signifying their alignment with the DOI. Although I identified a considerable amount of evidence of synchronic interplay by remaining attuned to lexical indicators of discourse markers as directed by Baxter (2011), I also identified instances of synchronic interplay with lexical indicators not mentioned by Baxter, as well as instances without any such indicators at all. Participants' utterances characterized by synchronic interplay highlight the direct oppositional struggle of the DRE and DOI and the ways that the clash between them manifests in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values.

Transformative Interplay

Transformative interplay is much less common than polemical interplay (Baxter, 2011). Like negating, countering, and entertaining, transformative interplay is a form of synchronic interplay, because, when it occurs, more than one discourse is voiced in a single utterance of a speaker. Discursive interplay is said to be transformative when the discourses voiced by a speaker cease to be in competition with one another (see Chapter

Two, p. 70). Transformative interplay is an idealized form of dialogue in which, in contrast to polemical interplay, discourses are on equal footing; no discourse dominates or is marginalized with respect to any other discourse. These conditions create the possibility of the emergence of new meanings. Discourses can come together yet remain distinct from one another, creating a new meaning known as a *discursive hybrid*, or combine with one another in such a way that they become indistinguishable, creating a new meaning known as an *aesthetic moment* (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008). In aesthetic moments, the merging of discourses greatly changes their meaning and creates a sense of consummation and wholeness for those in relationship to one another as that relationship is cast in a new, previously unrecognized light. I identified two discursive hybrids in the utterances of the participants in the present study, but no aesthetic moments. To follow, I describe these hybrids and explain how they were created.

Discursive Hybridity

Discursive hybridity occurred when participants positioned the DRE and the DOI as complementary in their utterances, rather than in competition. No longer struggling against each other, these discourses were able to come together to allow new meanings of Christian family identity to emerge. Usually, hybrids were created when participants reflected upon the current state of their relationships with their conservative Christian parents. In my analysis, I found that transformative hybridity occurred when participants argued that (a) avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values when communicating with their conservative Christian parents allowed them to maintain a sense of family cohesiveness; and (b) being distant from their conservative Christian parents increases

their level of satisfaction with their relationship with these parents. To follow, I illuminate each of these hybrids.

Arguing that avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values allows for a sense of family cohesiveness to be maintained. Some participants had a difficult time reconciling the desire within the DOI for free and open dialogue and the expectation within the DRE for cohesively-believing, -practicing, and -valuing family members. These participants described how avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values when communicating with their conservative Christian parents allowed them to maintain a sense of family cohesiveness. After having already revealed their differing religious beliefs and values to their parents, these participants would either implicitly or explicitly come to an agreement with their parents to avoid talking about their differing religious beliefs and values together. One example was provided by Tara, who said that the most recent turning point that she experienced in her relationship with her conservative Christian mother came when she decided to go to church with her mother and the rest of her family to celebrate Christmas despite having “no desire to ever attend church again” (1:50:59-1:51:02). She explained that rather than insisting on not going and asserting her differing religious beliefs and values, she chose to go as a favor to her mother. Tara said of doing so:

[I] probably [felt] some pride in myself, [like], “Good job, coming. It meant a lot to your mom. Good.” I don’t know. Maybe, to some extent, [I also felt] a little bit of contentment, [like], “We don’t have to talk about things openly, and just so long as you let me be, I’m happy to also do the same for you, and be like, “Yeah, I support you. If you are happier and more at peace and are able to treat others

kindly as a result, I'm very supportive of you doing this and participating in this way.'"... I think, after all of the shitty stuff, we're at a semi-peaceful place for the time being. No, we're at a peaceful place for the time being; we're not being openly antagonistic [to] each other. (1:51:51-1:52:35)

Tara went on to say that after going to church with her mother and the rest of the family, they all went back to her mother's house, where they ate and opened Christmas presents together. She also stated, "[There was] no big fanfare, [but] I think my mom said 'Thank you.' That meant a lot. That was really great." (1:52:37-1:52:53). Tara then explained:

My boundary now is, if they're ever interested in talking about the past, or opening up another, "Hey [Tara], why don't you believe in the Bible?"... They haven't pressed this, but if it were to come up, my boundary is "I'm not going to talk about it unless we're in family therapy and there's someone there to facilitate the conversation. I'm just not going to talk to you about it." So, I wish I had understood that sooner and just been like, "I don't want to talk to you about it because I don't think anyone, myself included, is capable of having a conversation that's not deeply critical."... I like that we don't talk about it. I have no desire to talk to them about it. If they.... I think that I've tried, over the years, to show genuine curiosity about their views.... I guess it would be cool if they genuinely wanted to know what I thought and why. I just don't think that.... And, also I, at some point, I'm not genuinely curious. So, my curiosity has boundaries, because I'm not curious like, "Oh, maybe I want to believe that." I have no desire to. So, I guess, in theory, that would be cool, but I like not talking about it. That seems most functional for us. (1:59:13-2:01:14)

Tara advised other adult children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their conservative Christian parents to avoid the topic as well. Speaking as if she were addressing them directly, she said:

It's been deeply rewarding to not talk about [my differing religious beliefs and values with my conservative Christian parents], and if you and/or your [conservative Christian] parents aren't.... If it's going to be too emotionally devastating to anyone involved, I think that you should not talk about it. Now, from all the conversations I had with people, I know that not everyone thinks that, and for some people, they're like, "No, I have to talk about it." So, I acknowledge that. I think my advice would be to find out what works for your family and do that. If it's important to talk about it, set rules around how you're going to talk about it. What are the boundaries and what is hurtful to you and what is hurtful to the person? "Okay, we're going to avoid that." If you can't do that, don't talk about it. That was the biggest thing for me.... I remember, at some point, saying [to my parents], "I know what you guys think. I don't need you to remind me. We've said these verses and read these chapters of the Bible [throughout] my whole life. I'm not getting new information from our conversation, so I don't need to talk about it." But, yeah, I think there's not a right way, and it depends on the family and what people need. In my family, we don't need to talk. So, I would say don't talk about it, but I know that, for others, it's important to talk about it. (2:02:53-2:04:42).

Clearly, in an effort to preserve her sense of being a part of her family, Tara chose to avoid the topic of their religious belief and value differences, eventually made an explicit

agreement with her parents to avoid the topic, and encouraged other adult children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their conservative Christian parents to do the same. Another example came from Helen, who was surprised at how she felt when practicing this topic avoidance. She said:

I feel like I should feel more dissatisfied or more longing for something that I've lost, wishing that I still had that closeness with [my mother] or feeling like, "Oh, this is weird, that things are so different." But my feelings are mostly numbness because I'm happy that it's not so volatile and we're not constantly talking about politics or religion or my sexuality, and there's not these things that are on the table to have conflict over as much anymore.... [I feel] numbness, in general, like a "This is fine" feeling. Sometimes, [I feel] a little bit trapped by our situation, where I'm like, "Okay, sometimes I still don't really love you as a person," not due to our own conversations, but due to things that I see that she posts [on social media]. I'm like, "Just another reminder that you can be the worst." [I also feel] that I am trapped by financial constraints and the fact that she owns this house [that I rent from her].... It feels like I owe her more relational maintenance and more talking to her and catching up on things. So, [I feel] some numbness, some trapped guilt of, "All right, we [have to] keep this up for at least as long as I'm living here." [These feelings are], generally, not negative feelings. It's just, "All right, this is better than where we've been in the past. It's not the best place that our relationship has been in, but it's average." (1:50:06-1:51:55)

To Helen, avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values and/or the related topics of politics and sexuality allowed her to feel more connected to her family and capable of

maintaining a relationship with her mother. In these examples, both Tara and Helen discursively challenge the notion that good Christian families must share the same religious beliefs, practices, and values, as well as the notion that free and open dialogue about religious beliefs and values is ideal, reframing the competition of the DRE and DOI to portray topic avoidance as a win-win solution.

Arguing that distance can increase relationship satisfaction. Many participants struggled to contend with the DRE, which would suggest that members of good Christian families should be cohesive in their religious beliefs, practices, and values, and the DOI, which would suggest that members of good Christian families should make attempts to remain cohesive despite their differing religious beliefs and values. Such participants described how being distant from their conservative Christian parents, and sometimes distant from their other family members as well, made them more satisfied with their relationships with their parents. Tara provided an example of this discursive hybrid as well, saying:

I have a lot of conflicting feelings and ways I will describe my relationship with [my parents]. I would still say that, in many ways, our relationship is very tense, or it's more distant than it has been. But that's good. I appreciate the distance. I think the distance is good for us. We are, geographically, as distant as we ever have been before, and also, in many ways, emotionally and psychologically distant. However, at the same time, there's some weird family dynamics that have brought us closer together.... My youngest brother... has not lived at home for many years due to many issues. He's, actually, moving in with [my husband and I]. He's 14. So, that weird family dynamic has made [my husband and I] have to

cooperate very closely with my parents on lots of things. We've been in family therapy with my brother and my parents for the past six months. And [my parents] have been very affirming and incredibly grateful to us that we are willing [to allow my brother] to come and live with us. This external relational thing that's happening has presented [my parents] with the opportunity to be very affirming of me in ways that they have not been in the past. I feel, at the same time, distant [from] them. I also feel closer and affirmed by them in ways, simultaneously, that I never have felt before. It's a lot of mixed emotions and feelings. The distance is not bad. I appreciate the distance and, given the reality of how I am and how they are, I think that the distance is good. But there's also some closeness from these other sources, too. (1:53:27-1:55:32)

Even though Tara identified the catalyst for change in her relationship with her conservative Christian parents to have been an "external relational thing," the fact of her younger brother coming to live with her and her husband, she also describes how distance gave her and her parents the opportunity to relate better to one another. Tara expressed appreciation for the distance and reframed it from a negative circumstance to a positive one. A similar example came from Corey, who said:

[My relationship with my parents] has been maintained to this day, and the distance, both physically and connected, in general, has grown apart. My dad and I became pretty close when I went through treatment [for addiction] because he's been through [similar] treatment. Our relationship got closer there, for a little bit, as he was supporting me in that. But I would still consider [myself to be] at the same place with both [of my parents]. Relationship satisfaction, I consider, has

gone up because I am further away and I.... It is “Out of sight, out of mind.” I have grown, but there’s no turning point that I can really identify where this distance has made me more at peace with living and letting live, as opposed to there always being this [sense that] “They need to see things my way or I need to see things their way. Until that happens, we can’t be on good terms.” Boundaries have happened, have been able to be developed. (1:05:03-1:06:05)

Corey explicitly articulated that being distant from his conservative Christian parents has increased his satisfaction with his relationship with them. He explained that it allows him to expend less energy thinking about the negative aspects of their relationship, which arose more frequently when they were less distant. In these examples, both Tara and Corey discursively challenge the notion that good Christian families must share the same religious beliefs, practices, and values, as well as the notion that family unity despite religious belief and value differences should be maintained in good Christian families, reframing the competition of the DRE and DOI to depict distance as a win-win solution.

Overall, these examples render unmistakable the emergence of two hybrids within the utterances of participants in the present study: arguments that (a) avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values allows for a sense of family cohesiveness to be maintained; and (b) distance can increase relationship satisfaction. In these instances, the struggle between the DRE and DOI ceased as they came together yet remained distinct from one another. New meanings emerged for participants, demonstrating that some were able to create win-win outcomes satisfying aspects of both discourses.

Dialogically Contractive and Expansive Discursive Practices in Dialogical Interplay

While the description of the nature of discursive struggle and the relative power of each discourse that I have offered thus far functions generally, examining participants' utterances in greater detail allowed me to discover the microlevel discursive practices that characterized the meaning-making process with respect to Christian family identity. Baxter (2011) lamented that relatively few researchers who use RDT investigate "how struggle is constituted at the microlevel in texts" (p. 169). I endeavored to deepen my analysis by considering where participants' talk and their reports of the talk of their conservative Christian parents would be situated on a continuum between monologue and idealized dialogue. In other words, I sought to identify the discursive practices employed by participants and, reportedly, by their conservative Christian parents, that are dialogically contractive and those that are dialogically expansive. Dialogically contractive discursive practices solidify and perpetuate the dominance of a centripetal discourse by challenging and excluding centrifugal discourses, whereas dialogically expansive discursive practices function to remove centripetal discourses from their privileged positions, giving centrifugal discourses, those discourses previously relegated to the margins, the potential to gain traction (see Chapter 2, pp. 67-69). To follow, I highlight the presence of both discursive practices in the utterances of participants in the present study.

Dialogically Contractive Discursive Practices

Baxter (2011) argued that, in addition to dialogically contractive discursive practices identified by Bakhtin (1975/1981) and by engagement researchers (Martin & White, 2005), many dialogically contractive discursive practices initially identified by Deetz (1992) are useful for examining interpersonal interactions, including those of

parents and children. These dialogically contractive discursive practices include *disqualification*, *naturalization*, *neutralization*, *topical avoidance*, *subjectification of experience*, and *pacification*. I recognized four of the six of these, all but subjectification of experience and pacification, in participants' reports of the speech of their conservative Christian parents. Baxter (2011) also pointed to the dialogically expansive discursive practices of *entertaining* and *attributing*. I described entertaining and illustrated its potential for dialogic expansion above, when demonstrating that a small number of participants' conservative Christian parents entertained the DOI, presenting it as a discursive position with some legitimacy. In my analysis, I did not identify any instances of attributing. Because of the facts that dialogically contractive discursive practices solidify and perpetuate the dominance of a centripetal discourse by challenging and excluding centrifugal discourses and that when those championing centrifugal discourses employ such practices they become expansive rather than contractive, such practices could only be found in the speech of conservative Christian parents that participants reported. Therefore, to follow, I describe and provide examples of the functions of the four dialogically contractive discursive practices that I found in participants' reports of the speech of their conservative Christian parents: *disqualification*, *naturalization*, *neutralization*, and *topical avoidance*.

Disqualification

First, Baxter (2011) described disqualification as a dialogically contractive discursive practice in which when a person who is aligned with alternative discourses is presented by those aligned with a dominant discourse as ineligible to speak about a subject because they are not an expert or lack the right to express themselves for some

reason. Some conservative Christian parents reportedly portrayed participants as lacking the necessary wisdom or life experience to know better than to voice a discourse other than the DRE. Other conservative Christian parents reportedly portrayed participants as not being qualified to voice the DOI because of their differing religious beliefs and values or their identities. An example of disqualification came from a story that Breanne told me about the time that she was present at a religiously motivated dedication of a house bought by her parents. She explained:

[My father] had a dedication to the house, so he invited all his people from Monday night Bible study to come and sing and pray.... There had to have been at least 20 or 30 people there.... It was a comfort zone, even though I [had been] removed from [that Bible study group] for years. I knew everybody, [and I] knew all the songs [and all of] the [Bible] verses. We were in the midst of praying and sharing [out loud].... I started praying like I normally would.... So, after that meeting, the next day, [my parents] had me over [to their house] and they lectured me about praying and sharing, and they told me I was not allowed to do that because I'm gay, and that I disrespected [my father] and his family and everybody else there for being in the moment and sharing. I did have another light conversation about, "I'm still a Christian. God still loves me, you know. Just because I don't go to your church doesn't mean I'm not finding a church or finding peace and forgiveness," and he disagreed with me. So, that was that turning point. (36:10-37:52)

In this example, Breanne is reportedly disqualified twice, from (a) "praying and sharing" at her parents' religious gatherings; and (b) calling herself a Christian. The justification

that Breanne said that her parents gave for silencing her was that she is not qualified to do either because she is gay. By not allowing Breanne to say what she thinks, her conservative Christian parents are able to preserve the dominance of the DRE and not allow for consideration of the DOI. From this example, it is clear that disqualification was present in participants' reports of their parents' speech.

Naturalization

Second, according to Baxter (2011), naturalization is a dialogically contractive discursive practice in which a person who is aligned with a dominant discourse fortifies that discourse by presenting it as if it were simply an unquestionable, unambiguous fact of reality. Reportedly, participants' conservative Christian parents often portrayed their religious practices in this way; as just what one ought to do. One example of such naturalization is present in Derek's story about when his conservative Christian parents forced him to sign up to take confirmation classes. Derek said:

It was pretty straightforward, as far as [the fact that] my mom [said], "Hey, you're eligible to sign up for confirmation, and we're going to." It wasn't like, "Do you want to?"... I don't like being told, "This is how it is." I was told, "You are being signed up." And I didn't like that because it was a huge commitment that [my parents] didn't have to do.... I didn't want to sit there for two hours every Thursday. And I said, "I really don't want to do it. Do I have to?" And, [for my mother,] it wasn't even a question of "We can talk to your dad." ... It was like, "No, you're doing this." And we just argued. I don't remember what was said, but it was a screaming match for a while.... It might have not been those exact words, but me going to this, it was non-negotiable. I don't remember the exact words, but

it was like, “No, this is happening. There’s no [debate]. You’re going. I’m not even going to give you an option. What would happen if you didn’t?” Like, “You’re going.” (1:04:58-1:06:42)

Derek’s parents, his mother especially, reportedly treated the idea that he will go to confirmation classes as a given, a non-negotiable fact. Derek’s mother’s question “What would happen if you didn’t?” suggests that doing so is unthinkable to her and underscores her perception of a lack of an alternative reality. Like Derek, many participants reported that their parents discursively treated Christian rituals, such as praying and attending church, as unquestionable as well. Clearly, naturalization is present in participants’ reports of their parents’ speech.

Neutralization

Third, neutralization is a dialogically contractive discursive practice in which a person who aligns with a dominant discourse disguises the value-laden nature of the discursive position they occupy (Baxter, 2011). *Proclaiming*, supporting one’s argument by reporting speech of experts which suggests that those experts support one’s position, is a particularly effective form of neutralization. Many conservative Christian parents reportedly proclaimed that they were right to voice the DRE because it is in accordance with God and/or the Bible. An example of this came from Noah, a White, male, heterosexual, 22-year-old self-described “hopeful agnostic” (20:36-20:39). In the process of explaining why his religious beliefs and values are meaningfully different from those of his conservative Christian mother, Noah said that whenever he is struggling, his mother appeals to the highest possible authority, God. Noah said:

[My mom] shapes everything around [God's plan], like how she views the world and how she views really hard-hitting things like death. And I guess [our religious belief and value differences are] meaningful in that when I'm going through a hard time, or if I'm even doing really well, I either have to.... My mom would like me to thank God or pray to God that things are going to be better. But, in my eyes, [the way] I see it [is] that I need to fix those things, or I need help from somebody else. That feels a bit more tangible. That's a pretty big difference between us two. She puts it in the hands of God, I guess, and I can't. I don't feel like I can do that. But that's mostly her reaction to when things happen. And [there was] this one particular moment that was really rough for me. It was a girl that I didn't even know, but she died. And she belonged to a really religious family, and she died in a car accident. I don't know where. She probably had never done anything wrong, ever, and it hit me really hard because I don't see how, if she was so faithful and so good.... Again, I didn't even meet this girl, but if she was so faithful and so good, why would God take her off the earth? I struggled with that for a bit. And I was asking my mom about it, and she was just saying stuff like, "It's God's plan" or "It was God's will." But I think that's ridiculous. I don't think that's true. I don't know why that would be, anyway. But it's His plan?!? Who benefits from that? Or, what does that lead to? That was a big point of contention, because [my mom], like I said, likes to put everything in the hands of God, and I don't. I can't do that. (21:56-24:06)

In this example, Noah reported his mother's speech, and his mother, in turn, indirectly reported the speech of God. She reportedly presented God's divine plan as an explanation

for events that did not make sense to Noah. From Noah's perspective, she did so to bolster her discursive position in an attempt to get him to share in her trust and belief in God without recognizing the value implications of accepting this as true.

Topical Avoidance

Fourth, Baxter (2011) described topical avoidance as a dialogically contractive discursive practice in which a person who aligns with a dominant discourse suggests that discussing a subject would be improper for some reason, thereby not allowing alternative discourses to be voiced. From the perspective of the adult child participants, conservative Christian parents often insisted on avoiding the topic of participants' differing religious beliefs and acting as if their differing religious beliefs and values did not exist, especially in the presence of people outside of their immediate families. One such example came from Winston who described what his parents would say to keep from revealing to his grandparents the true reason why he did not attend church with his parents whenever he visited them. He said:

My mom and her siblings are all very much trying to appease their parents, my grandparents. And we're all very much invested in pretending that everything is good and ideal and no conflict ever occurs, even when it's very obvious that something bad is going on. It really wasn't about me and my parents negotiating that, so much as my parents trying to negotiate on my behalf to my grandparents why I was no longer attending church. And so, after church every Sunday, my entire extended family goes to the Olive Garden.... And so, my grandparents, obviously, were [like], "Oh, we didn't see you in church [today]." Then my parents would step [into my conversation with my grandparents] and be like, "Oh,

well, you know, college is so exhausting. He was just so tired, so we told him to stay in,” or something like that. They would always make these weird little excuses for me or just blatantly lie and be like, “Oh, well, he just got in. He just drove up for the day because he had something off.” [It was] that level of deception, where it was very much about managing appearances rather than discussing what was actually going on, because there was none of that happening. (30:51-32:01)

Reportedly, Winston’s parents avoided the topic of his differing religious beliefs and values in front of his grandparents. By providing excuses and lying, Winston’s parents were able to save face and prevent the DOI from being addressed.

Overall, these examples illustrate that, according to participants, conservative Christian parents utilized a variety of dialogically contractive discursive practices. They made attempts to further promote the dominance of the DRE and keep the DOI from challenging it.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I addressed my second research question: “How, if at all, do the discourses that inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values interplay to create meaning for such adult children?” Although considerable research on the socialization of young family members into their families’ religions has been undertaken previously (e.g., Colaner, 2008; Mullikin, 2006; Park & Ecklund, 2007), as well as on what may happen to parent-child relationships when socialization efforts fail (e.g., Ellison et al., 1996; Trinitapoli, 2007), scholars have not yet examined how cultural and

relational discourses interplay and create meaning for conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. Within this chapter, I shed light upon how such adult children talk about their communication with their conservative Christian parents and negotiate the meaning of being a good Christian family. To follow, I summarize each major category of results and consider their implications.

Discursive Interplay

The interplay of the discourses of righteousness and exclusion and openness and inclusion featured diachronic separation, polemical synchronic interplay, and transformative interplay. Apart from two hybrids, the interplay between the two discourses was polemical; participants made discursive efforts to destabilize righteousness and exclusion while privileging openness and inclusion. These discursive efforts included (a) spiraling inversion; (b) negation; (c) countering; and (d) entertaining.

Spiraling inversion occurs when a shift in dominance takes place between two discourses for a particular activity or subject over time (Baxter, 2011). I found two categories of spiraling inversion reflected in participants' talk: (a) explaining that they used to uphold the DRE when they were younger but now give voice to the DOI; and (b) explaining that they have switched back and forth between voicing the DRE and DOI throughout their lives. Negating occurs when a speaker refers to an alternative discourse before immediately dismissing it (Baxter, 2011). I identified two categories of participants' negation as well: (a) emphasizing autonomy in response to their conservative Christian parent(s) voicing the DRE during an interaction; and (b) emphasizing the strangeness of the DRE after first reporting the speech of an unspecified

person or group voicing it. Countering occurs when a speaker rejects a discourse that they are expected to embrace and voices an alternative discourse instead (Baxter, 2011). I uncovered three circumstances of participants' countering: (a) expressing the desire to stay part of their families or to keep their families together despite their differing religious beliefs and values; (b) emphasizing the change that has occurred with respect to their religious beliefs and values; and (c) illustrating the difficulty of maintaining relationships with conservative Christian parents without sharing the same religious beliefs and values. Entertaining occurs when a speaker presents a discourse as one of many possible discursive positions (Baxter, 2011). I revealed two categories of participants' entertaining: (a) admitting to feeling guilty for causing emotional pain and/or straining their relationships with their conservative Christian parents; and (b) admitting or alluding to fearing going to hell. Transformative hybridity occurs when discourses stop competing with one another and join together while remaining distinct from each other to make the emergence of new meanings possible (Baxter, 2011). I found two discursive hybrids in participants' talk: (a) avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values to maintain a sense of family cohesiveness; and (b) being distant to increase relationship satisfaction.

Implications of Discursive Interplay

The discursive interplay of the DRE and DOI has meaningful implications for religious belief change, parent-child communication about religious differences, and individual and family identity. These results from the present study show that participants' talk about their communication with their conservative Christian parents regarding their differing religious beliefs and values was informed by and reflects cultural

and relational discourses about what it means or should mean to be a good Christian family. Participants' status as simultaneous insiders and outsiders in their families saturated their talk as they attempted to remove righteousness and exclusion from its dominant position and force consideration of openness and inclusion. To displace the DRE, participants championed free and open discussion among members of Christian families, especially parents and their children, and advocated for acceptance of members with differing religious beliefs and values and family cohesion despite religious belief and value differences.

By engaging the diachronic separation in the form of spiraling inversion and entertaining that I identified in participants' talk, I reveal the extent to which the DRE dominates cultural and relational understandings of what it means to be a good Christian family. The spiraling inversion and entertaining demonstrate the difficulty that many of these participants experienced as they found that they did not share their parents' religious beliefs and values and attempted to voice the DOI. While the majority of participants described a single, gradual switch from privileging the DRE to privileging the DOI, they often described making this switch as terrifying and heartbreaking, both for themselves and for their conservative Christian parents. In addition, those participants who oscillated back and forth between the two discourses give an indication of the confusion and existential anxiety that often accompanied their experiences. For most participants, acceptance of the DRE was encouraged by their parents and other family and community members from a very young age, and it took many years for these participants to recognize that holding another discursive position was a legitimate possibility. When they did, the relational and psychological turmoil they experienced

following this realization led some participants to experience depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and/or existential crises, and a few participants contemplated or attempted suicide at least partly because of these difficulties. These findings offer further evidence that the sense of certainty and peace that religious identity often provides (Hogg et al., 2010; Ysseldyk et al., 2010) can erode along with one's religious faith, perhaps especially when such an erosion of faith, or any deviation from the religious beliefs and values of one's family, violates one's family identity (Scharp & Beck, 2017; Worman & Kartch, 2022; Worwood, 2020). These mental health-related findings from the present study are particularly valuable for family therapists, clergy, and other mental health professionals who counsel individuals who experience religious belief and value change and families whose members are religiously diverse. These findings also have implications for scholarly understanding of mental health challenges and warrant a future family communication study that is focused more directly on the mental health outcomes associated with disclosure of religious belief change or parent-child communication about religious belief and value differences. For example, researchers could examine the impact of such communication on the stress levels of conservative religious parents and/or their differently believing adult children by taking blood and/or salivary samples of the stress hormone cortisol before and immediately following conversations of conservative religious parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values about those differences.

By engaging the discursive negating and countering of the DRE that I identified in participants' talk, I show that participants attempted to assert their own individual religious identities while still identifying as members of Christian families. Although

scholars, such as Scharp and Beck (2017), have uncovered the reconstructed identities of people who have left forms of Christianity, the results of the present study provide new insight into how such individuals who have reconstructed their religious identities communicate those identities to their parents. Participants who negated the DRE exhibited what Scharp and Beck (2017) labeled “liberated self identities” (p. 141) by communicating that they intended to be true to their inner selves rather than conform to the religious identities of their families. Participants in the present study who countered the DRE communicated their reconstructed identities as “disenfranchised victims,” “redeemed spiritualists,” educated and questioning individuals [similar to “(wo)men of science”], or “[Christians] in name only” (Scharp & Beck, 2017, pp. 139-144) by communicating that they had come to adopt differing religious beliefs but still wanted to have positive relationships with their conservative Christian parents.

The finding that participants negated and countered the DRE also demonstrate that some participants rejected the DRE more forcefully than other participants, which has implications for scholarly understanding of the role that people’s perceptions of morality play in their response to voicings of alternative, especially dominant, discourses. Often, participants negated the DRE when they perceived that their conservative Christian parents’ voicings of the DRE perpetuated injustice and/or immorality. For example, some participants negated the DRE when coming to the defense of people who are not Christians, people in the LGBTQIA+ community, people of color, and people who are incarcerated. Participants negated the DRE particularly often when they themselves were within one such group of people or had a close relationship with someone who was within one such group of people. Researchers who have undertaken

RDT-informed studies have noted the role that people's perceptions of morality play in shaping discourses (e.g., Hintz & Brown, 2020; Suter et al., 2015), but not in responding to voicings of alternative discourses. Future researchers undertaking RDT-informed studies, especially from a critical perspective, should extend the theory by exploring whether the strength of one's sense of justice is linked to a tendency to negate alternative discourses, and dominant discourses in particular, or by exploring whether other traits are linked to tendencies to contend with alternative discourses in specific manners.

The finding that participants most commonly countered the DRE with the DOI when expressing their desires to stay part of their families or to keep their families together despite their differing religious beliefs and values has implications for scholarly understanding of family communication patterns and resilience. Many of the participants who countered the DRE when expressing such a desire also suggested that they perceived the likelihood that their conservative Christian parents would ever embrace the DOI, and, by extension, the participants themselves, to be quite low and had all but given up this hope. Scholars have previously acknowledged that shared beliefs, including religious beliefs, may be linked to individual and family resilience and hope (e.g., Boumis et al. 2023; Greef & Du Toit, 2009; Oh & Chang, 2014). Boumis et al. (2023) recently studied associations between Family Communication Patterns theory (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Ritchie, 1991; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), the positivity/efficacy of memorable messages regarding persevering through difficult times, and Communication Theory of Resilience's (Buzzanell, 2010, 2019) resilience processes. They found "that conformity orientation shared a direct effect only with change-related resilience processes," and, considering Fife et al.'s (2014) finding that conformity orientation is associated with

stronger religious belief, argued that “one possibility is that individuals raised in families higher in conformity orientation may be more likely to rely on their faith to reframe meanings during difficult events (i.e., alternative logics)” (Boumis et al., 2023, p. 27). Their findings, together with the findings of Fife et al. (2014) and from the present study with respect to when participants countered the DRE with the DOI, warrant future family communication research to be undertaken using Family Communication Patterns Theory, Communication Theory of Resilience, and RDT. For example, researchers may explore linkages between family communication patterns, resilience, and particular ways that adult children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their conservative religious parents communicatively contend with these differences, given that memorable religious messages and/or a strong sense of shared family identity, a possible outcome of conformity orientation (Horstman et al., 2018), likely do not serve as a sources of strength from which such individuals may draw and may, in fact, make resilience more challenging for them. Additionally, researchers could use the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load in conjunction with RDT to investigate whether relational maintenance efforts on the part of conservative Christian parents and/or their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values can and do produce emotional reserves deep enough to help them cope with the difficulties they often experience due to their differences.

By engaging the transformative hybridity that I identified in participants’ talk, I demonstrate that, for some participants, the DRE and DOI can be positioned in such a way as to coexist and come together to create new meaning. The finding that transformative hybridity occurred when participants argued that avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values when communicating with their conservative Christian

parents allowed them to maintain a sense of family cohesiveness has implications for scholarly understanding of the impact of topic avoidance on parent-child relationships. Although topic avoidance has often been found to be detrimental to such relationships (e.g., Birditt et al., 2009; Dailey & Palomares, 2004; Golish & Caughlin, 2002b), some participants in the present study and their conservative Christian parents used it strategically to prevent their religious belief and value differences from further disrupting their relationships. The results regarding topic avoidance support Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) argument for acknowledgment of "the 'both/and' interplay of openness and closedness" (p. 132) and Caughlin's (2004) assertion, "Even people who highly value openness sometimes simultaneously believe that good family or relational communication involves a willingness to avoid topics" (p. 482). Golish and Caughlin (2002a) found that adolescents and young adults engage in topic avoidance with their parents and stepparents and that deep conversations, including conversations about personal beliefs, were among the topics that adolescents and young adults avoided the most. Given that one third of the participants in the present study were 28 years old or younger, the fact that some of them avoided the topic of their religious belief differences with their conservative Christian parents is not entirely surprising, but this finding also suggests that the topic of religious belief differences may be commonly avoided by more than just adolescents and young adults. Golish and Caughlin's (2002a) finding that the most common reasons for avoidance were self-protection, relationship protection, and conflict also aligns with participants' motives for avoidance in the present study. In light of Afifi and Schrodtt's (2006) finding that uncertainty about one's family is positively and linearly associated with avoidance of the state of one's family for adolescents and young

adults in stepfamilies and postdivorce, single-parent families, and the uncertainty felt by participants in the present study about their own discourse-dependent families, it is likely that their uncertainty gave them additional reason to avoid the topic of their differing religious beliefs and values when communicating with their conservative Christian parents.⁷

The results of the present study regarding topic avoidance also have implications for privacy management. Citing Afifi and Guerrero (2000), Petronio (2002) stated, “Boundaries may be protected using topic avoidance. There are situations where collectives decide that they are better served when they do not talk about a particular private topic in order to preserve the group boundaries.” (p. 102). The results of the present study regarding topic avoidance suggest that members of collectives, such as families, do not always collectively make the decision to avoid a topic as Petronio implies, and that when the decision to avoid a topic is made by one member of a collective, rather than all members making the decision together, the discursive positioning of the member who makes the decision to avoid a topic can impact both the centripetal-centrifugal struggle and the relationships of the members of the collective. When participants in the present study, who voiced the DOI, avoided the topic of their differing religious beliefs and values, competition between the DRE and DOI ceased and a transformative hybrid that allowed participants to maintain a sense of family

⁷ Galvin (2014) argued that “discourse plays an increasingly important role in constructing family identity when the cultural indicators of blood and/or law are less salient or absent” (p. 18). The participants in the present study identified as regarding the differences in their religious beliefs and values from those of their conservative Christian parents as personally meaningful. Many, if not all, participants suggested that the cultural indicators of blood and/or law were less salient to them in light of these religious belief and value differences. All participants communicated with their conservative Christian parents in efforts to negotiate the meaning of being a Christian family. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the families of participants in the present study in to be discourse-dependent.

cohesiveness emerged. However, when participants' conservative Christian parents, who voiced the DRE, avoided the topic of the differing religious beliefs and values of their children, these parents perpetuated the dominance of the DOI over the DRE.

Communication researchers should use RDT to extend Communication Privacy Management Theory (Petronio 2002; 2010) by shedding additional light on the process by which collectives, or members thereof, decide to avoid topics as well as the impacts of this decision-making process. As Baxter (2011) points out, doing so would also allow researchers to consider expression in addition to nonexpression in the form of topic avoidance as well as to consider topic avoidance as a meaningful symbolic act rather than a behavioral choice.

The results of the present study regarding distancing align with previous findings that distancing can help make strained parent-child relationships more manageable (e.g., Allen, 2018; Allen & Moore, 2016; Scharp & Thomas, 2016). Allen and Moore (2016) found that people who identified as “functionally estranged” from a family member, including a parent or child, indicated that their “routine [and meaningful] silence constitutes [an ongoing] relationship that is distant where there once was closeness” (p. 291), and that people in such relationships reluctantly accepted them or preferred them over close relationships. Only two participants in the present study explicitly labeled themselves as being or having been estranged from their conservative Christian parents. Nevertheless, participants' talk of the meaning that emerged from transformative hybridity when they argued that distance can increase relationship satisfaction is strikingly similar to the meaning that participants in Allen and Moore's (2016) study and Allen's (2018) study ascribed to their functionally estranged family relationships. I

contend that many of the participants in the present study could be reasonably considered to be, or to at one point have been, functionally estranged from their parents. The fact that most participants in the present did not label their relationships with their conservative Christian parents as estranged can be explained by what Allen and Moore (2016) argued is the prevalence of binary thinking about estrangement and family (dis)function among both scholars and laypeople. I echo their call for scholars to trouble binaries such as these by taking a critical approach to family communication research and employing theories such as RDT.

The results from the second research question I asked make plain how adult children of conservative Christian parents described their talk with such parents about their differing religious beliefs and values, as well as how they collectively negotiate the meaning of being a good Christian family in light of their differences. Using a critical, RDT-informed perspective, I demonstrated that most participants resisted the DRE, offering the DOI as an alternative discourse worthy of serious consideration. I also found that, despite the weight of the cultural and relational discourses in favor of the DRE, the participants in the present study envisioned good Christian families as discussing and accepting religious diversity among members and keeping them together despite differences. As I have shown, these findings have considerable implications for communication scholars, family therapists, clergy, and other mental health professionals because they illuminate the dominance of the DRE and the impact of its dominance over the DOI on the communication and relationships of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. I will discuss these implications further in the final chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview of the Chapter

In the present study, I examined the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with religious belief and value differences. From interviews with the adult children, I identified the cultural and relational discourses that informed and are reflected in their talk and illustrated how the interplay of these discourses impacts how such parents and adult children make meaning of their Christian family identities. Although I am not the first researcher to examine parent-child communication across religious difference (e.g., Colaner et al., 2014; Morgan, 2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022; Soliz & Colaner, 2015), socialization in families (e.g., Knapp et al., 1981; Medved et al., 2006; Rittenour, 2020; Sillars, 1995; Wang, 2014; Wood, 1982) or how family members communicate to make meaning of their family identities (e.g., Koenig Kellas, 2005, 2015; Koenig Kellas & Trees, 2013; Phillips & Soliz, 2020; Thompson et al., 2009), I heeded the calls of other researchers (e.g., Allen, 2018; Baxter & Norwood, 2015; Baxter et al., 2021; Morgan, 2020; Phillips & Soliz, 2020; Scharp & Thomas, 2022; Suter, 2016) to apply a critical dialogical lens to such communication. With the results of the present study, I extend the work of previous researchers, especially in applying Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT) to understand and demonstrate how relational parties interact and link religious beliefs and values, parent-child relationships, and family identity. Through my work in the present study, I facilitate a more nuanced and detailed understanding of religious socialization efforts in families and of how members make sense of their family identities when such efforts are unsuccessful and religious difference is salient.

I summarize the most important findings of the present study in this final chapter. First, I consider the theoretical implications of these findings. Second, I discuss the contributions of these findings to the body of knowledge regarding parent-child religious communication and socialization, family communication across religious difference, and making meaning of religious family identity. Third, I discuss the practical implications of these findings for family therapists, clergy, and other mental health professionals. Fourth, I consider the limitations of the present study. Fifth, I describe my future research and application endeavors.

Summary of Results

In Chapter Three, I elucidated the results produced as an answer to the first research question, in which I asked, “What discourses inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values?” My analysis of the interview data yielded two discourses in participants’ talk: (a) righteousness and exclusion (DRE); and (b) openness and inclusion (DOI). I found that the DRE was mostly voiced in participants’ reports of the talk of their conservative Christian parents. The DRE consisted of three themes: (a) family as a cohesively-believing unit; (b) family as a cohesively-practicing unit; and (c) family as a cohesively-valuing unit. Participants described these themes as expectations that their conservative Christian parents had for them as members of good Christian families, and it was evident that these parents had internalized messages from cultural discourses outside of their parent-child relationships. I found that the DOI was mostly voiced by the participants themselves. The DOI consisted of three themes as well: (a) family as a means of discussion; (b) family as a means of acceptance; and (c) family as cohesive despite

difference. Participants described these themes as their desires for what a good Christian family ought to offer its members. It was clear that participants' desires were influenced by cultural discourses outside of their parent-child relationships, and that most participants communicated their differing religious beliefs and values to their conservative Christian parents by drawing from both cultural and relational discourses.

In Chapter Four, I articulated the results produced as an answer to the second research question, in which I asked, "How, if at all, the discourses that inform and are reflected in the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with different religious beliefs and values interplay to create meaning for such adult children?" Through my analysis of the interview data, I discovered that the interplay of the DRE and DOI manifested in (a) polemical interplay, including diachronic separation in the form of spiraling inversion (which occurs when a shift in dominance takes place between two discourses over time), synchronic interplay in the forms of negating (acknowledging an alternative discourse so as to reject it), countering (disclaiming an expected discourse and supplanting it with an alternative discourse), and entertaining (suggesting that a given discursive position is but one of several viable discursive positions); and (b) transformative interplay, including synchronic interplay in the form of a discursive hybrid (which occurs when discourses cease to be in competition and come together while remaining distinct from each other to allow new meanings to emerge). I also found that participants' conservative Christian parents used the dialogically contractive discursive practices of disqualification (which occurs when a person aligned with a dominant discourse presents a person aligned with an alternative discourse as ineligible to speak about a subject), naturalization (which occurs when a person aligned

with a dominant discourse presents that discourse as if it were an unquestionable, unambiguous fact of reality), neutralization (which occurs when a person aligned with a dominant discourse disguises the value-laden nature of their discursive position), and topical avoidance (which occurs when a person aligned with a dominant discourse suggests that discussing a subject would be improper for some reason) to prevent the DOI from being voiced by the participants. I showed that the DRE attempted to reinforce the dominant understanding of good Christian families as those characterized by shared religious beliefs, practices, and values, and that the DOI sought to destabilize the DRE by framing good Christian families as those characterized by open and free discussion and acceptance of differing religious beliefs and values and family cohesion despite differences in religious beliefs and values among members.

Theoretical Implications

RDT is valuable to the extent that it can be used to develop better understanding of meaning-making processes and bring to light the power relations inherent in such processes (Baxter et al., 2021; Suter & Seurer, 2018). The theory has proven useful to scholars studying how discourses, both those that enjoy a privileged, taken-for-granted status in society and those that are kept to the margins and are often unacknowledged, inform family communication as members negotiate the meaning of family, especially for those in discourse-dependent families (Baxter et al., 2021). Therefore, RDT was an ideal sensitizing tool to guide my work in the present study concerning how the interplay of discourses impacted the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values and how such adult children make meaning of being a good Christian family. In the present study, I highlighted how

religious individual and family identities are co-constructed, constrained, and contested within families headed by conservative Christian parents. By investigating the role that discursive competition plays in these processes, I have provided further evidence for Baxter's (2011) assertion that interpersonal and family communication and relationships do not exist in a vacuum; they are influenced by the socio-cultural milieu in which they exist.

My use of RDT in the present study led to three important observations. First, using RDT as a critical lens through which to examine the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values allowed me to consider issues of power (Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al., 2021). Baxter (2011; Baxter et al., 2021) asserted that power relations are pivotal to the meaning-making process because the process involves unequal discourses competing with one another for privilege. In the present study, the struggle between the DRE and DOI quickly became apparent; the DRE attempted to maintain its dominant position as the master narrative of the good Christian family and prevent the alternative discourse of openness and inclusion from being taken into account, while the DOI fought to be perceived as a legitimate alternative. The relative privilege and marginalization of these discourses became clear when I viewed power as located in the positioning of these discourses themselves, rather than in structural systems, the participants, or their conservative Christian parents. I embraced the postmodern critical tradition in which Baxter most recently located RDT (Baxter et al., 2021). As Baxter and Asbury (2015) explained, doing so entails recognizing:

Discourses construct power through their knowledge claims: taken-for-granted assertions about what is and what ought to be. The presumptions we have about the world... constitute power.... The postmodern project is less about understanding how stable institutional and ideological structures constrain the everyday world and more about critically resisting seemingly stable systems of meaning and taken-for-granted constructions of the world. (p. 192)

With this understanding of how power is discursively obtained and contested came an appreciation for the impact of the competition between the DRE and DOI on meaning-making and a desire to expose how this competition played out among participants and their conservative Christian parents.

Second, using RDT in the present study also allowed me to develop better understanding of how the relationships and individual and family identities of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values are constituted in communication (Braithwaite et al., 2018; Braithwaite & Suter, 2022). Cultural and relational discourses about the meanings of family, parent-child relationships, and Christianity influenced how these parents and adult children made sense of themselves as individuals, as part of parent-child dyads, and as members of Christian families in light of their meaningful differences. Scholars such as Colaner (2008) and Morgan (2019; Morgan & Koenig Kellas, 2022) have previously shed light on parental expectations and social norms within Christian families as well as the impacts that violating these expectations and social norms may have for members. In the present study, guided by RDT, the interplay of cultural and relational discourses was constitutive in participants' talk regarding their communication with their conservative Christian

parents about their religious belief and value differences, including participants' reports of their conservative Christian parents' speech.⁸ As the DRE and DOI competed, participants and their conservative Christian parents negotiated the meaning of their relationships and identities. My analysis of this interplay made explicit participants' conservative Christian parents' expectations for their children, in addition to the incongruence of these expectations with participants' own desires for what it ought to mean to be a good Christian family.

Third, using RDT in the present study allowed me to illustrate the RDT concept that utterances are part of an utterance chain, linked to past and anticipated utterances (Baxter, 2011; Baxter et al., 2021). This was important as the theory enabled me to demonstrate the influence of previously circulated discourses on the talk of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. It was clear that their talk did not exist in isolation from their own past statements to each other or from what generalized others within their culture had long-since articulated.⁹ As a result, I was able to trace back participants' utterances, including the utterances that participants attributed to their conservative Christian parents, other family members, and other Christians, to their discursive sources and determine which discourses were salient for these parents and children at a given time. The meaning that participants and their conservative Christian parents gave to being a good Christian family was, like the meaning of all semantic objects, "embedded in a larger web of meaning – a system of

⁸ Baxter (2011) described reported speech as talk that consists of direct quotes or paraphrases of a person or group of people other than the speaker. She pointed out that reported speech "functions to personify a discourse" (p. 159).

⁹ Mead (1934) described the generalized other as a mental amalgamation of significant others and members of one's broader culture from whom one derives one's sense of the rules, norms, and expectations of society.

integrated bits of meaning” (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). My micro-level examination of the meaning making process in this relational context enabled me to put its complexity on full display.

Taking these contributions into account, I argue that my work in the present study has two main implications. First, the present study serves as evidence that turning point interviews can be an effective means of co-creating a text for contrapuntal analysis. Although early RDT-informed studies involved turning points (Baxter, 2011), the researchers who undertook such studies did so by engaging earlier versions of the theory and concentrated on articulating dialectical tensions at play in various relational forms. For example, some of these researchers (e.g., Baxter, 1990) first described turning points that had been identified in previous research to participants in their studies as being common among specific relationship parties before subsequently asking participants whether and how they experienced these turning points, as well as to rate the importance of each turning point on a Likert-type scale. Other researchers who undertook early RDT-informed studies (e.g., Baxter & Erbert, 1999; Erbert, 2000; Graham, 2003) first tasked participants with identifying and describing relational turning points before asking participants to rate the importance of various dialectics at each of these turning points. While this deductive, quantitative approach was helpful, Baxter (2011; Baxter et al., 2021) developed ways of using RDT that would be more impactful. For example, she stressed that an inductive, qualitative approach allows researchers “to infer the various strands of meaning at play within the broader discourses” and reveal “the multivocal ways in which the discursive interanimation of [discourses] organizes meaning making in talk” while avoiding the oversimplification that may occur when researchers fail to

engage in in-depth assessment of talk (Baxter, 2011, p. 63). She also recognized that although identifying the discourses in competition and their significance has value, the true liberating potential of RDT comes from researchers using it to illuminate the process of struggle by which meaning is made. As Baxter (2011) put it, “Making the black box of praxis more translucent” allows researchers to distinguish privileged and marginalized discourses from each other and reveal specific features of discursive struggle and their dialogic potential (pp. 121-122). I took these exhortations to heart in the present study and returned to a turning points methodology with the updated goals of (a) identifying common turning points in the relationships of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values; and (b) centering participants’ attention on moments of major relational change to help them clearly articulate shifts in relational and personal identity.

As she developed what she called RDT 2.0, Baxter (2011) argued that because researchers who take a turning points approach to change, as opposed to a stage approach, elicit turning points from participants using Huston et al.’s (1981) retrospective interviewing technique, they exhibit a bias toward quantitatively measuring change. Although I utilized the retrospective interviewing technique to direct participants in the present study to identify and describe the turning points in their relationships with their conservative Christian parents that took place over time, I have not undertaken a quantitative analysis of the turning points graphs that I co-created with the participants during interviews. Instead, in the present study, I investigated the qualitative changes that participants described at each turning point by analyzing participants’ talk. Doing so allowed me to shed light on the discursive struggle that took place and its impact on the

meaning-making process. The structure of the turning points interviews kept participants' focus on the meaningful instances of relational change that they had experienced. Given that turning points are times during which the interplay of discourses and the links in the utterance chain become more readily apparent (Baxter, 2011), it is likely that structuring participant interviews in this way allowed for greater insight into these aspects of discursive struggle. For this reason, researchers undertaking RDT-informed studies should consider utilizing turning points interviews even when solely examining change qualitatively.

Second, I engage the results of the present study to develop further evidence for the central claims Baxter (2011; Baxter et al., 2021) made in RDT. The interplay between the two discourses in the present study demonstrated that the meaning that the adult children of conservative Christian parents made of their Christian family identity was constituted through communication. Through their interactions with their conservative Christian parents, the participants came to understand their conservative Christian parents' expectations for what it means to be a good Christian family (i.e., the DRE) and articulated their own desires for what it could or should mean to be a good Christian family (i.e., the DOI). The struggle between these discourses, as well as the unequal power of these discourses, was evident in participants' talk; to make sense of their Christian family identity, participants who privileged the discourse of openness and inclusion could not simultaneously embrace the dominant discourse of righteousness and inclusion without contradiction. When participants described their communication with their conservative Christian parents about their religious belief and value differences, it was clear that the utterances of both parties were informed by and reflected cultural and

relational discourses about good Christian families, both those discourses articulated in the past and those they anticipated being voiced in the future. I use the results of the present study and suggest that Baxter's (2011; Baxter et al., 2021) assertion that people co-construct the meaning of a semantic object by voicing the unequal, competing cultural and relational discourses about that semantic object that exist at one of the four points in the utterance chain held true with respect to the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. That is, as participants in the present study described their communication with their conservative Christian parents, they made plain that the meaning of being a good Christian family is dominated by the DRE, which consists of cultural and relational messages regarding good Christian families, yet resisted and challenged by the DRE, which consists of other cultural and relational messages regarding good Christian families.

Broader Knowledge Contributions

The results of the present study are important contributions to critical family communication research (Manning & Denker, 2021; Moore & Manning, 2019; Suter, 2016) as well as to the understanding of parent-child religious communication and religious family identity. First, the results of the present study challenge the dominant conception of a Christian family as one that shares the same religious beliefs, practices, and values. The participants in the present study introduced the DOI as an alternative conception: Christian families as families in which members may have differing religious beliefs and values, openly discuss their religious belief and value differences, perceive themselves to be accepted as family regardless of their religious beliefs and values, and maintain a sense of togetherness despite their religious belief and value differences. In

their communication with their conservative Christian parents, the participants in the present study sought to legitimize their conception of Christian family identity, even though doing so often involved putting parent-child relational harmony at risk. Rather than acquiesce to the DRE, the participants made discursive moves such as negating and countering to force serious consideration of the DOI and promote dialogical expansion, recognizing that their religious beliefs and values did not need to be controlled by their conservative Christian parents. Making this challenge known forwards the critical family communication project by revealing the vulnerability of a discourse that is often taken for granted (i.e., the DRE) and demonstrating that taking a critical approach to interpersonal and family communication research can illuminate power differentials between discourses.

Second, from these results, I illuminate the ways that adult children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their conservative Christian parents talk about these differences and how messages are constitutive of the meaning of what a good Christian family can be. Most participants in the present study perceived their discursive positioning with respect to Christian family identity to be incompatible with their parents' expectations of them as members of Christian families. This incompatibility was made evident by the themes that constituted the discourses of righteousness and exclusion and openness and inclusion and by the nature of the competition that existed between these discourses. Because of this perceived incompatibility, participants described experiencing tension between their individual religious identities and the identities of their Christian families. The participants articulated the cultural messages that encouraged discussion and acceptance of religious belief and value differences in Christian families yet also

expressed concerns about their differing religious beliefs and values and the challenge of maintaining a sense of family unity despite these differences. Although tensions between family members due to the identity threat posed by religious belief and value differences have been identified by others (e.g., Scharp & Beck, 2017), from the results of the present study, I provide new insight into the role that cultural and relational discourses play in creating such tensions. In addition, from the findings of the present study, I submit that conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values should interrogate their perceptions of their respective discursive positionings as incompatible and seek to identify and build upon areas of agreement in order to ease these tensions.

The two discursive hybrids that I identified in participants' talk are particularly noteworthy: (a) arguing that avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values allows for a sense of family cohesiveness to be maintained; and (b) arguing that distance can increase relationship satisfaction. Their presence demonstrates that not all participants perceived the DRE and DOI as incompatible opposites. The hybrid created when participants argued that avoiding the topic of religious beliefs and values allows for a sense of family cohesiveness to be maintained has implications for scholarly understanding of topic avoidance in parent-child relationships. Some participants asserted that by avoiding the topic of their differing religious beliefs and values with their conservative Christian parents, they were able to prevent these differences from becoming a point of contention between them and their conservative Christian parents. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, this finding is contrary to that of many studies which suggest that topic avoidance has a negative impact on parent-child relationships (e.g., Birditt et al., 2009; Dailey &

Palomares, 2004; Golish & Caughlin, 2002b) and demonstrates that whether it is the parent or adult child who enforces the topic avoidance impacts the nature of the discursive interplay. Utilizing a dialectical perspective allowed me to shed light on the fact that strategic topic avoidance is not a value-free decision and warrants more research informed by both RDT and Petronio's (2002) Communication Privacy Management Theory.

The hybrid created when participants argued that distance can increase relationship satisfaction has implications for scholarly understanding of parent-child estrangement. Some participants asserted that creating distance between themselves and their conservative Christian parents, both physical and psychological, made their relationship with their conservative Christian parents more satisfying. As I mentioned in Chapter Four, Allen (2018; Allen & Moore, 2016), using a dialectical perspective, demonstrated that although the dominant conception of estrangement is that it is an extreme, all-or-nothing approach to relationships that is undesirable and ought to be used as a last resort, estrangement is sometimes experienced as a functional means of maintaining a relationship and preferable to a closer relationship. The results of the present study regarding distancing, which could only have been found by utilizing a dialectical perspective, provide additional support for the notion of functional estrangement. Additionally, these results suggest that functional estrangement may be a viable means of relational maintenance for family members with seemingly insurmountable ideological differences of other kinds as well.

Third, from the results in the present study, I argue that I shed new light on the continued socialization efforts that conservative Christian parents made with respect to

their adult children. Researchers have indicated that within religious families, cultural expectations and parental socialization are powerful influences on adult children's religious beliefs and values (Baumbach et al., 2006; Colaner & Giles, 2008; Colaner et al., 2014; Pearce & Thorton, 2007), but few have examined whether or how religious parents make ongoing socialization efforts. Many participants in the present study indicated that their parents actively attempted to socialize them into conservative Christianity for many years into their adulthood. When the participants in the present study communicated with their conservative Christian parents about their differing religious beliefs and values, these parents attempted to reiterate their expectations for what members of good Christian families believe, practice, and value. Many of the participants perceived that their conservative Christian parents tried to convince them to conform to these expectations by deliberately inducing feelings of guilt, shame, and/or fear in the participants. Some participants perceived that their conservative Christian parents intentionally excluded them from participation in family social events and/or religious gatherings. Some participants also recalled that their conservative Christian parents rearticulated memorable messages that they had been telling the participant since childhood about who the participant truly is or ought to be, especially regarding the religious beliefs and values that the participant ought to hold. These responses by conservative Christian parents to their apparent failures to socialize their children into the religious identity of their family may continue over many years and can come to impact the lives of adult children's spouses and children as well. These can be thought of as extreme measures to which such parents, in their desperation to save their adult child's soul, perceive they must resort.

Practical Implications

The results of the present study have many implications for professionals, such as family therapists, other mental health professionals, and clergy, who counsel religiously diverse families and/or individuals whose religious beliefs and values meaningfully differ from those of their parents and other family members. All clinical mental health practitioners must be aware of, sensitive to, and able to skillfully address matters of religion and spirituality (Sandage & Strawn, 2022). Walsh (2019) asserted that it is important for family therapists “to address the spiritual dimension as a possible source of suffering, as well as a potential resource for healing and resilience” (p. 73). She went on to say, “Spiritual concerns and faith differences, commingled with family dynamics, can fuel relational strife and tear loved ones apart” (p. 87). The results of the present study provide an in-depth look into how such strife may occur in religious families and the impact of such strife on the individual and collective identities of these families’ members. When I facilitated a post-hoc member reflection with participants from the present study, they confirmed that the findings were accurate depictions of their own lived experiences and what they perceived to be the experiences of other adult children with religious beliefs and values that differ from those of their conservative Christian parents. Like many participants in qualitative research interviews (Rossetto, 2014), the participants in the present study also recognized the therapeutic benefits of their involvement. The participants expressed that both their original interviews and the member reflection were cathartic experiences for them; they said that being a participant in the present study helped them feel less alone and in solidarity with others with similar parent-child relational dynamics.

Walsh (2019) also suggested that family therapists ease tensions that arise due to differing religious beliefs and values among family members by “facilitating a spiritual pluralism” (p. 79). However, from the results of the present study, I suggest that doing so may be a very difficult task, and the discursive hybridity I identified in the talk of some participants suggests that there may be other viable, healthy ways for family members with religious belief and value differences to relate to each other. I suspect, based on the findings from the present study, that professionals, such as family therapists, other mental health professionals, and clergy, who counsel religiously diverse families and/or individuals whose religious beliefs and values meaningfully differ from those of their parents and other family members could help to improve such family communication and relationships by working individually with each member to articulate their individual conception of what it means to be a family of a particular religion, and then helping them to discern (a) the origins of the cultural and relational discourses that inform and are reflected in their talk of their individual conception; and (b) their concerns about what may happen if one of their family members does not conform to this conception. I envision this work being undertaken in a manner somewhat akin to an Internal Family Systems approach (Schwartz, 2021; Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020).¹⁰ The knowledge that their communication with each other is informed by both cultural and relational discourses may help conservative religious parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values to recognize and better understand the influences on how they

¹⁰ Therapists utilizing the Internal Family Systems model help clients to discover and acknowledge the inner parts of themselves that are motivated by deep-seeded concerns informed by their early experiences, including the messages that they received and were exposed to as children by their parents. The aim of the approach is to help clients reduce their dysfunctional behavior by communing with these inner parts of themselves and assuring these parts that they do not need to be in control of the client’s behavior.

make meaning of their religious family identity and encourage them to reevaluate how they relate to each other. Perhaps doing this work would promote discursive hybridity and allow members of these families to recognize truth in multiple perspectives.

Both Walsh (2019) and Patterson et al. (2000) observed that matters of spirituality and religious belief are encountered frequently in family therapy and are often found to be a component of problems that families present, including problems that are not overtly spiritual in nature. As I indicate from the results of the present study, some of the points of contention between members of religious families, such as racism and socio-political values, may appear, at first, not to be linked to religious beliefs or spirituality but are indirectly informed by or have implications for religious beliefs or spirituality and vice versa. Other researchers have uncovered this connection as well. For example, Hall et al.'s (2009) meta-analysis of religious racism revealed that "greater religious identification, greater extrinsic religiosity, and greater religious fundamentalism were all positively related to racism" (p. 130). Another example was provided by Guth et al. (1995), who found "impressive strength and consistency in the association between religious variables [conservative eschatology, religious tradition, and religious commitment] and environmentalism" (p. 371), with conservative eschatology being the "strongest religious predictor of environmental perspectives" (p. 364). By considering the findings from these and other such studies, in addition to the findings from the present study, those who counsel religiously diverse families and/or individuals whose religious beliefs and values meaningfully differ from those of their parents and other family members may better understand the relational and identity challenges that having differing religious beliefs and values from one's family members may pose, and would

do well not to underestimate the pervasive influence of religion in the lives, communication, and relationships of their clients.

Limitations of the Present Study

In addition to its many strengths, the present study has two main limitations. One limitation of the present study was how I co-created the data with participants using the turning points methodology. The major benefit of this method is providing a means of visually depicting how these relationships develop over time. At the same time, relying on participants' retrospective accounts of how their communication and relationships with their conservative Christian parents occurred over time poses two potential issues. First, as Baxter (2011) pointed out, facilitating a single interview with each participant at one point in time, rather than obtaining longitudinal data, limited my ability to distinguish between spiraling inversion and segmentation, the two forms of diachronic interplay (i.e., whether the changes in the dominance of discourses were due to the passage of time or due to the topical or activity domain). I could have made a more precise determination as to whether the dominance of one discourse over the other changed for a given topical or activity domain or based on the topical or activity domain if I had co-created data with participants at several points across time. However, given the timeframe of my dissertation, doing so would have presented another set of unique challenges, especially collecting data during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Second, interviewing only the adult children of conservative Christian parents, rather than interviewing such parents and adult children together or separately posed an additional challenge. It prevented me from witnessing the communication of these parties firsthand and limited me to considering the speech of conservative Christian parents only

as reported by their adult children. Given the differences in the power of the discourses voiced by the adult children participants and their conservative Christian parents, the participants may have characterized their communication with their conservative Christian parents in ways that overemphasized the marginalization of the DOI and the domination of the DRE. However, I made the decision to interview adult children only for the present study because of the difficulty that I have previously experienced when attempting to recruit conservative Christian parents to be interviewed about their communication with their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values, as well as the relational difficulties associated with parent-child communication regarding such differences. As I mentioned in Chapter One, I previously conducted a pilot study of the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values (Worman, 2020). Despite a widespread call for participants and a very active push on my part, my advisor's part, and the parts of others who tried to help me recruit, only a small number of conservative Christian parents were willing to be interviewed. In these interviews, parents described perceiving themselves as failures for not having successfully socialized their children into their families' religion. Given this and other findings that conservative Christian parents commonly perceive passing on their religious beliefs and values to be a duty given to them by God (Dollahite & Marks, 2005; Mahoney, 2005), it is conceivable that such parents feel too ashamed to come forward. Additionally, although interviewing conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values together would have allowed me to consider their communication with one another more directly, I decided against doing so because, along with practicality concerns, including face threats for parents (Miller-Ott & Alverez, 2022) and personal and

relational risks for parents and adult children, I was wary of causing or exacerbating relational strain on study participants. Future researchers should attempt to find ethical ways to involve conservative Christian parents more directly in studies of their communication with their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values.

My Future Research and Applications

Near the end of Chapter Four, I made some suggestions for future researchers of the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. I will conclude this dissertation by highlighting the research studies that I intend to undertake in the years to come on this topic. First, I intend to reexamine the interview data and turning points graphs that I co-created with the participants in the present study to establish a typology of turning points in the relationships of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. As a starting point, I will first utilize both the Colaner (2008) and Morgan (2019) typologies to develop an initial codebook because of the similarity between the topics explored in those studies and the topic of the present study. I will then engage in open coding of all turning points that do not fit into the initial codebook, as Tracy (2020) advised. Following Braithwaite, Waldron, et al. (2018) and Oliver-Blackburn et al. (2022), I will allow the most salient code for each turning point to supersede all others, and I will determine this by closely considering how participants describe its meaning. I will also classify each turning point as positively-, negatively-, or neutrally-valanced on the basis of its change in overall relational well-being scores from the previous turning point. Identifying the turning points in the relationships of the participants and their conservative Christian parents will create better understanding of

how these relationships develop over time as well as the kinds of moments during which the competition between discourses regarding Christian family identity are most evident.

Second, I will address some of the limitations of the present study with subsequent research studies. For example, I endeavor to continue studying the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values by interviewing conservative Christian parents rather than adult children. Doing so would allow me to shed light on whether additional or entirely different discourses inform and are reflected in the talk of these parents about their adult child's differing religious beliefs and values, as well as the interplay of the discourses present in such parents' talk. I plan to adapt the research design from the pilot study of such communication that I previously undertook to examine conservative Christian parents' talk from a critical dialectical perspective as well. I would also like to study such communication by interviewing conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values together or by observing them communicating with each other. However, I have not yet found a way to do so that would be practical or ethically sound due to the emotional difficulty and negative relational consequences that may accompany such conversations.

Third, I plan to further investigate the decision made by some participants and some of their conservative Christian parents to soften their discursive positions when communicating with each other about their differing religious beliefs and values, often when entertaining the alternative discourse. This study will be informed by facework theory (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006; Goffman, 1955, 1967; Lim & Bowers, 1991; Moore, 2016) and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). I want

to identify other circumstances in which such parents and children soften their discursive stances as they communicate with each other and what they are attempting to achieve by doing so. Using facework theory, I will uncover whether, how, when, and why conservative religious parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values use communication to preserve their faces as they communicate with each other. Using politeness theory, I will reveal whether and how conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values soften their discursive positions in efforts to protect their autonomy, fellowship, and/or competence faces.

Fourth, I endeavor to undertake a study of the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values that is informed by Communication Theory of Identity (Jung & Hect, 2004; Soliz & Colaner, 2018). When participants in the present study developed religious beliefs and values that differed from those of their conservative Christian parents, they had to renegotiate and decide how to communicate their individual and family identities. These findings, as well as those of Morgan et al. (2020), suggest the possibility of gaps between the personal, enacted, relational, and communal layers of their identities. This study will help me to focus more directly on how the communication of differing religious beliefs and values is linked with one's self-concept.

Fifth, I intend to further explore the impact of uncertainty on the communication of differing religious beliefs and values. Many of the participants in the present study described experiencing a high amount of uncertainty about their identities and family relationships due to their differing religious beliefs and values. By undertaking a study informed by Uncertainty Management Theory (Brashers, 2001, 2007), I would be able to

shed light on whether and how adult children of conservative Christian parents communicate with those parents in attempts to make meaning of and contend with this uncertainty. I would also be able to investigate the roles of appraisal and emotion in adult children's uncertainty management.

Along with furthering my research agenda, I also plan to do some translational work with my findings. I plan to partner with therapy clinics designed to serve clients with religious trauma and other religion-related issues to create seminars and workshops for family therapists, other mental health professionals, and clergy so that they can more effectively counsel religiously diverse families and/or individuals whose religious beliefs and values meaningfully differ from those of their parents and other family members. I also plan to collaborate with churches to create workshops aimed at laypeople in religious families so that I can more directly equip them with the knowledge and tools necessary for having more effective and compassionate conversations about differing religious beliefs and values.

In the present study, I have provided a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the discourses that informed and are reflected in the talk of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. I have demonstrated the power differential of these discourses, how they competed against each other, and the impact of this discursive struggle on how such adult children made meaning of their Christian family identities. Both the participants and their conservative Christian parents drew upon relational and cultural discourses as they communicated about their meaningful religious belief and value differences. With the present study and my future research, I aim to further illuminate the communicative and relational

challenges that families experience as they contend with religious belief and value differences among their members.

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APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

305 Louise Pound Hall / Lincoln NE 68588-0329/402-472-2070 / <https://comm.unl.edu>

University of Nebraska – Lincoln

**Informed Consent: Discursive Struggles Reflected in the Communication of
Conservative Christian Parents and their Adult Children with Differing Religious
Beliefs and/or Values**

I, Braedon Worman, am studying the communication of conservative Christian parents and their children who do not share their religious beliefs and/or values. I provide you with the following information in order to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in this study. To participate in the study, you must meet the following criteria:

1. You are least 19 years old;
2. You consider one or both of your parents to be conservative Christian(s);
3. You have religious beliefs and/or values that differ from the religious beliefs and/or values of your conservative Christian parent(s);
4. The difference between the religious beliefs and/or values of your conservative Christian parent(s) and your own religious beliefs and/or values is meaningful to you;
5. You have communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) about your differing religious beliefs and/or values.
6. Your communication with your conservative Christian parent(s) has influenced how satisfied you felt with your relationship with your

conservative Christian parent(s) and how much you felt like a part of your family.

If you are unsure about whether you meet the above criteria, please contact me (see contact information on the last page of this consent form). If you are certain that you do not meet the above criteria and do not qualify for this particular study, you should not participate in this study. Please contact me to tell me that you will not be participating. If you meet the above criteria and wish to participate in this study, you must read this entire informed consent and verify that you fulfill the participant criteria and agree to participate by initialing every page, signing and dating the final page, and sending this form back to me in its entirety (via email, preferably). Please keep a copy of this informed consent for your records. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Dawn O. Braithwaite.

If you meet the above criteria, you may participate in this study. If you agree to participate, please contact me to set up a time to be interviewed by me. The interview will be one-on-one and will be conducted using video-conferencing software, such as Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime, unless you request to be interviewed over telephone. Regardless of the means by which the interview is conducted, the audio from the interview will be recorded and transcribed so that I can study it. However, all records of interview content will be kept confidential (see page three for information that may be discussed and/or appear in my conference presentations, PhD dissertation, and submissions to refereed academic journals for publication). Based on experience, I expect the interview to require approximately one hour of your time.

When I contact you for the interview, I will first review this consent form with you.

Second, I will ask you to tell me more about who you are, who your parents are, and the nature of your relationship with them. Third, I will ask you about your religious beliefs, values, and practices, as well as those of your parent(s). Fourth, I will invite you to tell me the story of how you came to develop differing religious beliefs and/or values from your conservative Christian parent(s) and the times when you and your conservative Christian parent(s) communicated about your religious belief and/or value differences – from the time before you communicated about this with them to the most recent time. Fifth, we will work together to create a turning points graph to visually depict when these instances occurred and the extent to which you perceive that they impacted your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s). I will ask questions about each of these instances in order to more fully understand them from your perspective.

A turning point is an event or experience in your life that is filled with unique meaning, and, for our purposes, had considerable impact on your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s), and is important for understanding this relationship.

Turning points range from small moments to big, dramatic occurrences and can be positive or negative.

We will graph these turning points by marking down when they occurred, naming them, and discussing:

1. How satisfied you were with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) at the time of each turning point;

2. How much you felt like a member of your family at the time of each turning point;
3. The communication that occurred at the time of each turning point;
4. Other details relevant to each turning point

At the conclusion of the interview, I will ask you a few more questions about your communication and relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s), including what it has been like and how it impacts you today.

Once I have interviewed all of the participants for this study and analyzed the all of the interview data, which I expect to do over a period of about five months, I will contact you again to find a time convenient for you to participate in a focus group with other participants in this study. A focus group is a group of people who are asked to meet together to provide their opinions and perspectives on a topic. For this focus group, you, together with other participants in this study, will meet with me via Zoom to discuss my initial findings and indicate whether or not they resonate with your lived experience. You will be asked not to simply agree with me or other participants about these findings, as you are the expert on your own lived experiences and my aim is to best reflect how participants describe their experiences of communicating and relating with their conservative Christian parent(s). I expect this focus group to require one hour of your time, but I will allot two hours. The audio from the focus group will also be recorded and will be transcribed and analyzed if I am convinced by one or more participants that I need to make substantial changes to my findings. You may turn off your camera and/or give yourself a pseudonym (fake name) on Zoom during the focus group if you wish to conceal your real name and likeness (If you need help doing so, please contact me at least three days prior to the focus group.). Due to the nature of a focus group, I cannot

guarantee complete confidentiality. Please do not share what is said in the focus group outside of the focus group.

At any time throughout the interview and/or focus group, you are free to take a break, ask me to turn off the recorder, or refuse to answer any questions. You are also free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me, my dissertation advisor, or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

As previously indicated, all records of interview and focus group content will be kept strictly confidential. All other identifying documents, such as this consent form, will be kept confidential as well. All documents and all audio-recordings will be stored on my password-protected personal devices. Your name and identity will not be publicly linked in any way to any of the information you provide. Only my PhD dissertation advisor, Dr. Dawn O. Braithwaite, and I will have access to this information. I will assign each participant a pseudonym and, when writing about or discussing information provided by participants, I will use their pseudonym. However, data may be stored in the UNL Data Repository (UNLDR) through UNL Libraries and individual level data could be shared with a scholarly journal in accordance with their data sharing policies, but would be de-identified.

I plan to analyze the information provided by participants for my PhD dissertation and for other future research projects. I plan to present my findings from my PhD dissertation

and these other future research projects at academic conferences, include them in my PhD dissertation, and submit them for publication in refereed academic journals. To be clear, when writing about or presenting this information, I plan to include demographic information, turning points graphs, and interview excerpts.

You may be participating in this study as an option for research credit or optional extra credit in a communication studies course at the University of Nebraska. This option is dependent on a prior agreement that you must have arranged with your instructor. For those instructors who have chosen to offer this as an extra credit opportunity, students receiving extra credit will be asked to indicate their instructor's name. Your instructor will be informed that you participated in a study in the Communication Studies department, but not the study in which you participated. For participating in this study, you will earn up to 10 research credits for your course. You will not be penalized in any way in your class for not participating in this study. Your course instructor will provide an alternative option for extra credit if you do not wish to participate in this study but would still like to receive extra credit.

For participating in this study, thanks to funding from a Diana Carlin Fellowship and UNL's Department of Communication Studies, you will be compensated US \$10 in the form of an eGift Card sent to the email address you provide. Other than potentially earning extra credit in a UNL communication studies course, there are no other direct benefits to you as a result of participating in this study except potentially gaining a greater understanding of your experience with your conservative Christian parent(s).

However, talking about your communication and relationship with your parent(s) may make you feel uncomfortable. In the event of problems resulting from participating in this study, please contact the UNL Psychological Consultation Center at (402) 472-2351 or other comparable services. Treatment is available on a sliding fee scale. It is the responsibility of each participant to pay for treatment if they choose to seek it out. Any responses, oral or written, will be regarded with the utmost confidentiality.

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate or after the study is complete. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Dawn O. Braithwaite. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that I am unable to answer or would like to report any concerns you may have about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965.

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information presented. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with me, my dissertation advisor, or the University of Nebraska. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your signature also indicates that you are in fact at least 19 years old, you consider one or both of your parents to be conservative Christian(s), you have religious beliefs and/or values that differ from the

religious beliefs and/or values of your conservative Christian parent(s), the difference between the religious beliefs and/or values of your conservative Christian parent(s) and your own religious beliefs and/or values is meaningful to you, and you have communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) about your differing religious beliefs and/or values.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

I understand that I will and agree to be audio-recorded throughout the interview and focus group process. I know that I am free to ask the researcher to turn off the audio-recording device at any time.

Signed _____ Date: _____

Should you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact one or both of the following people:

Braedon Worman

Doctoral Student, Department of Communication Studies

Phone: (406) 270-2151

Email: bworman@huskers.unl.edu

Dr. Dawn O. Braithwaite

Willa Cather Professor, Department of Communication Studies

Phone: (402) 472-2069

Email: dbraithwaite@unl.edu

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Do Your Beliefs Differ from Those of Your Parents?

My name is Braedon Worman and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. I am conducting research on how children of conservative Christian parents communicate with their parents about their religious belief and value differences, and I invite you to participate! I'd appreciate learning from your experiences.

I am seeking participants willing to be interviewed for this research study. All responses to interview questions and other private information will be kept confidential. Each participant will be paid \$5 for their involvement. UNL student participants may also receive research credit in a Communication Studies class.

You are eligible to participate if you:

- Are at least 19 years old
- Live in the United States
- Consider one or more of your parents to be a conservative Christian
- Consider your own religious beliefs and/or values to be meaningfully different from the religious beliefs and/or values of at least one of your conservative Christian parents
- Have communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) regarding your religious belief and/or value differences

Participation in this study will require approximately one hour of your time. Interviews will take place via Zoom at your convenience. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at bworman@huskers.unl.edu or (559) 367-4983.

Thank you for considering your involvement in this study. I hope to hear from you soon! If you know someone else who may be interested in participating, please share this message with them.

Braedon Worman
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Communication Studies
University of Nebraska – Lincoln
305 Louise Pound Hall
Lincoln, NE 68588

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of the communication of conservative Christian parents and their adult children with differing religious beliefs and values. I am grateful that you would take the time to share your story with me. Your experiences and perspective regarding this topic are very important to this research and I look forward to hearing them. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask you – just do your best to answer honestly and in as much detail as you feel comfortable providing.

To participate in this research interview, you must: be at least 19 years old, consider one or both of your parents to be a conservative Christian, have communicated with that/those parent(s) that your religious beliefs differ from theirs, and perceive that such communication has, at times, impacted how satisfied you felt in your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) and how much you felt like a part of your family. You must also perceive the difference between your religious beliefs and the religious beliefs of your conservative Christian parent to be meaningful. Does this describe you?

If so, here's how we will proceed:

First, I'll review the consent form with you so that you fully understand your rights as a research participant. Remember, in order for me to be able pay careful attention to what you are saying, I will be recording the audio of our interview. As the consent form indicates, this will allow me to go back and study what we talked about. You may ask to take a break or for the interview to stop at any time. Just let me know.

Next, I'll ask you a series of questions to get a sense of who you are, who your parents are, and your relationship with your parents.

Following that, I will ask about your religious beliefs and practices, as well as those of your conservative Christian parent(s).

With those details covered, I will invite you to tell me the story of how you came to develop differing religious beliefs from your conservative Christian parents and the times when you and your parent(s) communicated about your religious belief differences – from the first time to the most recent time. As you tell this story, I will listen quietly without interruption. You will have my full attention, though I will periodically be taking some brief notes.

Once you have told me your story, we will work together to create a turning points graph to visually depict when these instances occurred and the extent to which you perceive that they impacted how satisfied you were with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) and how much you felt like a part of your family. I will ask questions about each of these instances in order to more fully understand them from your perspective.

Turn on audio recorder now

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1) I will start by asking you about yourself and your parents to better understand each of your identities:

- a) What is your age? What are your parents' ages?
- b) What is your gender? What are your parents' genders?
- c) What is your race/ethnicity? What are the race/ethnicities of your parents?
- d) What is your sexual orientation? What are the sexual orientations of your parents?
- e) In which U.S. state do you live? In which U. S. state do your parents live? Did you grow up there?
- f) What is the marital status of your parents?
 - If parents are divorced or separated: How old were you when your parents' marriage ended?

2) Next, I'll ask you about your relationship with your parents:

- a) For the purpose of this interview, you can either discuss your relationship with both of your parents, or your relationship with just one of your parents. If both of your parents are conservative Christians, then please discuss your relationship with them both. If only one of your parents is a conservative Christian, please discuss your relationship with that parent only. Will you be discussing your relationship with both of your parents, or your relationship with just one of your parents?
 - If just one parent, which parent? Why?
- b) Are you and your conservative Christian parent(s) biologically related?
 - If not, how are you and your parent(s) related?

c) Starting from the time that you came to live with your conservative Christian parent(s), what percent of time did you live with your conservative Christian parent(s) until you became an adult?

d) In general, how would you describe your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) over the years?

e) On a 1-100 scale, how satisfied were you with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) before you first communicated with this/these parent(s) regarding your differing religious beliefs?

f) On a 1-100 scale, how satisfied are you with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) today?

g) On a 1-100 scale, how much did you feel like a part of your family before you first communicated with this/these parent(s) regarding your differing religious beliefs?

h) On a 1-100 scale, how much do you feel like a part of your family today?

3) Next, I'll ask you about your religious beliefs and practices, as well as those of your conservative Christian parent(s):

a) Are you now or have you ever been a member of a church or other faith-based community? Has one of both of your parents?

- If so, with what denomination(s), if any, are/was these churches or other faith-based communities affiliated?
- During the time that you lived with your conservative Christian parent(s), did your conservative Christian parent(s) take you to and/or

encourage you to participate in a church or other faith-based community?

- If so, how often did you attend?

b) Is/are your conservative Christian parent(s) now or has/have your conservative Christian parent(s) ever been a member of a church or other faith-based community?

- If so, with what denomination(s), if any, are/was these churches or other faith-based communities affiliated?

c) Do you now or have you ever worked professionally for a church or another faith-based business or organization?

- If so, please tell me what position you hold or have held.

d) Do your conservative Christian parent(s) now or have your conservative Christian parent(s) ever worked professionally for a church or another faith-based business or organization?

- If so, please tell me what position your conservative Christian parent(s) hold or have held.

e) You have identified your parent(s) as (a) conservative Christian(s). In what ways does the moniker of 'conservative Christian' describe your parent(s)?

- Where do you think your parent's/s' conservative Christian beliefs come from?

f) During the time that you lived with your conservative Christian parent(s), how important did your religious beliefs seem to your conservative Christian parent(s)? Please explain.

- If what ways, if any, did your conservative Christian parent(s) encourage you to adopt their religious beliefs?

g) How would you describe your own religious identity and beliefs today?

- You have identified your own religious beliefs and those of your conservative Christian parent(s) as meaningfully different. Please describe the ways in which these differences are meaningful to you.
- To what extent have you revealed your current religious identity and beliefs to your conservative Christian parent(s)?
- How fully do your conservative Christian parent(s) know your current religious identity and beliefs?

h) Now that you are an adult, how important do your religious beliefs seem to your conservative Christian parent(s)? Please explain.

- If what ways, if any, do your conservative Christian parent(s) encourage you to adopt their religious beliefs today?

4) Thank you for providing all of that background information. Would you please give me a brief overview of how you came to develop your current religious beliefs?

5) Now we can begin to construct a turning points graph, focusing specifically on instances during which you communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) about your differing religious beliefs. The graph will visually depict when these instances

occurred as well as how satisfied you were with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) and how much you felt like a part of your family during each instance. As we discuss each turning point, I will ask questions about each of these instances in order to more fully understand them from your perspective.

As a reminder, a turning point is a meaningful event or experience in your life that had considerable consequence for your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s), and is important for understanding your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) today. Turning points range from small to dramatic occurrences and can be positive or negative. Do you have any questions about what is meant by a ‘turning point?’

Calibrating the Turning Points Graph

As we discuss the turning points in your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s), I will mark each turning point down using this graph. The bottom of the graph will depict your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) from before you communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) about your differing religious beliefs until today, by months and years. When was it that you first communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) about your differing religious beliefs?

The left side of the graph will depict your perception of how satisfied you felt with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) at each turning point that you identify. You will rate the amount of satisfaction on a 1-100% scale. To help me make sense of this, please tell me what “100% satisfied” would mean to you?

- What would “0% satisfied” mean to you?

The right side of the graph will depict your perception of how much you felt like part of your family at each turning point that you identify. You will rate the amount that you felt like part of your family on 1-100% scale. To help me make sense of this, please tell me what “100% a part of your family” would mean to you?

- What would “0% a part of your family” mean to you?

We’ll start by discussing the first time that you communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) about your differing religious beliefs. At that time, how satisfied were you with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) on a 1-100% scale?

- At that time, how much did you feel like a part of your family on a 1-100% scale?

I’ll mark your answer on the graph.

Plotting and Discussing Turning Points

We are now ready to discuss the turning points in your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s).

Turning Point #1:

Date: During what month and year did this turning point occur? Please give me your best estimate if you cannot recall precisely. I’ll mark this on the graph.

Name: We’ll give each turning point a title so that we can identify it and remember it more clearly. What should we call this turning point? I will write the title on the graph.

Satisfaction: Take some time to reflect on this turning point and your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) at this time. How satisfied were you with your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) on a 1-100% scale at the time of this turning point? I’ll mark your answer on the graph.

Shared Family Identity: How much did you feel like a part of your family on a 1-100% scale at the time of this turning point? I'll mark your answer on the graph.

Description: From your own perspective, please describe what happened during this turning point. Who said or did what?

Probes: [*Skip if answered above*]

- a) Who was there or involved in this turning point?
- b) What was the occasion? What was happening?
- c) Where did the turning point take place?
- d) What did you and your conservative Christian parent(s) (or others) talk about at this turning point?
- e) What was not talked about? Why?
- f) What did you feel and experience emotionally at the time of this turning point?
- g) How and why did this turning point increase or decrease your satisfaction with your relationship with your parents?
- h) How and why did this turning point increase or decrease how much you felt like a part of your family?
- i) Did anyone else, such as a sibling, friend, or another adult, do or say anything during this turning point?
- j) [From turning point #2 and on] If this turning point involved a decrease in your sense of closeness in your relationship with your parents, what most helped you get through this difficult time?
- k) How did this turning point end?
- l) What else should I know to understand this turning point?

[Repeat this plotting process as many times as necessary. It is fine if the participant wants to go back and add an earlier turning point or say more about an earlier turning point]

6) Thank you for discussing and graphing those turning points with me. Let's turn our attention to your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) today.

a) Please describe your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) today. How do you feel about it?

- With respect to your conservative Christian parent(s), what emotions do your experience when you think about your relationship today?

b) During times when your relationship with your conservative Christian parent(s) was/were difficult, what most helped you get through these times?

- What would have been helpful during such times?

c) What, if anything, do you wish you or your conservative Christian parent(s) would have said or done differently during the times when you communicated with your conservative Christian parent(s) about your differing religious beliefs?

d) What, if anything, do you wish you or your conservative Christian parent(s) would change about how you (all) communicate about your differing religious beliefs now?

e) In what ways, if any, has your experience communicating about your differing religious beliefs with your conservative Christian parent(s) influenced how you communicate with others about your religious beliefs and identity?

f) What advice about communication would you give to people whose religious beliefs are different from those of their conservative Christian parent(s)?

g) What advice would you give to conservative Christian parents regarding communicating with their children who have differing religious beliefs?

h) Are you a parent?

- If so, how, if at all, has your experience communicating about your differing religious beliefs with your conservative Christian parents influenced your communication about religious beliefs with your own children?

i) What else should I know about communication between conservative Christian parents and their children with differing religious beliefs – in terms of your own experience or such communication in general?

j) Why did you volunteer to participate in this interview with me?

k) How, if at all, do you feel that being interviewed today has affected you?

l) Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up group interview with other participants in this study via Zoom?