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RUNNING HEAD: DEPRESSION AMONG RELIGIOUS COLLEGE WOMEN

Enduring Deep Sorrow:
Depression Among Religious College Women

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Abstract

The transition into college can lead to stress which can lead to depression in both men and women (e.g. Lopez & Gormley, 2002). Depression cripples both men and women. The lifetime risk of major depression is 10-25% for women and 5-12% for men (Greenspan, 2001). Mild symptoms rob men and women of energy needed for academic and social pursuits (Beeber, 1999). Depression results in poor over-all functioning, emotional behavioral problems and low self-esteem (Reinherz, Giaconia, Hauf, Wasserman & Silverman, 1999). Individuals with depression also have more problems in intimate relationships with friends and family (Reinherz et al., 1999).

This exploratory study, which launches a more in-depth investigation of Magee's (2001) unexpected finding about prayer journals, ultimately seeks to understand how to promote resiliency against threats to healthy development among religious college-aged women. This is a narrow inquiry guided by the research question: *Among college-aged women with a Christian belief system, what relationship exists, if any, between their conceptions of happiness and belief in God?*

Selected findings, based on survey data from college-aged women who self-identify as Christian, provide a framework to more fully understand the role that one's spiritual beliefs play in young adult women's psychological and social development. The findings from this study suggest that depressed women who are religious do personal writing relating to social justice/change and to break the isolation of feeling alone more often than religious women who are not depressed. The findings further suggest that religious women's conceptions of happiness relate to themselves and their relationships. Their conceptions of happiness do not include a relationship to the world. The researchers present three explanations to examine these findings.

Enduring Deep Sorrow:

Depression Among Religious College Women

A great deal of psychological research has been conducted on the causes and prevention of major depressive disorders. Depression is widely understood as a disorder that causes serious and lingering psychological problems. Even mild symptoms of depression are associated with negative effects on social development (Beeber, 1999), self-esteem (Reinherz, Giaconia, Hauf, Wasserman & Silverman, 1999), and intimate relationships (Reinherz, et al., 1999). One consistent variable found across studies of depression is gender -- women, when compared with men are more likely to be diagnosed with depression. For example, Greenspan (2001) shows that among women, between 10-25% will be diagnosed with major depression at some point in their life compared with men who have a lifetime risk of being diagnosed with major depression at a rate of 5-12%. Additionally, even among college students there is a gender divide related to depression. For example, growing numbers of students are seeking help at college counseling centers, yet more women, compared with men, are presenting with symptoms of depression (Beeber, 1999). This finding is consistent with research showing that stress associated with college entrance can trigger depressive responses, particularly among women (e.g., Lopez & Gormley, 2002). This study further explores depression among college-aged women by analyzing their conceptions of happiness. Specifically, this study looks at conceptions of happiness among religious college-aged women, and the role, if any, that personal writing (i.e., writing in a diary or journal for the purpose of reflecting on one's life) plays in strengthening psychological resiliency against depression or enhancing happiness.

Recent research on factors associated with college-aged women's resiliency against threats to emotional health, such as depression, suggests that personal writing may foster immunity against depression (Magee, 2001). These findings are consistent with other research which shows that disclosure of personal problems through writing reduces stress and improves emotional health (Pennebaker, 1999). In fact, Magee's research on the relationship between personal writing and women's emotional health yielded an unexpected result related to spiritual life. Using her *Personal Writing Questionnaire-R* (PWQ-R) (2001), a data collection instrument administered to college students about their personal writing habits and reasons for engaging in personal writing, she found that women are more likely to write for the purpose of speaking with God. Among the 394 college students who completed the PWQ-R, represented by 39.6% men (n=156 men) and 60.4% women (n=238), respondents indicated their reasons for personal writing by selecting from a list of thirteen reasons. When a Pearson chi-square test was applied to these data in order to determine if gender was a significant variable associated with one's reasons for engaging in personal writing, one of the thirteen reasons was statistically significant, i.e., writing to God.

Among the total 394 college students who completed the PWQ-R, 81 students reported that their personal writing is done in order to "write to God". Of these 81 respondents, 28.4% were men (n=23) and 71.6% were women (n=58). The results of a statistical comparison of these results, using the Pearson Chi-Square test, revealed statistically significant results ($\chi^2(1, n=394)=3.574, p=.059$). Thus, with 95% certainty these findings are not due to chance, but instead gender does appear to play a role in whether one's personal writing is directed to God. Considering these results, it seems somewhat reasonable to say that at least among one large

sample of college students, when compared with men, women are more likely to report that one reason for their personal writing is to write to God.

This discovery generates numerous questions about the connection between spiritual health and mental health among college women such as: *Are college women who believe in God happier than those who do not? Are college women who write diaries to God happier than those who don't? If so, what role does religiosity play in college women's conceptions of happiness?* To begin to more fully understand such questions, we administered *The Women and God Survey* (see appendix A) to women enrolled at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. Because the scope of this paper limits our ability to report entirely on our results, only selected findings and analyses from these survey data will be presented. Eighty college-aged women at this small liberal arts college (i.e., nearly 10% of the female student body) who self-describe as Christian, completed *The Women and God Survey* which consisted of 125 questions about conceptions of happiness, the role of faith in their lives, and personal writing practices. Additionally, respondents completed the *CES-D*¹ depression scale which is a 20 question standardized test widely used as a depression screening tool. The *CES-D* was included to anecdotally support or refute claims made by women taking this survey about happiness.

For this paper, our inquiry is narrowed to the following overall research question: *Among college-aged women with a Christian belief system, what relationship exists, if any, between their conceptions of happiness and belief in God?* Although the results of this study are not generalizable to larger populations, our findings provide a beginning framework for considering the role that spiritual beliefs play in mediating depression among religious college-aged women.

¹ The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) is one of the most common methods for determining an individual's depression quotient. It was developed by Lenore Radloff during research at the National Institute of Mental Health.

Selection criteria for college women participants in this study were limited to three main criteria: full time enrollment in the above mentioned college, regular participation in religious activities, and full or partial agreement with the following Christian statement of belief:

There is one true God, who has created all things, and who exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That the Bible is an authority and divinely inspired. That all people are valuable and created in God's image. However they are alienated from God and each other because of their sin and guilt, and subject to God's wrath. That Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine. That he lived as a perfect example, assumed the judgement due to humans by dying in our place, and was bodily raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. There is salvation by God's grace to all who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone. That the Holy Spirit gives believers new life in obedience through his indwelling and transforming power (adapted from the statement of faith of *InterVarsity Christian Fellowship*).

Our survey research is focused on actively involved, religious college women with the above Christian beliefs for five reasons. Women who are both religious and enrolled in college: 1) are an understudied population; 2) provide a logical starting point to explore questions about the role of spiritual health and mental health among college-aged women; 3) are likely to have considered the relationship between their beliefs and happiness; 4) are likely to engage in personal writing directed to God; and 5) are able to provide insights into strategies, such as personal writing, use to promote happiness. Additionally, we had relatively easy access to this population. One of this study's investigators is presently enrolled in the college where these data were collected, adheres to the statement of Christian beliefs, as shown above, is an active campus leader across several Christian cohorts, and has regularly kept a diary directed to God since adolescence.

The design of this survey research reflects seven predicted outcomes: 1) the majority of respondents will agree with the statement of Christian beliefs, as shown above; 2) the majority of respondents will regularly participate in religious activities; 3) the rate of self-reported

depression among respondents (using the *CES-D* depression scale) will be higher than the rate of self-reported depression among the female student body (i.e., from the college survey site's assessment data); 4) the rate of women's personal writing to God among respondents will be higher than the rate of personal writing to God in the Magee study of personal writing among the female student body; 5) respondents will agree with the statement: *Women who believe in God are happier than women who do not believe in God.*; 6) depressed women's (i.e., mid and high scorers on the *CES-D*) reasons for doing personal writing would vary from the reasons reported by non-depressed women (i.e., low scorers on the *CES-D*); and 7) respondents' conceptions for why college women believers are happier than non-believers will reflect a psychological theory that mental health is measured by the degree to which a person is in relationship to him/herself, to others and to the world (Gilligan, 1982). In conclusion, the results from this study of religious college women's conceptions of happiness have implications for college administrators, clinicians, and psychological researchers.

Theoretical and Contextual Framework

This study of religious college women's conceptions of happiness is informed by, and contextualized within three domains: 1) institutional assessment data on self-reported religiosity and depression among the female student body at the college where participants were enrolled; 2) feminist research on adolescent girls and women psychological and social development; and 3) theological perspectives on the relationship between spiritual and mental health. These areas provide a context for more fully understanding participants' campus culture regarding religiosity and depression, the developmental trajectory of depression in girls and women, and the relationship between spiritual health and mental health.

The campus culture of women's religiosity and depression

At the university where this study was conducted, the Office of University Assessment asks incoming students to voluntarily complete a national survey (i.e., *The Cooperative Institutional Research program* or CIRP) developed by the University of California-Los Angeles to collect data on incoming students, including information about religious preference, participation in religious activities, and self-reports of depression. Typically, nearly 90% or more of first year men and women complete the *Freshman Survey*, administered since 1992. Certainly, the data from the *Freshman Survey* does not correspond specifically with characteristics of participants in this study. Nevertheless, a comparison of selected *Freshman Survey* responses provided by the female students (n=286) during the 2002-03 school year about their religiosity and depression, with data collected on characteristics of the 80 women in this study provides a useful context for considering our overall results (see Table 1).

When comparing the survey data from the *Freshman Survey* and *The Women and God Survey* it is apparent that much higher levels of depression are reported on *The Women and God Survey*. While this can not be a direct comparison it is still worth noting.

Developmental trajectory of depression among adolescent girls and women

When considering conceptions of happiness among women, a brief review of selected theories about the developmental trajectory of depression among adolescent girls and women provides a useful context. Consistently, psychological studies of depression show that adolescent girls and women are at a greater risk, when compared with men, of being diagnosed with depressive disorders (Daley, Hammen, & Rao, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999); Scattolon & Stoppard, 1999; Reinherz et al., 1999). In terms of the prevalence of

depression among women, when compared with men, one study shows that women experience depression twice as often as men (Beeber, 1999).

As shown above, gender is a well-documented variable in diagnoses of depression, yet much more research is needed to explain why such a phenomenon exists. Carol Gilligan, a developmental psychologist with a feminist perspective, provides a plausible point of view. She writes that psychological research has found the story of girls and women's development "hard to trace" (1982, p. 62) because most early psychological studies of human development did not include girls and women as participants. To fill this gap, over the past twenty-five years, Gilligan and her colleagues have conducted psychological research on girls and women's development.

Gilligan's work provides strong evidence that women's depression is rooted in girlhood. Girls face a devastating psychological crisis which she calls "inherently paradoxical" (1982, p. 2). According to Gilligan (1982), girls learn to go out of relationship in order to stay in relationship. These girls become women who give up their "voice...abandon the self, for the sake of becoming a good woman, and having relationships" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2). Gilligan (1982) adds:

For over a century...adolescence has been identified as a time of heightened psychological risk for girls. Girls at this time have been observed to lose their vitality (Bruer and Freud, 1895/1955; Freud, 1895/1955, 1905, 1933/1965; Maudsley, 1879; Skey, 1867), their resilience (See Block, 1990; Demitrack, Putnam, Brewerton, Brandt, and Gold, 2990); Eldern and Caspi, 2990; Hetherington, 1981; Peterson, 1988; Peterson and Ebata, 1987; Rutter, 1986; Simmons and Blyth, 1987; Werner and Smith, 1982), their immunity to depression (Seligman, 1991), their sense of themselves and their character (Deutch, 1944; Horney, 1926); Thompson, 1964)...This crisis in women's development has been variously attributed to biology or to culture, but its psychological dimensions and its link to trauma have been only recently explored.

As this quote attests, girls' and women's struggle for well-being has been noted for over one hundred years. Other developmental psychologists offer similar voice-related explanations for the high rates of depression among women. For example, Belenky et al. (1986), who are well known for their theories on women's development of mind, tells us that "...women do not speak in a different voice. They have no voice at all. Conventional feminine goodness means being voiceless as well as selfless...The fact that women are expected to curtail their voice may account for the greater prevalence of clinical depression and learned helplessness among women than among men"(Al-Issa, 1980; Weissman & Payke, 1974). Even more recent works explain women's depression as rooted in a loss of voice. According to Campbell (2002), depression is also associated with a lack of emotional expression. From an early age girls "tend to internalize their problems" (Leadbetter et al, 1995, p. 139 as cited in Campbell, 2002) with resulting symptoms of "sadness, loneliness, fatigue, worry about things going wrong, not liking themselves, and wanting more friends" (Leadbetter et al, 1995, p. 139 as cited in Campbell, 2002).

Another plausible explanation for high rates of depression among girls and women is related to the past nature of psychological research of adolescence. In the past developmental psychologists viewed emotional turmoil as a normal aspect of adolescence (Daley, et al., 2000). Thus, few researchers examined the causes, symptoms, and prevention of adolescent depression, including investigations of developmental trajectories of depression based on gender. Contemporary studies provide strong evidence that as girls approach adolescence they become increasingly more at risk for depression because they encounter debilitating psychosocial challenges and barriers such as academic failure (Daley et al., 2000), eating disorders, suicidal ideation, unplanned pregnancy, sexual abuse, depression. And, according to Gilligan (1992)

adolescent depression among girls continues into young adulthood and beyond (Reinherz, et al., 1999). Thus, it is not surprising that high school girls enter college with symptoms of depression.

Psychological research about high school girls' transition to college supports the notion that first year female college students suffer a variety of psychological conflicts, including depression (Beeber, 1999). Beeber (1999) also finds that throughout college, women remain at risk for developing depression because women are more prone to manage stress through interpersonal ties and often entry to college is often associated with discontinuation of or interruptions in previous support systems such as friendships, romantic relationships, and family. This begs the question: *How do college women cope with the stress of entering college?* As mentioned above, personal writing is one strategy that college women use to cope with the stresses of college life.

The role of personal writing in girls and women's depression

Findings from exploratory qualitative research suggest that college women use personal writing to promote resiliency against negative mental health outcomes, including depression (Magee, 2001). Additionally, college women report a variety of reasons for their personal writing, including writing for the purpose of "writing to God" -- the main impetus for this study. Female participants in this study are self-described Christians who, for the most part, also engage in personal writing, directed at God. A main curiosity behind this study is the question: *What psychological benefits related to happiness, if any, do religious college women gain from personal writing to God?*

Little is known about the psychological benefits of personal writing to God. A few works, however, provide some preliminary data about the prevalence of personal writing among

college-aged women (Magee, 2001), the prevalence of college-aged women who do personal writing for the purpose of writing to God (Magee, 2001), and the effect of writing on reducing stress (e.g., Pennebaker, 1999).

Social psychologist James Pennebaker is widely recognized as the leading expert in the emotional and physical effects from writing about life events. According to Pennebaker (1999), the healing function of writing comes from the function it serves to organize and integrate emotion into an event and to create a space to reflect and ruminate on events. Pennebaker has conducted studies on the role of writing in college students' lives (1999) and found positive outcomes, for example improvements in grades. On the positive effects of writing about deeply personal or traumatic events, Pennebaker finds that the benefits come from improved "physical health, subjective well being and adaptive behavior styles" (1999, p. 120). In conclusion, Magee's findings extend Pennebaker's claims into the realm of personal writing among college-aged women and further into the relationship between spiritual health and mental health.

The relationship between spiritual health and mental health

Current researchers have argued that spiritual health is the highest goal of development (Johnson & Olpin, 2002). There has also been a growing interest in the intersection between religion and psychology because of the increasing number of people for whom religion is an important part of life (Hawkins, Tan & Turk, 1999). Of particular relevance to this study is the finding that women are more likely than men to both identify themselves as religious and participate in religious services (Ferraro & Kelly-Moore, 2000). Religion is clearly a powerful force in psychological and social aspects of American society, and while this influence is not likely to subside, the integration of psychology and theology has been a slow process (Hawkins, et al., 1999). Hawkins et al. (1999) found in their study on effective forms of therapy that 72%

of the general population claimed religious faith as the most important influence in their lives, but only 29% of mental health professionals viewed religious matters as important for therapeutic work. This clearly illustrates the past and present division between psychology and religion.

The dichotomy between psychology and religion has resulted in very limited research on the intersection of the two disciplines. The research that exists has often emphasized the role religion plays in mental health and illness (Streyffler & McNally, 1998). Some have claimed that strong religious devotion reflects irrationality and mental disturbance, but others have argued that religion promotes positive psychological functioning (Streyffler & McNally, 1998). In their recent study Hawkins et al. (1999) found that private forms of religious coping, as well as more public forms (church attendance), may serve as a buffer against mental disturbances. They also found that healthy psychological qualities and attitudes were positively associated with intrinsic religious orientation (1999).

In recent years the research on the intersection of religion and psychology has been growing (Hawkins, et al., 1999). This is partly due to the trend in psychology of viewing the health of the whole person (Hawkins, et al., 1999). This holistic approach considers all aspects of the person instead of just fragments. Religion is part of the puzzle, an integrative piece that can not be separated (Hawkins, et al., 1999). Researchers have been exploring how religion can have effects on positive psychological functioning (Hawkins, et al., 1999).

Several researchers have argued that religion is an effective coping mechanism for mental illness (Hawkins, et al., 1999; Pargament, Olsen, Reilly, Falgout, Ensing & Van Haitsma 1992; Streyffler & McNally, 1998; Wong-mcdonald, 2000). Wong-mcdonald (2000) describes religious coping as “the way individuals utilize their faith in the management of stress and

problems in life”(1). Hawkins et al. (1999) found that religiosity was associated with lower levels of depression. They also found that religion buffers the adverse effects of stress and depression and contributes to positive well being (1999).

Through examining women and depression two major factors have presented themselves: (1) religion and (2) personal writing. Researchers have documented the benefits of personal writing (Pennebaker, 2001); while the benefits of intrinsic religiosity have also been documented (Hawkins, et al., 1999; Pargament, et al., 1992; Streyffler & McNally, 1998; Wong-mcdonald, 2000). Magee’s (2001) finding that college women keep prayer journals more often than college men points to an intersection between religion and personal writing. It is expected that out of this study the interaction between faith, personal writing and conceptions of happiness will emerge as associated with the depression during the transition into college.

Method

Participants

IWU students volunteered to complete *The Women and God Survey* (see appendix A). Informational flyers were distributed (see appendix B) at four of the IWU Christian religious group meetings (i.e., Faith, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, DRL-3, and the Methodist Student Fellowship). Two criteria had to be met in order to qualify to take the survey. Survey participants had to be females who were currently enrolled as IWU students and in attendance at one of the meetings when the informational flyers were distributed.

Eighty IWU women participated in the surveys. The surveys were given at IWU bible study meetings and all of the women present elected to participate. Of those women 35% were first-year students, 25% were sophomores, 23.8% were juniors and 16.3% were seniors. In terms

of grade point averages 55% had a GPA of 3.5 and above, 38.9% reported between 3.1 and 3.49 and 6.3% were below 3.0. The majority of these women spoke English as their primary language, 96.3%, and for only 2.5% and 1.3% Spanish and French, respectively, were their primary languages. These women also represented mainly middle class suburban lifestyles, 65% were from suburban homes (7.5% urban, 18.8% rural, 7.5% other and 1.3% not reported) and 80% reported middle class incomes (10% upper, 5% lower, 1.3% other and 3.8% not reported).

Procedures

As mentioned above, female IWU students completed *The Women and God Survey* at IWU religious group meetings using the informational flyer and the researcher's explanation of the project.

The researcher contacted each of the IWU Christian religious organizations during the fall of 2002 (i.e., Faith, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, DRL-3 and Methodist Student Fellowship) to verify meeting times. She asked for time on their agenda (during at least one meeting and if needed two meetings) to explain the study and to distribute the surveys to attendees. The surveys were all completed at the meetings and collected.

All of the groups agreed to participate in the study. The researcher visited each group and administered the surveys. There were nine survey administration times. Each time the researcher visited she presented the project and asked for these women's participation. Most of the groups were women's bible studies of approximately 8-10 women. Everyone in the bible studies elected to participate, though the option not to participate was presented.

The surveys were not distributed to participants without researcher supervision. The researcher wanted to oversee the administration of the surveys in the event that participants had questions or needed support as a result of completing the survey. The survey took 25-30 minutes

depending on participants reading and writing speed. All of the surveys were completed during the first 30 minutes of these women's bible studies.

The researcher explained the study, gave instructions, and remained during the entire administration period. She distributed a debriefing form (see appendix C) upon survey completion. The debriefing form gave survey participants some more information about the purpose of the study and referrals for assistance if the survey triggered any emotions or worries.

The researcher also indicated that she was available to speak to anyone who may be upset or in need of support following survey administration. If a survey participant asked for the researcher's support then she would write a one-paragraph summary of this incident and get a copy to Dr. Magee within 24 hours. Dr. Magee would assess if the incident merited any further response, such as a care referral. No students requested researcher support and no care referrals were made during the survey administration. No one appeared upset, flustered or overly emotional upon completion of the surveys.

Once survey data collection was completed, ID numbers were assigned to each survey, and data entry into SPSS began. The researcher had two data sets: quantitative data and qualitative data. The data was coded and entered. The researcher entered all of the quantitative data and a research assistant helped to enter the qualitative data. The data entry took approximately two weeks to complete. Dr. Magee supervised the data entry.

Measures

The Women and God Survey was developed by the researchers for this study (see appendix A). The survey was designed to give these women a chance to tell their stories. The survey was organized in nine parts:

- Part I: Beliefs:

2 questions, one open-ended. This was to indicate if the women self-identified as Christian.
- Part II: About You:

12 questions. These were basic background questions about primary languages, income levels, majors, geographic locations, etc. These were mainly descriptive statistics.
- Part III: About Personal Writing:

6 questions. These were regarding personal writing throughout the lifetime. One open-ended question was posed to allow participants the opportunity to explain their personal writing.
- Part IV: About Prayer Journaling:

11 questions. These were regarding personal writing but more specifically prayer journaling. Included open-ended questions and forced response questions. These questions also investigated the definition of prayer and types of prayer.
- Part V: Religious background:

11 questions. There were regarding personal church attendance, bible reading and the role God plays in women's lives.
- Part VI: Religious Organization Involvement:

5 questions. These were regarding oncampus religious organization involvement.

- Part VII: More about you:
CES-D- the depression scale
- Part VIII: Open-ended questions:
This section included two questions that allowed participants to explain their personal writing further and religious women's happiness levels.
- Part IX: Interest in participating in interview study:
Two questions regarding a possible interview study.

One standardized norm-referenced measure of depression was used in this study. That is the Center for Epidemiological Studies –Depression Scale (CES-D), which is included as part of the survey. This measure is included because of Magee's previous research involving writing, depression and resiliency (2001). It was also included to consider correlations. We are interested in how depression affects women who have faith in God.

The data source for this study is the self-report surveys. The survey data is valuable to form a base of knowledge regarding college-aged women's prayer journals and faith. The surveys include both quantitative measurement and qualitative responses. These different data measures were analyzed and combined in order to more fully address the research question. The survey was used to collect data on the population of women who "write to God". The quantitative data provided a framework within which to examine women and God. The qualitative data helps to fill in the framework.

Results

Quantitative Data Analysis

The data that were analyzed are exclusively from *The Women and God Survey* completed by eighty college women (see Table 2). The first step taken was to give each survey an ID number and to enter all of the quantitative and qualitative data into a statistical database. The survey was divided into nine sections (i.e., 1 Beliefs, 2 About You, 3 About Personal Writing, 4 About prayer journaling, 5 Religious Background, 6 Religious Organization Involvement, 7 More About You, 8 Open-ended Questions, and 9 Interview Study), three of which are not included in this analysis (i.e., sections five, six and nine). These three sections were not included because the data collected was not directly relevant to the overall research question. Some, but not all of the data in each of the other six sections was included in this analysis.

Agreement with statement of beliefs

One of the most essential criteria needed for this study was respondents' full or partial agreement with the statement of belief found on page one of the surveys because the research question was so aligned with religiosity. Because the survey was administered during campus based religious group meetings, it is not surprising that 95% (n=76) of the respondents fully agreed with the statement.

Demographics

Descriptive statistics show that among the eighty respondents, most were Caucasian (85%; n=68). The largest percentage of participants were first year students, i.e., 35% (n=28) with the remaining divided as follows: 25% sophomores (n=20), 23.8% were juniors (n=19), and 16.3% seniors (n=13). English was the first language for all but three women in this study. Additionally, most women grew up in suburban settings (65%; n=52) and in middle income

families (80%; n=64). Most women reported that they had grade point averages above 3.5 on a 4 point scale (53.7%; n=48) with only 5.0% (n=4) indicating that their grade point average was below 3.0.

Personal Writing

Respondents answered six questions about their personal writing which was defined as "any writing that you do, such as freewriting or poetry in a diary or in a journal, that you do to reflect on your life" (see Table 2). Regarding the act of personal writing, nearly all of the women reported that they have done personal writing in their lifetime, i.e., 95% (n=76) and most also reported that they currently do personal writing, 78.8% (n=63). One finding that stands out is that more than at any other age, these women began personal writing at age 12, i.e., 21.3% (n=17) with over half reporting that they began personal writing at age 12 or under, 51.5% (n=42).

Regarding frequency of personal writing, most women are personal writers. Nearly 40% reported that they do personal writing once or more per week. Further, 77.5% reported that they currently do some type of personal writing. When asked what types of personal writing they did, it became clear that these women engaged in several different types (see Table 4). The majority of women reported that they do freewriting (77.5%; n=62), this was followed by a majority of women who report writing down famous quotes (58.8%, n=47).

Prayer Journaling

Respondents answered nine questions regarding prayer journaling which was defined as "any personal writing that you do that includes prayer" (see Table 5). The majority of respondents reported including prayers in their personal writing (76.3%; n=61). Interestingly 52.5% of respondents stated that they keep a journal including prayers and 17.5% keep a journal

that is only prayers. 76.3% of respondents also report directing some to all of their personal writing to God (n=61). This finding is extremely interesting to this study due to the interaction between personal writing and faith.

Respondents also reported the reasons that they do personal writing. Thirteen choices were presented: (1) a loneliness indicator, (2) to record daily events, (3) to access the self, (4) to reflect on social change, (5) to provide temporary relief of daily stress, (6) tell the truth, (7) to break the isolation of feeling alone, (8) to give myself a boost, (9) to hide secret acts or thoughts, (10) to complete creative writing or freewrites at school, (11) to communicate or write about God, (12) to reflect or solve problems with friends or relationships, and (13) to share thoughts with others in letters or gifts (see Table 6).

The seven most frequently selected choices were: (5) to provide temporary relief of daily stress (78.8%), (11) to communicate or write about God (75%), (3) to access the self (68.8%), (1) a loneliness indicator (61.3%), (12) to reflect or solve problems with friends or relationships (60%), (2) to record daily events (53.8%), and (6) tell the truth (52.5%).

CES Depression Scale

All of the eighty respondents took the CES-D. The majority scored low (77.5%; n=62). This indicates little to no risk for mild or major depression. However, 22.5% scored in the mid to high range of the instrument. 12.5% scored in the mid range while 10% scored in the high range. These two categories indicate that these respondents are at risk for mild to major depression.

Pearson's Chi-Square

In order to determine statistically significant correlations between variables, Pearson's chi-square was run on several selected categorical items across personal writing, prayer journaling, and depression scale scores.

Pearson's chi-square correlations were run to compare the different types of personal writing and whether or not respondents included prayers in that type of personal writing (See Table 7). Only one significant correlation was revealed. Participants who freewrite are more likely (87%) to include prayers in their personal writing than participants who do not freewrite (64%) are to include prayers in their personal writing ($\chi^2(1, n=80)=3.743, p=.053$).

A chi-squared correlation was run between writing to God and including prayers in personal writing. It was statistically significant that the women who include prayers in personal writing are more likely to write to God (93%) than the women who don't include prayers in their personal writing (33%) are to write to God ($\chi^2(1, n=73)=26.376, p=.000$).

Pearson's chi-square correlations were also run for participants' scores on the CES-D in relation to personal writing and prayer journaling. There was a statistically significant correlation between two reasons for doing personal writing and scoring mid/high on the CES-D (see Table 8). Women who chose reason 7 (i.e., to break the isolation of feeling alone) were more likely (39.3%) to score mid/high on the CES-D than women who didn't choose reason 7 (9.3%) were to score mid/high on the CES-D ($\chi^2(1, n=71)=9.149, p=.002$). The same effect in the opposite direction was found true when running the correlation between low CESD scores and reason 7. Women who chose reason 7 (i.e., to break the isolation of feeling alone) were less likely (90.7%) to score low on the CESD than women who didn't choose reason 7 (60.7%) were to score low on the CESD ($\chi^2(1, n=71)=9.149, p=.002$). Also significant was that women who scored high on the CES-D were more likely (71%) to write for reason 4 (i.e., to reflect on social

change and social justice) than women who didn't score high on the CES-D were likely (29%) to write for reason 4 ($\chi^2(1, n=71)=4.913$).

As shown in Table 8, women who score high on the CES-D are more likely to write out of feelings of isolation than women who score low on the CES-D. Women in this study, who do personal writing because of reason 7 appear to write in order to "break the isolation". Women in this study, who do personal writing because of reason 4 appear to write in order to "reflect on social change and justice". It appears that the women of this study who score high on the CES-D are more likely to write to reflect on social change and justice than are the women of this study who score low on the CES-D. These two findings are statistically significant.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Sections of *The Women and God Survey*, a pencil-paper instrument, provided blank space for respondents to provide short answers to open-ended prompts. In parts of the survey, respondents were asked to provide further explanation for quantitative responses, but there were only four questions included in the survey that were aligned with the study's overall research question. There four questions were: *Please say more about the kind of personal writing that you do and what you write about (Q #20); How do you define prayer (Q #21)?; Please share anything else that you would like us to know about your prayer journaling (Q #25); Do you believe that religious college women are happier than college women who are not religious (Q #50)?* With volunteer assistance, respondents' written responses to these four questions were entered into a Microsoft Word file, i.e., all responses to each question were compiled, in order to carry out, a commonly used qualitative data analysis approach known as thematic coding (Maxwell, 1996).

Thematic coding is a qualitative categorizing strategy, in which the data is fractured and rearranged into categories that “facilitate the comparison of data within and between these categories and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 1996; pg 78).

The first step in the thematic coding process was to review all of the respondents' responses to the four open-ended questions. See Table 9 for a summary of the number of respondents to each question.

As Table 9 illustrates, most of the women in this study provided answers to these four open-ended questions. For the purpose of this paper, however, our analysis is limited to the responses that the women provided to question fifty, *Do you believe that religious college women are happier than college women who are not religious?* Analysis of the qualitative responses to this question is a logical starting point to more fully understand how this sample of religious college women view happiness, which is central to this paper's focus.

The first step taken to analyze women's responses to question fifty was to divide the responses into three categories: 1) those who agreed with the statement, i.e., religious college women are happier than college women who are not religious; 2) those who disagreed with the statement, and 3) those who both agreed and disagreed with the statement. Almost all of the women in this study agreed with the statement. Sixty-six of the eighty women in this study (82.5%) agreed that religious college women are happier than college women who are not religious, or were in the "both agreed and disagreed" category. Thus, 12 women disagreed with the statement. Although the women who disagreed with this statement provided interesting responses, the focus of this paper is on those who agreed with the statement because of the small number of women in this study who disagreed (n=12). The responses made by those who disagreed with the statement will become part of future analyses of these data.

Because our main research question pertained to conceptions of happiness, these data were considered using a grounded theory approach (Maxwell, 1996). A grounded theory approach does not presuppose categories but rather considers each response as it relates to the research question(s). One decision that we made had to do with a typical analytical dilemma. Often a respondent does not provide only one response to an open-ended question. Most women in this study wrote responses to question fifty that indicated more than one reason for their opinion on why they believe that religious women are or are not happier than non-religious college women. For the purpose of this analysis, these data were coded based on a duplicated count. In other words, sixty-six women's responses were analyzed but if they provided more than one reason, those reasons were coded separately thus making the number of responses much more than sixty-six.

Using a grounded theory approach, two main steps were taken to code all of the responses to question fifty into categories and sub-categories. The coding, as explained above, was limited to the sixty-six women who agreed that women believers are happier than women non-believers. First, tables were constructed with all of the women's responses and if they provided more than one reasons then those reasons were separated accordingly (n=94). Next, these ninety-four responses were coded into five broad categories (see Table 10).

Spiritual support

As Table 10 illustrates, among the five broad categories of reasons why these religious college women perceived themselves as happier than non-believers, the largest number of responses fell into the category of spiritual support, i.e., 32 or 35% of the total number of responses (n=94). Furthermore, respondents' answers in this category had to do with benevolent constancy (i.e., a term we coined to characterize the responses) that suggests that happiness is

linked to a sort of psychological protection rendered by those who "know God". In other words, "knowing God", a relatively passive act in the form of a belief, generates an external source of support that results in feeling states often associated with happiness such as comfort, hope, acceptance. Examples of responses in this category include:

- Any person who knows God is happier because God died for us and gives us unimaginable peace and happiness.
- From personal encounters, it seems that religious women are far happier. They have something incredible in their lives that non-religious women could never even imagine. I personally could never be unhappy knowing that someone gave his life for me so that I could have the gift of eternal salvation.
- I believe my faith gives me joy in the little things in life. Also know that I don't need a guy in my life to be happy -- God makes me complete. A lot of non-religious people search for happiness in external things, like relationships or money, where religious women are more content with just God's grace.

The above examples illustrate the strength of these women's conviction that religion and happiness are linked. Interested in more fully understanding the perceived social and psychological rewards of "knowing God" we conducted further thematic coding of the responses that we had assigned to the top rated category, spiritual support. We were interested to know if sub-categories could help us say more about the relatively passive act of experiencing spiritual support from "knowing God".

Further thematic coding of responses that fell into the category of spiritual support was conducted on the 32 responses. Three sub-categories were identified suggest that simply "knowing God" generates a sense of spiritual support that results in 1) positive psychological effects (i.e., feeling more comfortable/assured, feeling understood, feeling hope); 2) feelings of being "backed up" (i.e., you just know that God is always with you); and 3) better coping skills (i.e., strength through hard times, guidance, reduces worries). Some of the responses fell into multiple of the above mentioned sub-categories, thereby further duplicating the number of responses possible.

The above mentioned sub-categories, while informative, did not add much to our understanding of perceptions of the relationship between spiritual support and happiness. It comes as no surprise, for example that spiritual beliefs can make you feel stronger in the ways mentioned above. As we continued to review these data, however, we asked ourselves this question: *Could it be that the reported psychological benefits that come from "knowing God" provide clues to what is missing from religious college women's psychic life?* To explore this question further we identified fourteen positive emotional outcomes related to spiritual support and conceptions of happiness among religious college women (see Table 11). Table 11 provides some insight into the emotional needs that "knowing God" fills among religious college women but the threats to emotional well-being listed are those most likely to threaten anyone's emotional well being.

Joy

As Table 10 illustrates, among the five broad categories of reasons why these religious college women perceive themselves as happier than non-believers, the second largest number of responses fell into the category of joy, i.e., 22 or 24% of the total number of responses (n=94).

Furthermore, respondents' answers in this category addressed the concept of "joy" which was equated with satisfaction and fulfillment. Examples of this category include:

- I feel we are not searching all over the place for satisfaction because we have already found it in God.
- I think generally they (Christian women) have more joy and a sense of fulfillment in their lives.
- I think faith gives us a joy and contentment that most others don't have.

The above examples illustrate these religious women's convictions that "knowing God" is linked to a greater sense of happiness through the concept of "joy".

Purpose and meaning

As Table 10 illustrates, among the five broad categories of reasons why these religious college women perceive themselves as happier than non-believers, the third largest number of responses fell into the category of purpose and meaning, i.e., 17 or 18% of the total number of responses (n=94). Participants' responses in this category conveyed a sense of direction for their lives. Through "knowing God" they had a sense of a future not just in this world. Participants could rely on someone else to provide meaning for their lives. Some examples include:

- I feel that by being religious, we women have a purpose in life; we do not walk around aimlessly and we know where we are going. My time is not (usually) filled with frivolous things, rather it is spent wisely.
- We have a foundation to stand on and a reason for living that never fails.
- I think that religious college women have a different focus on what is important in their lives and what they want to get out of the college experience.

These responses show the strong feeling these women have that religion gives direction in life which in turn makes them happier than non-religious women.

Avoidance of social temptation

As Table 10 illustrates, among the five broad categories of reasons why these religious women perceive themselves as happier than non-believers, the final two categories relate to social constructs. The first is avoidance of social temptations, 12 or 12% of responses fell into that category. These responses suggest that happiness is linked to avoiding certain risk-taking behaviors. Those who “know God” seem to perceive themselves as happier because they do not engage in “unchristian acts”. Some examples from this category include:

- Non-religious college women turn to boys, alcohol, sex, drugs, etc. to fill something in their heart that they know is missing. They believe these “bad” things are making them happy but really God is the only one that will fill that hole in their heart and bring them never ending joy.
- In general, I think that most religious women don’t feel the pressure to turn to other ways to escape from the pressures of college and just life in general (i.e., drinking, smoking, drugs). I think religious women find other outlets for their frustration, aggression, feelings of loneliness, etc.
- We are strong enough to stand up for our beliefs and don’t just follow the crowd.

These women believe that they are happier because they can avoid risk taking behaviors. They give many reasons for being able to avoid those things: God filling them, no pressure to do “bad” things, and strength from their belief in God.

Social support

As Table 10 illustrates, among the five broad categories of reasons why these religious women perceive themselves as happier than non-believers, the second category relating to social constructs is social support. This final category has 11 or 11% of the reasons why religious women believe they are happier than non-religious women. The answers in this category suggest a sense of community associated with “knowing God” or being a Christian. Some examples of this category are:

- They also feel like they belong to a loving group.
- Women of faith tend to have a hope/joy in knowing that, even if things are not going so great, there will always be a community of Christian women (women of faith) to talk to and to pray with.
- Friendship and relationships based on God are so much stronger than friendships based on anything else.

These responses indicate that these religious women perceive their friend groups as stronger than non-religious women’s friend groups. This may be because of a sense of united purpose and goal. The united purpose is formed around God. Overall the reasons in this category that religious women gave for being happier than non-religious women revolve around having stronger friendships.

Relationship to self, to others, and to the world

Further thematic analyses of the responses to question 50 were compared with a theory espoused by Carol Gilligan (1982) which suggests that mental health is the degree to which one is in relationship to oneself, to others, and to the world.

In order to examine Gilligan’s theory the 61 responses to question 50 were separated into 94 reasons. The responses to question 50 were first categorized through thematic coding across

five broad categories: spiritual support, joy, purpose and meaning, avoiding social temptations, and social support. We applied Gilligan's theory to each of the reasons within the five broad categories. We assessed each category as a reason that reflected benefits to self, other and the world.

Analysis of the categorical responses across the five broad categories found that 73.4% (n= 69) of the reasons these religious women gave for being happier than non-religious women related to benefits of the self. So roughly three-fourths of the reasons these women gave for being happy were related to themselves. Some examples are: comfort, reassurance, and hope.

A further 24.6% (n=23) of the reasons related to relational benefits. These reasons for being happier than non-religious women were related to the religious women's relationships and spheres of influence. Some examples are: a loving group to belong to, support network, someone to talk to who shares your same values and a place to meet men.

Thematic coding of the 94 reasons resulted in zero related to benefits for the world. None of these religious women's reasons for being happier than non-religious women mentioned their relationship to the world. All of the reasons for happiness were related only to benefits for themselves individually or for their relationships. The other 2% (n=2) of the remaining reasons didn't fit into any of the three categories.

Discussion

The results of this exploratory study cannot be generalized beyond this sample but these results provide preliminary information about the relationship between religious college-aged women's depression and their overall conceptions of happiness, which can inform future psychological research.

What follows is a discussion of our findings organized into five sections: 1) findings related to the seven predicted outcomes listed in the beginning of this paper; 2) findings related to the overall research question that prompted this study: *Among college-aged women with a Christian belief system, what relationship exists, if any, between their conceptions of happiness and belief in God?*; 3) preliminary conclusions about “deep sorrow” or depression as the emotional price that liberal-minded Christian college women pay for their affiliation with conservative Christian college women; 4) implications for college administrators concerned with college women’s mental health; and 5) limitations of this study.

At the beginning of this paper we predicted seven outcomes. All seven of the outcomes were reflected in the data that was collected. The majority of the participants either fully agreed with the statement of beliefs (95%; n=76) or partially agreed with the statement (5%; n=4) which supports our first prediction. In support of our second prediction, 97.5% (n=78) of the women reported that they are actively involved in a campus religious organization. In agreement with our third prediction 22.5% of the women from our sample indicated depression while only 7.7% of the women who took the *Freshmen Survey* indicated depression. This is not a one to one correlation and the comparison must be made with caution.

We found that 95% (n=76) of the women in our sample have done personal writing sometime in their lives. While the percentage we found is slightly higher, agreeing with our prediction, it is almost equal to Magee’s 2001 finding that 94% of the women she surveyed have ever done personal writing. Our fifth prediction was supported in that 76.3% (n=61) of our participants believed religious college women are happier than non-religious college women (see below for a discussion of the reasons).

Our sixth prediction was also supported because the depressed women in our study seem to write about social change/justice and to break the isolation of feeling alone more than the non-depressed women in our study. A statistically significant relationship exists between these religious college women's depression and their reasons for personal writing. The depressed women, when compared with the non-depressed women in our study, reflect more on social change and social justice. They also write to "break the isolation of feeling alone" more than the non-depressed women of our study.

There seems to be a small group ($n=5$) of the women surveyed who score high on the depression scale and write about social justice issues. While this is a very small percentage of the total number of women surveyed (6.2%) it does point to a trend. It appears that only a small number of the religious women surveyed are grappling with the "tough" issues of the current time. Those same women are more likely to suffer from depression than their peers who are not addressing the social issues.

The same is true of writing to "break the isolation of feeling alone". While a relatively small number of women ($n=11$) are depressed and writing for this reason it points to a possible link. 13.8% of the women who are depressed are writing because they feel isolated which means that they recognize that isolation. Thus, it appears that this finding is additional evidence that they are prone to depression.

Further, our seventh prediction was only partially supported. These religious college women follow Gilligan's theory of mental health as it relates to the degree to which a person is in relationship to oneself and to others. However, they do not reflect the degree to which a person is in relationship to the world.

This finding about happiness and religious women's conception of happiness relates to the overall research question: *Among college-aged women with a Christian belief system, what relationship exists, if any, between their conceptions of happiness and belief in God?* Those women who responded "yes, religious women are happier than non-religious women" (n=61) are not reflecting on happiness as a world construct. Their reasons for happiness involve themselves and the others around them. None of the 94 reasons reflect a relationship with the world. This shows a narrow conception of happiness. One woman reported on the survey "I feel sometimes that religious college women (Christians at least) lead somewhat sheltered lives and because of that they are happier." Her statement may explain the concentration of happiness as a self and others concept and not a world concept.

A preliminary conclusion, which is further exploration and fairly speculative, is that "enduring deep sorrow" or depression may be the emotional price that these liberal-minded Christian college women pay for their affiliation with conservative Christian college women. Webster's Dictionary defines liberalism as "a movement in modern Protestantism emphasizing intellectual liberty and the spiritual and ethical content of Christianity" (p 826). These Christian college women who are grappling with social concerns can be said to be more liberal in thought and action. Based on these findings these religious college women who concern themselves with social change and social justice may be at a greater risk of mild to major depression when compared with the religious college women who do personal writing related only to one's self and one's relationships. "Enduring deep sorrow" may be a result of liberal minded thinking within a traditionally conservative environment.

Three possible explanations surfaced as we examined these findings. The first explanation is that there is a conflict of interest. This simply means that these Christian women

who are thinking and writing about social and world concerns may find themselves in conflict with other of these Christians who are not as concerned with such matters. This small subgroup of women may face opposition to the issues they are trying to voice. Their voices will not be heard by members of their community, which can lead to depression. This depression happens because their voices turn inward. Feminist theories of depression (Gilligan, 1982) argue that depression is simply a result of women's unheard voices turned on themselves.

The second explanation is that these women have minimal support systems. These Christian women do not find support for what they value and are trying to voice such as, world concerns and social justice. They are more prone to depression because fewer women in their community share their values and so their voices are silenced. These women face conflict for what they believe but as this idea suggests they also do not receive support within their community. They have very few role models, if any, so they must make a path for themselves. This is usually done alone or with few others, which could explain these women's tendency towards depression.

The third explanation, which is suggested by but not grounded in the data, is the environment of the liberal arts tradition. This idea suggests that these Christian women are more at risk for depression because they are enrolled in a university that traditionally teaches for a democratic society. This means that the liberal arts education promotes a greater social good. These Christian women's traditional value systems may be challenged in this environment. There may not be one right answer anymore. Instead of seeing things as black or white and right or wrong there is now a gray area to account for. This theory suggests that these women may face depression more often because they are grappling with that gray area. They are trying to

reconcile their traditional beliefs with new teachings. The two things are compatible but the struggle may not have much support.

All three of these ideas have interconnectedness. The reasons and explanations that these women are suffering from depression may include aspects of all three rather than just one isolated idea.

This study has several implications. First there are implications for college administrators and women's mental health professionals. Religious college women who do personal writing on the topics of isolation and social justice are more likely to suffer from depression. These women could be given support through college counseling centers and programs. This finding may have unique implications for college counselors who use writing as a therapeutic technique. There are also implications for this finding in future research. This study could be taken further in examining religious college women's conceptions of happiness and possibly their self-reported reasons for depression. Future research could help explain the broader picture of women's development and how faith and depression relate.

Some limitations of this study shall be considered in relationship to the validity of our results. The first is a design limitation, ideally we would have run a control group using the CES-D of non-religious women in order to have a more accurate comparison with our sample. Also the survey design does not provide rich, thick descriptions and an interview study would yield much more descriptive data. The second limitation is the small homogenous nature of our sample. This sample is lacking diversity of race, socioeconomic status, geographic location, etc. Another study would include more diversity and a larger sample size. The third limitation is in data collection. There are changes we would make to the survey and ideally use a different depression scale that has more accuracy. The fourth limitation is in data analysis. Ideally we

would move beyond correlations in the quantitative data and have more inter-rater reliability on the qualitative data. We would also have an interpretative community and include member checks to strengthen the validity of our findings.

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Author Note

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A special thanks to the 80 women who participated in this study.

Table 1

2002 Freshman Survey data (n=286) compared with participant data (n=80) on self reports of religiosity and depression

	<i>%</i>	<i>% of women</i>
	<i>incoming</i>	<i>participates</i>
<i>2002 Freshman Survey</i>	<i>women</i>	<i>in this</i>
<i>compared with Participant Data</i>	<i>students</i>	<i>survey</i>
		<i>research</i>
Religious preference: Protestant	51.4%	
Religious preference: Roman Catholic	31.0%	
Religious preference: Jewish	2.5%	
Attended religious service during the past year	91.2%	
Discussed religion during the past year	38.7	
Felt depressed during the past year	7.7%	22.5%
Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do during the past year	37.5%	--

Table 2

Descriptive statistics from The Women and God Survey (n=80)

<i>Demographic Information</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Grade Level		
First Year	28	35.0%
Sophomore	20	25.0%
Junior	19	23.7%
Senior	13	16.3%
English as first language	77	96.3%
Ethnicity/Race		
Caucasian	68	85%
Other	8	10%
Not Reported	4	5%
Hometown		
Urban	6	7.5%
Suburban	52	65.0%
Rural	15	18.7%
Other	7	8.8%
Income		
Upper	8	10.0%
Middle	64	80.0%
Lower	4	5.0%
Other (prefer not to say; not reported)	4	5.0%

<i>Demographic Information</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Grade point average		
3.5-4.0	48	53.7%
3.0-3.49	27	37.6%
Below 3.0	4	5.0%

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics on self-report personal writing information from The Women and God**Survey (n=80)*

<i>Personal Writing</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Have you ever done personal writing?		
<i>Yes</i>	76	95%
<i>No</i>	4	5%
Do you currently do personal writing?		
<i>Yes</i>	63	78.8%
<i>No</i>	17	21.3%
At what age did you begin personal writing?		
12 years old and under	41	51.5%
13 – 19 years old	24	30%
No Answer	15	18.5%
How often do you do personal writing?		
More than once a week	24	30%
Once a week	7	8.7%
Every other week	5	6.3%
Monthly	12	15%
Other	18	22.5%
Not reported	14	17.5%

Table 4

Types of personal writing as reported from The Women and God Survey (n=80).

<i>What types of personal writing do you do?</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Not Reported	7	8.7%
Freewriting		
Yes	62	77.5%
No	11	13.8%
Poetry		
Yes	30	37.5%
No	43	53.8%
Daily Events		
Yes	38	47.5%
No	35	43.8%
Lyrics		
Yes	21	26.3%
No	52	65%

<i>What types of personal writing do you do?</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Famous Quotes		
Yes	47	58.7%
No	26	32.5%
Narratives		
Yes	24	30%
No	49	61.3%
Other Types		
Yes	18	22.5%
No	55	68.8%

Table 5

*Descriptive statistics on self-report prayer journaling information from The Women and God**Survey (n=80)*

<i>Prayer Journaling</i>	<i>#</i>	<i>%</i>
Do you include prayers in your personal writing?		
Yes	61	76.2%
No	13	16.3%
Not reported	6	7.5%
Journal that includes prayers		
Yes	42	52.5%
No	27	33.8%
Not reported	11	13.7%
Journal not including prayers		
Yes	17	21.3%
No	52	65%
Not reported	11	13.7%
Journal only prayers		
Yes	14	17.5%
No	55	68.8%
Not reported	11	13.7%
Direct personal writing to God?		
Yes	61	76.3%
No	12	15%
Not reported	7	8.7%

Table 6

*Descriptive statistics on self-report reasons for personal writing from The Women and God**Survey (n=80)*

Reasons for Personal Writing	#	%
Not reported	9	11.2%
1 To reflect on painful memories, etc		
Yes	49	61.3%
No	22	27.5%
2 Record daily events		
Yes	43	53.7%
No	28	35%
3 Access the self		
Yes	55	68.7%
No	16	20%
4 Reflect on social change		
Yes	24	30%
No	47	58.8%
5 Relief of stress		
Yes	63	78.7%
No	8	10%
6 Tell the truth		
Yes	42	52.5%

Reasons for Personal Writing	#	%
No	29	36.3%
7 Break the isolation		
Yes	28	35%
No	43	53.8%
8 Give myself a boost		
Yes	29	36.3%
No	42	52.5%
9 To hide secrets		
Yes	26	32.5%
No	45	56.3%
10 Creative writings at school		
Yes	8	10%
No	63	78.8%
11 Communicate with God		
Yes	60	75%
No	11	13.8%
12 Solve problems with relationships		
Yes	48	60%
No	23	28.8%
13 Share as gifts		
Yes	28	35%
No	43	53.8%

Note. The reasons listed are abbreviated from their original wording. For original wording see appendix A.

Table 7

Pearson's Chi-Square between types of personal writing and prayers in personal writing (n=73)

<i>Types/Prayers</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>x²</i>	<i>p</i>
Freewriting	1	3.743	.053*
Poetry	1	1.537	.215
Daily Events	1	.024	.876
Lyrics	1	1.026	.311
Famous Quotes	1	.229	.632
Narratives	1	.001	.971

Note. * $p < .05$

Table 8

Pearson's Chi-Square between reasons for personal writing and scores on the CES-D (n=71)

<i>CES-D and Reasons</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>x²</i>	<i>p</i>
CES-D LOW and Reasons			
1 To reflect on painful memories, etc	1	1.073	.300
2 Record daily events	1	.416	.519
3 Access the self	1	.070	.791
4 Reflect on social change	1	3.242	.072
5 Relief of stress	1	.403	.526
6 Tell the truth	1	1.582	.208
7 Break the isolation	1	9.149	.002*
8 Give yourself a boost	1	.006	.940
9 Hide secrets	1	.827	.363
10 Creative writing at school	1	.403	.526
11 Communicate with God	1	.295	.587
12 Solve problems with relationships	1	.285	.594
13 Share as gifts	1	1.538	.215
CES-D MID and Reasons			
1 To reflect on painful memories, etc	1	.151	.698
2 Record daily events	1	.421	.516
3 Access the self	1	.031	.859
4 Reflect on social change	1	.055	.814
5 Relief of stress	1	.014	.907

<i>CES-D and Reasons</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>x²</i>	<i>p</i>
6 Tell the truth	1	.937	.333
7 Break the isolation	1	2.008	.156
8 Give yourself a boost	1	.937	.333
9 Hide secrets	1	.695	.404
10 Creative writing at school	1	1.145	.285
11 Communicate with God	1	.622	.430
12 Solve problems with relationships	1	.225	.635
13 Share as gifts	1	.421	.516
CESD-HIGH and Reasons			
1 To reflect on painful memories, etc	1	1.013	.314
2 Record daily events	1	.038	.845
3 Access the self	1	.303	.582
4 Reflect on social change	1	4.913	.027*
5 Relief of stress	1	.986	.321
6 Tell the truth	1	.484	.487
7 Break the isolation	1	6.963	.008*
8 Give yourself a boost	1	.854	.356
9 Hide secrets	1	.130	.718
10 Creative writing at school	1	.071	.790
11 Communicate with God	1	.009	.926
12 Solve problems with relationships	1	.052	.820
13 Share as gifts	1	1.019	.313

Note. The reasons listed are abbreviated from their original wording. For original wording see appendix A.

* $p < .05$,

Table 9

Number of respondents to the four open-ended questions asked on The Women and God Survey (n=80).

<i>Answers to four selected questions</i>	<i># who provided a response to this question</i>
Please say more about the kind of personal writing that you do and what you write about. (Q #20)	69
How do you define prayer? (Q #21)	79
Please share anything else that you would like us to know about your prayer journaling. (Q# 25)	60
Do you believe that religious college women are happier than college women who are not religious? (Q #50)	78

Table 10

Five categories of reasons, from thematic coding of 94 responses provided by women on The Women and God Survey (n=66), why religious college women are happier than non- religious college women.

	#	%
<i>Five categories of reasons why religious college women are happier than non-religious college women</i>		
1. Because by simply "knowing God" they experience spiritual support	32	35%
2. Because by simply "knowing God" they experience joy	22	24%
3. Because by simply "knowing God" they experience purpose and meaning	17	18%
4. Because by simply "knowing God" negative social temptations are avoided	12	12%
5. Because religious involvement leads to social support	11	11%
TOTAL	94	100%

Table 11

Two sides of the psychological/emotional effects of spiritual support.

Categories identified as the positive emotional effects of "knowing God"	Threats to emotional well-being
Feeling comfort	Feeling uncomfortable
Feeling hopeful	Feeling hopeless
Feeling fulfillment	Feeling unfulfilled
Feeling confident	Feeling a lack of confidence
Feeling strong	Feeling weak
Feeling joy	Feeling sad
Feeling more trusting	Feeling mistrusting
Feeling less worried	Feeling worried
Feeling loved	Feeling unloved
Feeling understood	Feeling misunderstood
Feeling cared for	Feeling uncared for
Feeling known	Feeling unknown
Feeling accepted	Feeling unaccepted
Feeling secure	Feeling insecure

Note: Listed in random order

Appendix A

The Women and God Survey

ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

ID #

2002/03

The Women and God Survey:
A Study by Kara Wolff and Dr. Vicki Magee,
Assistant Professor Educational Studies and Psychology

Introduction: Kara Wolff and Dr. Magee are conducting a study involving IWU women who identify themselves as Christian. The purpose of this study is to more fully understand the role that a relationship to a God plays in the lives of college women. A secondary purpose of this study is to also learn more about prayer journals and the role they play in college women's psychological and social development.

Part I: About your belief(s)

1. Please read the following statement. Do you agree with every idea in this statement?

There is one true God, who has created all things, and who exists eternally in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That the Bible is an authority and divinely inspired. That all people are valuable and created in God's image. However they are alienated from God and each other because of their sin and guilt, and subject to God's wrath. That Jesus Christ was fully human and fully divine. That he lived as a perfect example, assumed the judgement due to humans by dying in our place, and was bodily raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. There is salvation by God's grace to all who repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone. That the Holy Spirit gives believers new life in obedience through his indwelling and transforming power.

_____ Yes, I agree with every part of this statement _____ No, I disagree with some or all of this statement.

2. If you disagree please explain. If you agree and want to elaborate, please do.

Part II: About you

3. What is your date of birth? _____
4. Are you a current IWU student? ____ yes ____ no
5. Are you ____ Fr ____ Soph ____ Jr ____ Sr
6. What is your major? _____ minor? _____
7. What is your approximate gpa? _____
8. What is your primary language? _____
9. Do you speak any other language(s) fluently? ____ yes ____ no
10. If you speak another language, what is it? _____
11. Did you grow up in: ____ an urban setting ____ suburban setting ____ rural setting ____ other _____

OPTIONAL

12. What is your race or ethnicity? _____
13. Would your family be considered ____ upper ____ middle or ____ lower class ____ prefer not to say?
14. What is your sexual orientation?
- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| _____ straight | _____ bisexual |
| _____ gay | _____ other |
| _____ lesbian | _____ prefer not to say |

Part III: About personal writing

For this study personal writing is defined as *any writing that you do, such as freewriting or poetry in a diary or a journal, that you do to reflect on your life.*

15. Have you ever done any personal writing? ☐ yes ☐ no
16. Do you currently do any type of personal writing? ☐ yes ☐ no
17. If yes, at what age did you begin personal writing? at age _____
18. If yes, how often do you do personal writing?
- | | | |
|--|--|-------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> more than once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> ever other week | other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> once a week | <input type="checkbox"/> monthly | _____ |
19. Check all that apply: Does your personal writing include:
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> freewrites | <input type="checkbox"/> famous quotes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> poetry | <input type="checkbox"/> narratives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> log of daily events | <input type="checkbox"/> other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> lyrics | _____ |
20. Please say more about the kind of personal writing that you do and what you write about.

Part IV: About prayer journaling (or this study we define prayer journaling as personal writing that you do that includes prayer.)

21. How do you define prayer?
22. Do you include prayers in your personal writing? ☐ yes ☐ no
23. Please check any that **best** describes your personal writing.
- ☐ I keep a journal that includes prayers. I write in it _____ times a month.
 - ☐ I keep a journal that does not include prayers. I write in it _____ times a month.
 - ☐ I keep a journal including only prayers. I write in it _____ times a month.
24. Do you direct some or all of the content of your personal writing to God? ☐ yes ☐ no
25. If yes, please explain.

26. Do you include in your personal writing transcription of recitation prayers in your personal writing?

___ yes ___ no

27. If yes, please explain.

28. Do you include in your personal writing personally constructed prayer on themes such as adoration, praise, confession, thanksgiving, personal and global requests? ___ yes ___ no

29. If yes, please explain.

30. Certainly women have many reasons for keeping a prayer journal. On the list below, please check all that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/>	To document, explore, escape from, or reflect on extremely painful memories or feelings and how separate you feel from these feelings, including anger
<input type="checkbox"/>	To record daily events, hold onto writing for a lifetime, and to write innocent stories
<input type="checkbox"/>	To access the self -- to have a place where I can think about things related to me
<input type="checkbox"/>	To reflect on social change or social justice
<input type="checkbox"/>	To provide temporary relief/ventilation of daily stress/smaller issues
<input type="checkbox"/>	To tell the truth
<input type="checkbox"/>	To break the isolation of feeling alone
<input type="checkbox"/>	To give myself a boost
<input type="checkbox"/>	To hide secret acts, feelings and thoughts in the writing
<input type="checkbox"/>	To complete creative writing or freewritings at school
<input type="checkbox"/>	To communicate with or write about God
<input type="checkbox"/>	To reflect or solve problems with friends or relationships
<input type="checkbox"/>	To share thoughts/feelings/daily life with others in letters or gifts
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other reasons: please list the other reasons.

31. Please share anything else that you would like us to know about your prayer journaling.

Part V: Your religious background

32. Did you attend church when you were growing up? ____ yes ____ no

33. If yes, which church did you attend (or denomination)? _____

34. If you attended more than one church what was it/were they? _____

35. At what age did you begin attending church? _____ years of age.

36. Before coming to college how often did you attend church?

____ at least weekly ____ at least monthly ____ other _____

37. Now that you are in college, how often do you attend church?

____ at least weekly ____ at least monthly ____ other _____

38. Now that you are in college, do you attend the same church as when you were growing up? ____ yes ____ no

39. Thinking back over the past 12 months, how many times would you estimate that you have attended the church that you now attend? During the past 12 months I have attended church about _____ times.

40. Do you read the Bible? ____ yes ____ no

41. Thinking back over the past 30 days, how many times would you estimate that you read the Bible?

During the past 30 days, I have read the Bible about _____ times.

42. What role does God play in your life as a college woman? Please explain as much as you can about this.
There are no right or wrong answers. We are curious how you see it.

Part VI: Religious Organization Involvement

43. Are you involved in a religious organization on campus? ____ yes ____ no

44. If yes, which ones?

45. Thinking back over the past 12 months, how many times did you attend religious organization meetings?
_____ times

46. How many times during the past 12 months did you attend large group meetings (____ times) or small group meetings (____ times)?

47. Please briefly describe your involvement with this religious organization.

Part VII: More about you

48. Please read each of the sentences below and check one box for each (i.e., give each a rating of 1, 2 3, or 4).

During the last week:	1 Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)	2 Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)	3 Moderate amount of the time (3-4 days)	4 Most of All of the time (5-7 days)
I was bothered by things that don't usually bother me.				
I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor				
I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with the help of my family or friends				
I felt that I was just as good as other people.				
I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.				
I felt depressed.				
I felt everything I did was an effort.				
I felt hopeful about the future.				
I thought my life had been a failure.				
I felt fearful.				
My sleep was restless.				
I was happy.				
I talked less than usual.				
I felt lonely.				
People were unfriendly.				
I enjoyed life.				
I had crying spells.				
I felt sad.				
I felt that people disliked me.				
I could not get "going".				

Part VIII: Open-ended questions

49. Please use this space to share anything else that you would like us to know such as about your faith, your personal writing, your prayer journaling, the reasons that you do personal writing, and so on.

50. Do you believe that religious college women are happier than college women who are not religious?

☐ yes ☐ no

Please explain.

Part IX: Interview Study

51. Would you be willing to be interviewed about your family background, your history of religious involvement, the meaning of faith in your life and your personal writing? ☐ yes ☐ no

52. If yes, would you also be willing to share any or your entire prayer journal with Dr. Magee and Kara Wolff?
☐ yes ☐ no If yes, then what is the best way to contact you?

YOUR NAME: _____

CONTACT ME BY EMAIL _____

CONTACT ME BY PHONE _____

THE END – THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND IDEAS.

Appendix B

Informational Flyer

An invitation
Please join us as a participant in the IWU
Women and God research study

WHO IS INVITED?

Any woman who is currently enrolled as an IWU student is eligible to participate in this study.

WHAT ARE WE INVITED TO DO?

Kara Wolff, a senior psychology IWU student and Dr. Vicki Magee, an IWU Assistant Professor of Educational Studies and Psychology have designed a study that will serve as Kara's Senior Honors Research Project. The purpose of this study is to consider the relationship that college-aged women have with a god, specifically related to psychological and social development. We are asking IWU women to participate by agreeing to take a 10 minute survey and/or to be interviewed.

WHAT IS THE SURVEY?

Our survey entitled *The Women and God Survey*, asks questions regarding your beliefs, personal writing history, religious background, involvement in IWU religious organizations, your feelings and moods, as well as some basic demographic information. You can take the survey without being part of the interview study. The survey typically takes about 15 minutes to complete. You can share as much or as little information as you prefer. This is completely voluntary and if anything makes you uncomfortable you can stop at any time. This survey is also completely anonymous. Your name will not be associated with any portion of this survey. Your survey will be assigned an ID number and will only be referred too using that number. While you are taking the survey, Kara Wolff will be around as well as afterwards if you have any questions or concerns. Completed surveys will be placed in a sealed envelope so that no one will have access to them except Dr. Magee and me. If you have any questions I am available to answer them now as well as later. You can contact me at kwolff@iwu.edu and 309-556-2883. The information gained from these surveys can help to further the understanding of how women relate to god.

WHAT IS THE INTERVIEW?

At the end of our survey we ask you to let us know if you would like to be part of our interview study. We will select five women from those who say that they are interested. The interviews will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and will last 1-1 1/2 hours. We are also interested in women who keep prayer journals. If you keep a prayer journal we are interested in interviewing you but you need not keep a prayer journal to be considered for the interview study.

WHO DO I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Kara Wolff at (309) 556-2883 or Dr Vicki Magee at (309) 556-3574.

Thank you for your interest and your ideas!

Appendix C

Debriefing Form

Debriefing Form

To the women who were interviewed for our research on *Women and God* :

- Thank you so much for participating in this study. We appreciate your assistance in helping us to learn more about how a relationship with God affects women's psychological and social development, especially how prayer journals are used. We believe that our study is important because although a great deal of past research considers how college-aged students relate to God, much less is known about this from a woman's point of view.

Kara Wolff

Dr. Vicki Magee

- If you have any questions or concerns about this study please feel free to contact any of the following people:

*Kara Wolff (309) 556-2883 kwolff@iwu.edu
(senior thesis student)*

*Dr. Vicki Magee (309) 556-3574 vmagee@iwu.edu
(faculty advisor to the project)*

Dr. David Bollivar (309) 556-3677 dbollivar@iwu.edu (member of the Institutional Review Board)

- If you need to talk to someone about what you are thinking and feeling after participating in this study please feel free to contact the IWU Counseling Center at (309) 556-3052. They have trained people who can assist you and you will remain completely anonymous.
- If you have other concerns you can also contact the Dean of Students Office at (309) 556-3111.

References for Further Reading

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