AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON
THE VOCATION DISCERNMENT OF WOMEN IN
A LATIN AMERICAN RELIGIOUS ORDER

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF CLINICAL MENTAL HEALTH
COUNSELING

BY MELANIE E. BRUSS

THESIS ADVISOR: DR. YUI-CHANG CHAN

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA
DECEMBER 2012
Acknowledgements

I thank God who through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gave me the idea and perseverance to see this project through to completion. Next, I would like to thank Jan and Dan Atkinson for their unconditional love, support, and hospitality. To my family-thank you for your love and acceptance of my uniqueness! Thank you to all of my friends for your unconditional love and support- especially to Ellen, Tanya, Amie, Gayle, Annie, James, Mark, and Joseph. Thank you to all of the good and holy priests who have supported and encouraged me over the years. Thank you to Terhiana Rodriguez for your tireless help and your endless hours of transcribing, translating, and always making the deadline! Thank you to all those who helped me with the long hours of transcribing and translating required for this project-Tanya Camargo, Gabriella Wong, Patty Barajas, Jessica Rodriguez, Jacquelyn Dolezal, Annie Hosek, Jan Atkinson, and Claudia Cerrato.

I give a special thank you to the religious sisters, brothers, and Padre Pablo for your willingness to participate in this research. Thank you for your time, your hospitality and helping me to feel at “home” during my stay. Thank you for trusting me with your stories and for sharing yourselves and your hearts with me and the readers.

Thank you to Dr. Chan for your support and willingness to serve as Chair of this project and for your keen eye to point out my many and varied deviations from APA style! Thank you to Dr. Park for serving on the thesis committee, for your insight, thought provoking questions, and encouragement. Thank you, Dr. Nicholas, for serving on the thesis committee; for your wise presence, support, and encouragement. Thank
you to Emily Mastroianni for your open mind about this project and for helping me with the pre-interview peer debriefing session. Thank you also to Juno Park for peer debriefing and offering helpful suggestions for the use of critical methodology. A very big and special thank you to John McConnell for your friendship, editorial comments, and peer debriefing- you went the “extra mile” beyond all doubt- God bless you! Thank you to Courtney Ryan for explaining the ins and outs of a thesis timeline and for your suggestions for the implications for practice section. Thank you to Elizabeth Grace Saunders for much needed help setting up a realistic time management plan. And if I have forgotten to thank anyone, please forgive me, I very much appreciate everyone who has helped in any way towards the completion of this project.
# Table of Contents

**TITLE PAGE**........................................................................................................................................... 1  
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**..................................................................................................................................... 2  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**................................................................................................................................... 4  
**ABSTRACT**....................................................................................................................................................... 7  

**CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION**......................................................................................................................... 8  
Growing Number of U.S. Latinos................................................................. 8  
Career Counseling Needs of Latinos ....................................................... 9  
Career Counseling Research with Latinos.............................................. 10  
Vocation Discernment Research............................................................. 11  

**CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW**............................................................................................................. 16  
Career Counseling and Development with Latinos............................... 17  
  *Cultural Values* ....................................................................................... 18  
  *Religious/Spiritual Values* ...................................................................... 20  
Calling........................................................................................................ 21  
Vocation Discernment............................................................................... 24  
  *Discernment from a Spiritual Perspective* ........................................... 25  
  *Discernment from a Sociological Perspective* .................................... 27  
  *Discernment from a Psychosocial Perspective* ................................... 30  
  *Discernment from an Anthropological Perspective* ......................... 33  
  *Community Discernment* .................................................................... 35  
Summary.................................................................................................. 36  

**CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY**...................................................................................................................... 40  
Participants.................................................................................................. 41  
  *Selection of Participants* ...................................................................... 41  
  *General Description of Participant* ....................................................... 42  
  *Sample Size* .......................................................................................... 43  
  *Exclusion Criterion* ............................................................................... 43  
  *Compensation* ...................................................................................... 44  
Setting......................................................................................................... 44  
Procedure.................................................................................................... 46  
  *Gaining Access* ..................................................................................... 46  
  *Informed Consent* .................................................................................. 46  
  *Confidentiality in Qualitative Research* ............................................. 47  
  *Stages of Critical Ethnography* ............................................................. 48  
Validation Methods.................................................................................... 59
CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS
Psychosocial History
Inner Void
Conversion
Admiration for Religious Sisters
Sense of Joy
Seeking Direction
Moment of Clarity
Obstacles
Sense of Urgency
Explicit Reasons for Choosing the Religious Life
Explicit Reasons for Choosing her Community
Community Discernment
Summary

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION
Vocation Discernment
Explicit Reasons for Choosing the Religious Life
Explicit Reasons for Choosing her Community
Other Factors to Consider
Community Discernment
Family Support
Family Opposition
Limitations
Implications for Further Research
Conclusions and Implications for Practice

REFERENCES

APPENDICES
Appendix A – Adult General Informed Consent Form
Appendix B – Informed Consent Form for Interviews
Appendix C – Adult General Informed Consent with Permission to Interview
Appendix D – Post Interview Confidentiality Form
Appendix E – Instructions before Individual Interviews
Appendix F – Interview Protocol
Appendix G – Final Debriefing of Participants
Appendix H – Peer Debriefing - Pre-Fieldwork Interview
Appendix I – Peer Debriefing - Interview Transcripts
Appendix J – Peer Debriefing - Pragmatic Horizon Analysis
Appendix K – Negative Case Analysis…………………………………………………………… 135
Appendix L – Adult General Informed Consent Form (Spanish)............................. 138
Appendix M – Informed Consent Form for Interviews (Spanish)......................... 142
Appendix N – Adult General Informed Consent with Permission to Interview (Spanish)......................................................................................................................... 146
Appendix O – Post Interview Confidentiality Form (Spanish)................................. 151
Appendix P – Instructions before Individual Interviews (Spanish)......................... 152
Appendix Q – Interview Protocol (Spanish).............................................................. 153
Appendix R – Final Debriefing of Participants (Spanish).......................................... 155
Abstract

THESIS: An Exploratory Study on the Vocation Discernment of Women in a Latin American Religious Order

STUDENT: Melanie Bruss

DEGREE: Master of Arts

COLLEGE: Teachers College

DATE: December, 2012

PAGES: 155

This ethnographic case study explored the vocation discernment process for Latina women who have entered a religious order. The researcher spent three months participating in and observing the daily lives of religious sisters and conducted interviews. The eight religious sisters interviewed for the study were predominately of Mexican and Central America descent. Similar to Lester’s (2005) findings, sisters describe persistent feelings of *inquietud* before entering the religious life, and sought fulfillment through religious means. Participants often feel joy and admiration when they met a religious sister for the first time. Participants recount a religious or sensory experience which provided clarity to her decision. The participants indicate a sense of urgency to enter the religious life as soon as possible. The results are compared with other studies on religious life and vocation discernment through a sociological and psychosocial perspective.
Chapter I

Growing Number of U.S. Latinos

Data from the current U.S. Census Bureau (2011) confirm that Latinos/Hispanics are the largest and fastest growing ethnic-racial group in the United States currently comprising 16.7% of the U.S. population. Estimates suggest that Latinos will comprise 25% of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). The term Latino or Hispanic refers to persons originating from Spain and Spanish-speaking countries and territories such as Mexico, Central America, most South American countries except for Brazil, and certain islands in the Caribbean. The present study will focus on the career development and life choices of women originating from Mexico and Central America, however, for the sake of simplicity I will use the more generic term of Latinos/as rather than the terms Mexican or Central American so as to include both. Further, I will use the term Latinos/as to designate both persons who currently reside in Latin American countries as well as those who have immigrated to the United States. Great differences exist between Latino sub-groups (i.e. between Guatemalans and Mexicans), and within each individual, however, in order to make any sort of generalizations, I will focus on some of the similarities in culture, values, and religious beliefs, shared by members of this ethnic group.
According to Rivera (2011), Latinos have had the highest high school dropout rate of any ethnic/racial group in the last three decades. At every grade level, Latinos lag behind their same age white peers in math, reading, English, and other subjects (Rivera, 2011). Within higher education, the amount of Latinos completing university education at the bachelor, masters, and doctoral levels are disproportionately small. With the close association between educational attainment and employment advancement, Latinos are at a clear disadvantage to achieving higher levels of employment. Currently, Latinos are disproportionately represented in entry level, service occupations requiring little educational achievement and not offering much occasion for advancement (Flores et al., 2011; Rivera, 2011; Shinnar, 2007).

Accordingly, approximately 20% of Latinos live below the poverty level as compared with 6% of non-Latino Whites (Rivera, 2011). In light of these statistics, the ultimate career success of Latinos will affect the financial and social well-being of the entire U.S. population (Rivera, 2011).

**Career Counseling Needs of Latinos**

Latinos in the U.S. are at a higher risk than European Americans of experiencing oppression and poverty, which may lead to increased need of mental health and career counseling services. Unfortunately, Latinos are often uninsured and underserved by mental health and counseling agencies (Alegria et al., 2002; Peifer, Hu, & Vega, 2000). Oftentimes counseling agencies are not meeting the mental health needs of Latinos, even when they desire services (Schwarzbaum, 2004). Perhaps as a result, it has been noted that Latinos often drop out of counseling prematurely (LaRoche, 2002).
Consequently, career counselors need to better understand Latinos’ career development and career counseling needs to better serve this population.

**Career Counseling Research with Latinos**

From a review of the relevant research on the career development of Latinos, I have identified three fairly consistent findings in the research. First, parental influence was found to be positively related to a variety of other career development factors (Caldera, Robitscheck, Frame, & Pennell, 2003; Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Gomez et al., 2001; Griggs, Copeland, & Fisher, 1992; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007). This finding is consistent with the cultural value of *familismo*, whereas Latinos tend to show preference and loyalty to close family members and friends (LaRoche, 1999; Santiago-Rivera, Arrendondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002; Sue, Zane, Hall, & Berger, 2009).

Secondly, Latino adolescents and adults report having similarly high career aspirations to other racial and ethnic groups but simultaneously report much lower career expectations than other groups (Arbona, 1990; Chang, Chan, Greenberger, Dooley, & Heckhausen, 2006). Lastly, self-efficacy was found to be positively related to variety of other variables such as higher educational goals, vocational identity, and career exploration activities (Flores, Ojeda, Gee, Lee, & Huang, 2006; Gushue, Clarke, Panzar, & Scanlan, 2006).

Unfortunately, the vocational psychology literature has not paid enough attention to the career development and career counseling needs of Latinos (Flores et al., 2006; Koegel, Donin, Ponterotto, & Spitz, 1995). Many of the articles that have studied the career development of Latinos lack a clear theoretical base or do not
consider relevant cultural variables (Flores et al., 2006; Koegel et al., 1995).

Furthermore, although the vast majority of Latinos describe themselves as belonging to a religious group, studies have not examined specifically the potential influence of their religious values on their career development (Espinosa, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2003).

It has been noted previously that career researchers have overlooked religious/spiritual values in the career development of non-Latino Americans as well (Duffy, 2006; Duffy & Dik, 2009; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). However, the concept of “career calling” has recently garnered more interest among career researchers (e.g. Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hernandez, Foley, & Beitin, 2011). Career calling research investigates the sense of calling that for many originates from God and leads to a specific career path to serve God and others (see Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009, for a review). Many studies demonstrated the importance of career calling for a variety of populations (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, Lewis-Coles, 2006; Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, 2010; Hernandez et al., 2001). Researchers have found a variety of positive associations with career calling, such as life, health, and job satisfaction, career decidedness, self-knowledge, and comfort with decision (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). However, the potential importance of religious/spiritual values on the career development of Latinos, including sense of calling, has not been investigated. With the high rates of religiosity within Latino groups, it is surprising that this area of research has not yet taken flight (Espinosa et al., 2003; PEW Hispanic, 2007).

Vocation Discernment Research
The present study will focus on a specific type of life calling that applies to practicing Roman Catholics. As a majority of Latinos living in the U.S. and abroad consider themselves Roman Catholic, this is a relevant area for study. For instance, 74% of U.S. Latinos who were born outside of the United States and 74% of those who have emigrated from Mexico say they are Roman Catholic (PEW Hispanic, 2007). Also, Latinos typically report that their religious faith is very important to them, regardless of their religious denomination (PEW Hispanic, 2007). Most Latinos claim that they attend a religious service at least once a month, have religious objects in their home, and pray every day (PEW Hispanic, 2007).

According to the teaching of the Catholic Church, each person is called by God to a specific state in life, either to the Sacrament of Matrimony, the ordained Priesthood (for men), Consecrated Virginity, or the Religious life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995). Thus many Catholics engage in a process of vocation discernment whereby one attempts to listen and follow God’s call to a specific state in life (Bolin, 2008). The concept of vocation discernment seems to be particularly relevant for Latinos given the high rates of Catholicism and overall religiousness (PEW Hispanic, 2007). Furthermore, about 21% of new entrants into religious orders in the U.S. are Latino (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009). The present study focused on the vocation discernment process for Latina women who have entered a religious order with convents in the U.S., Mexico, and Central America.

According to theorists, sociologists, and researchers, persons may use a variety of psychological and spiritual processes to discern one’s vocation (Bertrand, 2001; Bolin,
These strategies may involve determining the source of one’s thoughts, evaluating one’s feelings, and weighing the costs and benefits associated with each option (Bertrand, 2001; Gallagher, 2007; Kramer et al., 1985; Stark & Finke, 2000). Sociologists have proposed Rational Choice Theory, which applies a cost versus benefit model to explain the vocation decision making process for religious sisters, brothers, and priests (Stark & Finke, 2000). Others have explored the importance of one’s self-concept in the life calling discernment process (Chistopherson, 1994; Feenstra & Brouwer, 2008; Hankle, 2011). These theoretical, sociological, and spiritual models of vocation discernment have not been tested quantitatively nor have they been explored further from a qualitative perspective.

Lester (2005) used an ethnographic approach to learn more about the formation of Postulants (religious sisters in their first stage of formation) in a Mexican convent and described some aspects of their vocation discernment process. Lester found many similarities between her participants’ vocation stories. These religious sisters saw a vocation to the religious life as being a call from God which one can choose to follow or to ignore. Many of her participants described having had a feeling of restlessness with her life which led to a greater practice of her religion, which in turn led to her consideration of the religious life. These young women began to experience “signs” that God was leading her into the religious life. Oftentimes these young women began to seek advice from a spiritual director and attended a vocational retreat to learn more about the religious life.
Researchers have explored and discovered some of the specific factors bearing significance on the choice of North American and European women to enter the religious life. Having a sense of “calling”, the desire to live in community, and/or to develop one’s spiritual life were found to be significant factors (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Kreis & Bardwell, 2011; Wolf, 1990). Social factors also bear significance, as many religious sisters cited the important influence role models have had on their decision (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Rieckelman, 2001; Wolf, 1990; Zajac, 1999). The members of the religious community must also continually discern whether the candidate has a genuine call and would be a suitable member (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Jackson, 2004; O’Reilly, 1989; Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, 1983; Vogue, 2001).

Sense of calling has been shown to be an important factor in many people’s career decision making process (Constantine et al., 2006; Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, 2010; Hernandez et al., 2001). However, sense of calling has not yet been specifically explored with persons of Latin American descent. In addition, with the exception of Lester (2005), the vocation discernment process has not been specifically explored with Latinas. Researchers recommend using qualitative methods for topics that have not yet been empirically explored (Creswell, 1994). Accordingly, I used an ethnographic case study approach to explore the vocation discernment process for Latina women.

The aim of the present study was to explore the vocation discernment process for women of Latin American (Mexican or Central American) descent who have entered
a religious order. I conducted the case study on women in the religious order *The Oblates of Cristo Rey*, a religious order with convents in Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the United States. Congruent with purposeful sampling methods, I studied religious sisters who are either currently discerning a vocation to the religious life (because they have not yet made final vows) or have already discerned such a vocation and have made their vows as professed religious sisters (Polkinghorne, 2005).

When women enter a religious order, they are referred to as religious sisters even before they have made their vows. I used the term “religious sister”, “nun”, or simply “sister” interchangeably to refer to a woman who has entered a religious order, regardless of whether or not she has made final vows.
Chapter II

Literature Review

Career Counseling Research with Latinos

The career counseling field has gradually begun to publish articles that explore and study the career development of Latinos. Koegel et al. (1995) examined eight years of research (1985-1992) in the top three career journals and found that out of 844 published articles only 14% addressed multicultural career development with only six (0.7%) emphasizing the career development issues of Hispanic Americans and one emphasizing Mexicans (0.1%). A more recent analysis of the vocational research found a greater paucity of research on multicultural issues in career journals (Flores et al., 2006). The authors reviewed the career related studies about racial/ethnic minorities (REMs) published between 1969 and 2004 in several leading vocational journals. Out of 4,181 possible studies, 281 (7%) examined the career development of REMs and only 22 (or .5% of 4,181) addressed career issues for Latinos/as in the U.S (Flores et al., 2006).

Additionally, Koegel et al. (1995) found that 39% percent of the articles they reviewed lacked a clear theoretical base. Similarly, Flores et al. (2006) found that insufficient attention was paid to the application of culture-specific theories and to relevant cultural variables. Additional research has given mixed results regarding the
efficaciousness of various career counseling methods, assessments, and theories with Latinos (Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Levinson, Ohler, & Maus, 2005). Perhaps for these reasons and others, the career counseling literature research on multicultural populations has been described as “confusing and inconsistent” (Luzzo, 1993, p. 227). Hence, Flores et al. claimed that career research with REMs is still in its infancy and called for emerging professionals to “develop programmatic lines of career research that focus on a single REM group” (p.17).

In Koegel et al.’s (1995) review, only 3% of the articles on multicultural issues used qualitative methods. Koegel et al. pointed out that the use of qualitative methodology such as in depth interviewing would be “highly appropriate for investigating how culture and environment influence individual career-related behaviors” and called for a “greater use of qualitative methods in the area of multicultural career research...” (p. 58). The present study seeks to study the career and life decision making behavior of a single racial/ethnic group (Latinos) using qualitative methods. Below I will briefly summarize some of the general findings regarding the career development of Latinos.

**Career Development with Latinos**

Some research has shown that level of acculturation to U.S. dominant culture is positively correlated with career self-efficacy for Latino adults and higher career aspirations for Latino youth (Flores et al., 2006; Miranda & Unhoefer, 1998). Additionally, research has shown a positive relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and higher educational goals and between vocational identity and
VOCATION DISCERNMENT

career exploration activities (Flores et al., 2006; Gushue et al., 2006). Arbona (1990) found in a review of the literature that young Latinos generally have similar career aspirations but lower expectations than other racial/ethnic groups (Arbona, 1990). Similarly, Chang et al. (2006) found that Mexican adolescents generally had similar educational aspirations but much lower achievement expectations than Asians, African-Americans and Whites.

Cultural values. Multicultural counseling literature often describes Latinos’ cultural value of familismo, which is the cultural value of showing preference and loyalty to family members and family friends (LaRoche, 1999; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002; Sue et al., 2009). This cultural value seems to be a somewhat consistent finding in the career development research about Latinos. A qualitative study on the career goals of Latino and African American youth demonstrated the important influence of parents and other relatives on the career aspirations of the youth (Griggs et al., 1992). Parental support has also been found to positively relate to math/science self-efficacy in a sample of Mexican middle-school students (Navarro et al., 2007). In a qualitative study involving successful Latinas in the U.S., participants described the important role of parents as either a source of support and encouragement or as a deterrent to following a non-traditional career path (Gomez et al., 2001). In one of two quantitative studies conducted by Caldera et al. (2003), parental encouragement and support appeared to positively influence the commitment to a career choice for Mexican American women, yet did not appear to influence the career commitment of the Mexican American women in the second study. Also, Flores and O’Brien (2002) found that parental
support was positively related to Mexican adolescent women’s level of career aspiration and career choice prestige. In the same study, the young women reported that remaining proximally close to their families was one of the most important factors in their educational planning (Flores & O’Brien, 2002). However, Risco and Duffy (2011) found that young Latinas rated “meeting family expectations” as one of the least important factors in determining their career goals (p.245). The discrepancy between these findings and those of the previously mentioned studies could be due to the individual differences between ethnicities within the broader group termed Latinos. For example, Risco and Duffy’s Latino sample underrepresented Mexican Americans, who comprise 65.5% of the U.S. population of Latinos/as (PEW Hispanic Center, 2007) but only 10% of their sample.

Although there does not appear to be much research regarding the use of culturally adapted methods in career counseling with Latinos, research has shown that Latinos benefitted from an inclusion of their cultural values into mental health counseling services. For example, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) which was culturally adapted for use with Latinos produced lower dropout rates than CBT without the adaptations (Rosello & Bernal, 1999). In addition, the culture-specific method of utilizing storytelling to educate clients and illustrate moral themes was an effective therapeutic technique used with Latino clients (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002; Sue, Zane, Hall, & Berger, 2009). Also, switching languages from English to Spanish was shown to foster a stronger working alliance and increase perceived empathy and credibility with bilingual Latino clients (Ramos-Sanchez, 2009; Santiago-
Rivera et al., 2002). Moreover, Griner and Smith (2006) found that specific culturally-targeted interventions were four times more effective than interventions intended for a broader racial/ethnic group. Perhaps including cultural adaptations into career counseling with Latinos would prove to be efficacious as well.

**Religious/spiritual values.** It was difficult to locate studies that examined the role of religious/spiritual values in the career development of Latinos or studies which explored the integration of religion and spirituality into career counseling with Latinos. However, some qualitative studies have indirectly implied that religious/spiritual beliefs do play a part in the career development of Latinos (Flores et al., 2011; Gomez et al., 2001). For example, in Flores et al., Latino immigrants found that work roles allowed them to connect with their culture through shared religious values, or through using spiritual strategies to handle work stress. In Gomez et al., many Latinas indicated the importance of spiritual strategies to help them to “recharge and regenerate” (p. 297).

Research has shown the efficacy of integrating religion/spirituality into mental health counseling with a White American population. Religious/spirituality oriented therapy outperformed a non-treatment control group in both psychological and spiritual benefits and an alternative psychotherapy group in spiritual benefits while maintaining equal psychological benefits (Worthington, Hook, Davis, & McDaniel, 2011). A large-scale meta-analysis revealed that religious/spirituality integrated therapies outperformed an alternative therapy in both spiritual and psychological benefits (Smith, Bartz, & Richards, 2007). Since research has shown a preliminary indication of the salience of religious/spiritual values for Latinos in qualitative studies, the positive effects
VOCATION DISCERNMENT

of culturally adapted methods in counseling Latinos, and the efficaciousness of integrating religion/spirituality with a general population, it may follow that incorporating Latinos’ religious beliefs into career counseling may sometimes be appropriate and worthwhile with this population.

Calling

Dik and Duffy (2009) noted that past career theory models focused on an individual’s personal characteristics and potential to fit well with a particular career, whereas more recently, researchers have suggested that external factors such as cultural and religious/spiritual values may also play significant roles in the career decision making process (Brown, 2002; Duffy, 2006; Duffy & Dik, 2009; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hernandez et al., 2011). One way in which spiritual and religious values have an effect on the career decision making process is some individuals may seek or believe they possess a life “calling” (Constantine et al., 1994; Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, 2010; Hernandez et al., 2001). Career calling literature suggests that some individuals may have desired or have experienced Divine inspiration in which God reveals a special career directive (see Dik et al., 2009, for a review). This inspirational directive may lead these individuals to follow a specific career path as a means of following God’s will (see Dik et al., 2009). It is important to note that some researchers have applied “calling” to refer to religious as well as nonreligious career paths, whereby one attempts to use their talents to better the world in some way (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Research in the area of career calling is promising as studies strongly indicate that sense of calling may be positively related to
other factors such as life, health, and job satisfaction, career decidedness, self-knowledge, and comfort with decision (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Various studies have indicated that the concept of calling is applicable to a substantial number of adults (e.g. Davidson & Caddell, 1994; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). For example, one-third of a sample of university employees believed they had a calling to a specific type of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In a sample of 3,091 diverse incoming college freshman, only 8% said that having a calling was absolutely untrue of them, whereas the majority indicated that it was somewhat, mostly, or totally true of them (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). Combining the data from their 2007 study with another large sample (n=2,432), Duffy and Sedlacek (2010) replicated similar results; 44% of incoming college students endorsed having a calling as being mostly or totally true for them and another 28% recounted that searching for a calling was mostly or totally true of them. In a sample of 2,409 members of affluent Protestant congregations, roughly 15% believed they had a calling to a specific career (Davidson & Caddell, 1994).

Hernandez et al. (2011) studied the phenomenon of calling with a small sample of Roman Catholics who each felt called to their respective careers. Generally, participants understood calling to mean “...being open to direction or guidance from God to work to serve others” (Hernandez, p. 71). Several themes emerged from this study. The participants believed their call was based on a mutual relationship with God, which involved listening responsively and taking personal responsibility for answering
the call. Most participants went through a period of questioning their faith. Many went through a period of struggling with their calling, realizing the personal sacrifice required. After some left the Catholic faith for a period of time, the participants eventually accepted and returned to their faith. The participants used various strategies to support them during their discernment, including prayer, consulting with a spiritual advisor or a traditional career counselor. The participants often had mixed feelings after they heard and began answering the call. Participants often felt excitement and joy about their call which was tempered by a realistic acknowledgement of the sacrifice involved in following their calling. Finally, each participant had to deal with different types of family member’s reactions, who either supported or resisted the other’s calling. Unfortunately, race or ethnicity was not reported on this small sample so it is hard to determine whether the results may be applicable for a Latino population.

Several positive effects have been found to be associated with the presence of or understanding of a life calling. In the large sample of college freshman, a strong positive correlation was found between having a calling and career decidedness, self-knowledge, and comfort with decision (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). In the study on university employees, those who viewed their work as a calling scored substantially higher on measures of life, health, and job satisfaction (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). For African-American undergraduates who believed they had a career calling, this typically coincided with a career focus which stressed the importance of serving others (Constantine et al., 2006). Feenstra and Brouwer (2008) found that college students’
understanding of their calling was related to positive adjustment to college and identity achievement.

From the literature reviewed thus far it can be determined that the search for and presence of a career calling is salient for many people. From a search on the relevant literature, I found that the concept of calling has not been explored with a primarily Latino population. Many of the studies cited thus far did not report including Latinos in their samples and those that did contained a very small percentage (e.g. Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007, 2010). Consequently, there is a need for further research to discover the process whereby diverse individuals, including Latinos, discover, understand, and follow a calling.

**Vocation Discernment**

In a nationalized survey, it was found that 70% of U.S. Latinos are Roman Catholic, 20% are Protestant, 6% have no religious preference, 3% are "alternative Christians", 1% are in a non-Christian religion, and only .37% are atheist or agnostic (Espinosa et al., 2003). In many Latin American countries, Catholicism is given a special recognition in the country’s constitution (i.e. Honduras, Peru, and El Salvador and others). For this reason and others, Catholicism is oftentimes tied to many Latinos’ cultural and ethnic identity (Maldonado, 2002; Palmer-Boyes, 2010). As I will discuss further below, Latinos who are practicing Catholics may not just be searching for a “career calling,” but also for a “life calling”.

Similar to the concept of career calling, many Roman Catholics engage in a life decision making process called *vocation discernment* to determine to which state in life
one is called by God (Bolin, 2008). The term *vocation* originates from the Latin word *vocare*, and designates “a function or station in life to which a person is called by God” (Stein, Hauck, & Su, 1988). Although the term vocation has often been used in a general sense to refer to one’s specific occupation, within the Roman Catholic Church, the term is still used to refer to a call from God to a specific state in life. This vocation may be to the Sacrament of Matrimony, the ordained Priesthood (for men), Consecrated Virginity, or to the Religious life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995). Many Roman Catholics therefore engage in vocation discernment to try to determine to which vocation they are called by God. People who are discerning a call to the consecrated religious life often make the decision to enter a religious order for the purpose of determining with certainty as to whether this is their calling from God. The present study will examine the vocation discernment process for Latina women who have entered a religious order and are either currently discerning their vocation to be a religious sister or have completed their discernment and have taken their final vows.

**Discernment from a spiritual perspective.** Theorists and theologians have proposed various models as to what are or what should be the steps involved in vocation discernment. The theoretical literature on vocation discernment is broad and complex, and a discussion on this expansive body of literature is beyond the scope of this current study. Therefore, I will next give a general overview of the major concepts about vocation discernment in the theoretical literature.

Jackson (2004), a Jesuit religious brother and director of vocations for the California Province of the Society of Jesus, advises an approach to discernment which requires for
the discerner to have the ability to reflect on the ordinary events of one’s life, the ability
to describe one’s experiences, a habit of daily prayer, knowledge of one’s self,
knowledge of one’s deepest desires, and openness to God’s will. Once those conditions
are met, the discerner seeks as much information as possible about one’s options. The
discerner must pray daily for God’s wisdom and enlightenment and for help responding
to God’s enlightenment (Jackson, 2004). Then the discerner must continue to evaluate
one’s options, seek additional information, and progress toward making a decision
(Jackson, 2004).

Bertrand (2001) and Gallagher (2007) described similar processes of general spiritual
discernment, which may also be applied to vocation discernment. Bertrand (2001)
relied on spiritual wisdom passed down through the teachings of St. Bernard. Gallagher
(2007) wrote of spiritual discernment using the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola in the
*Spiritual Exercises*. Discerners must determine whether an inspiration is coming from
God, from self, from an evil spirit, or from another source (Bertrand, 2001; Gallagher,
2007). A discerner evaluates one’s feelings in regards to each option to learn from
where the thought or feeling originates (Bertrand, 2001; Gallagher, 2007). Feelings of
sadness and happiness, called desolations and consolations respectively, give valuable
information to the discerner regarding from where the thought or inspiration originates
(Gallagher, 2007). To paraphrase and simplify this complicated process; one must
eventually determine if whether the choice he or she considers leads to fleeting
happiness or long-lasting happiness (Bertrand, 2001). Based on the belief that God’s will
leads to true and eternal happiness, one can determine whether or not a particular
inspiration comes from God and thus whether or not a particular path should be chosen (Bertrand, 2001).

**Discernment from a sociological perspective.** In the United States the numbers of consecrated religious sisters and brothers has decreased drastically since the mid-1960s. The lower numbers are due in part to decreased rates of entry (Ebaugh, 1977). Ebaugh (1993) proposed that the decreased rate of entrance into women’s religious orders was an effect of the simultaneously increasing social, educational, and professional opportunities for women in the secular (developed) world. This theory presupposes that the reasons women originally entered the religious life were to obtain more social, educational, and professional opportunity. I will also consider whether upward mobility factors could be motivating considerations for women living in Latin America, who at the present time, generally face less economic, educational and professional opportunities than women living in the post-industrialized world.

Finke (1997) and Stark and Finke (2000), however, proposed an opposing theory to that of Ebaugh (1993), noting that her theory did not take into consideration the parallel decrease in the number of Catholic priests and religious brothers since the mid-1960s. Stark and Finke noted the sudden and steep decline of Catholic priests, men and women religious, coincided with the release of Vatican II documents, which allowed for several reforms to take place in the organization and behavior of religious orders. Some of these changes included the abandonment of wearing the religious habit, no longer living together as a community, and having increased social involvement with the secular world. Stark and Finke used Rational Choice Theory to explain why these
changes in the structure of religious life may have led to women no longer desiring to become a religious sister. According to Rational Choice Theory, those engaged in a decision-making process, such as vocation discernment, review their options and choose that which offers more personal benefits and requires less cost, alongside respecting one’s moral values (Finke, 1997; Stark & Finke, 2000). Stark and Finke proposed that the sacrifices a vowed religious make, in particular: poverty, chastity and obedience, are part of the “costs” of the lifestyle, which had previously been outweighed by the “benefits”. They suggested that some of benefits/rewards may have been a strong sense of community and special treatment for wearing the religious habit. Starke and Finke argued that the post-Vatican II reforms allowing for the abandonment of the religious habit and of life in community lowered the compensating benefits while maintaining the costs.

To test this theory, both Finke (1997), and Stark and Finke (2000) examined survey data from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, comparing religious communities which made progressive Vatican II reforms with those which maintained a more traditional stance. They found compelling evidence to support their theory- orders who have maintained the tradition of living in community and wearing the religious habit have achieved more success at recruiting new members. Accordingly, other studies have found that members of religious communities expressed the desire to wear a religious habit as an important determining factor for their choice of a specific religious order (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Trzebiatowska, 2008). Further, eighty-six percent of visitors to the website
VocationMatch.com (a website which assists with vocation discernment) indicated their desire to enter a religious order which dons the traditional religious habit (CARA, 2010).

Other researchers also have found that orders which stabilized or gained membership since Vatican II are those which possess a focused mission, have reinstated classic traditions, and expect more from their members as a cost for belonging (Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). A review of the literature on religious commitment indicates that regardless of the religious tradition being studied, the sects which impose strong boundaries grounded on underlying religious principles engender greater levels of participation and commitment from members (see Finke, 2004). Although it appears a strong positive relationship exists between maintaining certain traditional practices and attraction and/or adherence to religious life, the reason for the relationship is not yet fully understood. In the present study, I also consider sociological influences such the desire to live in community, and/or to wear the religious habit as potential motivating factors for the religious sisters to have entered the religious life.

Giving more support to Rational Choice Theory, a study on the Sisters of Mercy, showed that religious sisters used a combination of strategies that sometimes included weighing costs versus benefits to discern to which type of ministry they were called. They used prayer and reflection (29%), rational/objective strategies (13%), and a combination of both (47%) to discern (Kramer, Weiner, & Nolan, 1985). The prayer and reflection group stated they used such activities as meditation, retreats, spiritual reading, reflection and prayer. The rational/objective group listed one’s own strengths and weaknesses, made a list of pros and cons, and discussed options with others.
Although this study was not about vocation discernment per se, but on discernment to a specific ministry, the religious sister’s strategy of making a list of pros and cons seems to give support to the theory that even religiously inclined individuals sometimes weigh decisions to see which option provides greater benefits and requires less cost (see Finke, 1997; Kramer et al., 1985; Stark & Finke, 2000). It is therefore a possibility that women engaging in vocation discernment may use similar methods to determine if the religious life would provide more ultimate benefits than the cost it requires and make their decision likewise.

**Discernment from a psychosocial perspective.** Several studies have reported on the factors which led or attracted religious sisters to the religious life in general as well as to the factors which have caused them to choose a specific religious order. One such study, conducted at the Center for the Apostolate at Georgetown University (CARA) (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009), involved both qualitative and quantitative methods and reported the factors which most attracted religious sisters and brothers to their respective orders. A majority of religious sisters (73%) endorsed “very much” a desire for spiritual growth and a deep prayer life as being a motivating factor for deciding on Religious life (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009). In this study and others, religious sisters believed living, working, and praying in community with members of their respective orders was an important factor in their attraction to religious life (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Markham, 1989; Nygren & Ukeritis, 1993). Giving further support to the importance of a strong community life, sociological data showed that religious orders which placed a higher priority on community life had higher numbers of religious sisters
entering, in formation, and taking their final vows (CARA, 1993, as cited in Stark & Finke, 2000).

*Identity formation.* A quantitative study on 128 female and 63 male Christian college students found that identity development and vocation development (meaning calling to a career in this study) “follow parallel paths” with strong positive correlations found between the two (Feenstra & Brouwer, 2008, p. 89). The profound importance of a person’s self-concept in relation to one’s choice of vocation materialized in qualitative studies as well. In a grounded theory study, Hankle (2011) discovered five themes in the vocation discernment process for men who chose to become Catholic priests, all of which contained the theme of one’s identity. Hankle borrowed from Super’s (as cited in Osborne, 1997) theory of vocational development to provide a conceptual framework for the themes he discovered from his interviews with the men. In this theory, one’s career choice must be congruent with one’s self-concept (Osborne, 1997). In correspondence with this framework, the men described stages of their discernment which involved a “testing” of their self-concept as being a priest. The men generally went through similar identity stages, first imagining themselves as priest, then testing out alternate views of self, then coming back to the idea of being a priest, being affirmed in this choice, and continuously staying open to further discernment (Hankle, 2011).

Chistopherson (1994), on the other hand, interviewed men who were pastors or clergy at Protestant or Roman Catholic churches, respectively. He discovered varying themes in the life stories of these men, and in particular, the importance of a man’s
identity in his vocation choice. Several of his participants discussed the importance of becoming “who they are” to fulfill God’s call. These studies seem to point to a strong relationship between identity development and the development of one’s calling.

**Social influences.** On another note, several studies implicated the importance of social modeling; many Sisters stated they were attracted to the religious life because of the positive example of other religious sisters (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Kreis & Bardwell, 2011; Trzebiatowska, 2008; Wolf, 1990; Zajac, 1999). In the qualitative interview responses numerous religious sisters stated the reason they were most attracted to their religious order was because of the “joy of the sisters” or because of their example of personal holiness (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Zajac, 1999). In an autobiographical article on her life as a religious missionary sister, Rieckelman (2001) stressed the important influence other religious, both priests and sisters, had on her decision to become a religious missionary sister. Furthermore, a historical study which examined historical archives to understand the vocational choices of women in three different religious orders also pointed to the important influence of role models who had already entered the religious life (Zimmerman, 2000).

Several studies pointed out the important influence of family members on the persons’ discernment process, both positive and negative. For example, many religious sisters discussed the significance of growing up in a God-centered family and community and receiving encouragement and support from family members (Kreis & Bardwell, 2011; Trzebiatowska, 2008; Wolf, 1990). Zajac’s (1999) participants often had family members who were members of religious orders, including the one they had joined.
In Bendyna and Gautier (2009), the religious sisters and brothers reported they received more support from members of their religious institute (89% ranked other members as initially supportive), and less support from parents (57% ranked parents as initially supportive) and even less support from siblings (49% ranked siblings as initially supportive). Many religious sisters and brothers reported receiving misunderstanding, indifference or hostility from others regarding their decision to be a religious (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Trzebiatowska, 2008). These studies did not analyze the implications of familial/community influences on the participants by race or nationality. Given Latinos’ cultural value of *familismo*, it was interesting to explore the influence of familial and community factors on the vocation discernment of the Latina women in the present study.

**Discernment from an anthropological perspective.** In an ethnographic book titled *Jesus in Our Wombs: Embodying Modernity in a Mexican Convent*, Lester (2005) describes the eighteen months she spent with postulants in a Mexican convent, observing their way of life and conducting interviews. Although she focused on their religious formation and on developing a theory of embodiment, she did touch on some aspects of vocation discernment. The religious sisters in her study saw vocation as a potentiality, “…the kind of life we *could* lead, the service to God and humankind we *could* give, if we were to conquer our selfish ambitions and humbly surrender ourselves to God’s plan for us” (Lester, p.7). They saw a vocation to the religious life as being a distinct call from God which one can choose to follow or to ignore, but in order to decide whether or not to follow God’s calling one has to first discern that calling.
In Chapter Four: Brokenness, Lester (2005) described some of the experiences the postulants recounted about life experiences which were part of their discernment process and helped lead to the choice to enter the convent. Each of her participants described having had a pervasive feeling of *inquietud* (restlessness, discomfort, or emptiness) with their present lives, feeling as if something were wrong or missing.

Initially, the young women dealt with this feeling of emptiness in different ways, such as changing jobs, going out partying, or breaking up with a boyfriend. Eventually, she usually began participating in some form of religious activity to seek for what was missing, or in a sense to fill the void. Through her greater participation in religious activities she often began to wonder if she was being called by God to the religious life.

Most of the young women reported that they first ignored this sense of calling and hoped it would go away. Interestingly, this sense of calling to the religious life seemed to follow her, “manifesting itself in small daily occurrences that, over time, started to seem too ‘weird’ to be mere accidents of circumstance” (Lester, p. 96). The women began to understand these small occurrences as signs that God was leading her into the religious life.

Eventually, the women often began to seek advice from some type of a spiritual director, a priest, or someone else she trusted. After receiving some type of counsel from the advisor, she then attended a diocesan vocational retreat. At this retreat she learned more about the different vocations, i.e. marriage, religious life, etc. and then more specifically about the religious vocation and about the different types of religious orders. The end of the second retreat was the point at which most of the women she
interviewed were ready to join a religious order. Lester (2005) noted the reasons the women gave for choosing one religious order as opposed to another one could be as important as the charism/mission of the order to something as seemingly insignificant as the color of the religious habit.

**Community discernment.** The members of the religious order must also discern whether or not the applicant may be a suitable potential member of the congregation. According to the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes (1983), once a woman enters a community she and the members of the community begin a period of continual and mutual discernment to determine whether the woman has a genuine call from God and has the capacity to live the life. Jackson (2004) explained in his prescriptive theoretical approach that the discernment process must be tested against those who hold legitimate authority in the religious order. Many communities require basic guidelines potential applicants must meet in order to be considered for membership (see O’Reilly, 1989; Vogue, 2001). For example, in the U.S. based CARA study, most religious communities required for candidates to have a medical assessment (94%), psychological testing (84%), a background check (75%), and/or a behavioral assessment (68%) (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009). These requirements are not always the same for religious communities in other countries.

St. Benedict, the founder of the Benedictine order, prescribed rules for his abbots to use to “test” potential candidates for their suitability to the novitiate. Benedict advised abbots to leave applicants waiting by the gate for several days before even being allowed into the guest quarters (Vogue, 2001). Accordingly, abbots tested candidates to
see whether they endured this test with patience and hence began to prove they had a “true vocation” by their zeal for seeking God, their obedience, and their desire to be humbled (Vogue, 2001). Although this extreme method of testing candidates is not used in the community discernment process of most religious orders, it demonstrates the importance of the discernment process for both the individual and the religious community.

**Summary**

The career counseling field has gradually begun to investigate the career development process for Latinos in the U.S. and abroad. Reviews of the career literature reveal very low percentages of articles devoted to multicultural issues and even less attention paid to issues regarding Latinos (Koegel et al., 1995; Flores et al., 2006). Articles published in this realm often lack a cohesive theoretical base, do not investigate culture-specific theories, or do not consider relevant cultural variables (Flores et al., 2006; Koegel et al., 1995). Hence, researchers have called for investigations that focus on a specific racial ethnic minority group and for a greater use of qualitative methods with these populations (Flores et al., 2006; Koegel et al., 1995).

One finding that has stood out fairly consistently in the career literature with Latinos is the importance of the cultural value *familismo*. Parental support and encouragement has been associated with a variety of positive effects from level of career aspiration and career choice prestige to self-efficacy beliefs (Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Navarro et al., 2007). The weighty influence of parents on many Latinos’ career
development was also emphasized in qualitative studies (Gomez et al., 2001; Griggs et al., 1992).

Another somewhat consistent finding regarding this population has been that Latinos are likely to have similar career aspirations to other racial/ethnic groups, but often have lower career expectations (Arbona, 1990; Chang et al., 2006). This may be due to perceived barriers such as discrimination or limited access to career resources and information (Arbona, 1990). Other findings with Latinos involve the relationship of career self-efficacy to other variables (Flores et al., 2006; Gushue et al., 2006; Miranda & Unhoefer, 1998).

Although not much research exists on the effectiveness of including cultural or religious values in career counseling with Latinos, multiple studies have demonstrated the efficacy of making cultural adaptations to general mental health counseling with Latinos (e.g. Griner & Smith, 2006; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002; Sue et al., 2009). Other studies have demonstrated the importance of including religious/spiritual values during mental health counseling with a general population (Smith et al., 2007; Worthington et al., 2011).

Religious and spiritual values, which were previously overlooked in the literature, have recently received more attention as being potential influencers on the career decision-making process. Recent career vocational literature has focused on the importance of these factors on the career decision-making process with White Americans and African-Americans (e.g. Constantine et al., 2006; Duffy & Dik, 2009). Further, researchers have discovered that sense of calling is a salient theme for many
adults who believe they have a special mission to serve others (e.g. Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hernandez et al., 2011; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Sense of calling is strongly correlated with a variety of other positive factors (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

Likewise, some Roman Catholics may believe they are called by God to a specific state in life, either to the Sacrament of Matrimony, the ordained Priesthood (for men), Consecrated Virginity, or the Religious life (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995). Some Catholics engage in a process of vocation discernment whereby one tries to listen, understand, and follow God’s call to a specific state in life. This is a relevant concept for Latinos in light of the high rates considering themselves Roman Catholic and entering religious orders (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Espinosa et al., 2003).

According to theorists, researchers, and sociologists, vocation discerners may use a variety of psychological and spiritual processes to discern (e.g. Bertrand, 2001; Hankle, 2010). These strategies may involve determining the source of one’s thoughts, evaluating one’s feelings, and weighing the costs and benefits associated with each option (Bertrand, 2001; Gallagher, 2007; Kramer et al., 1985; Stark and Finke, 2000). Others have explored the importance of one’s self-concept in the vocation discernment process (Chistopherson, 1994; Feenstra & Brouwer, 2008; Hankle, 2011).

Lester (2005) used an ethnographic approach to describe some aspects of the vocation discernment process for postulants in a Mexican convent. She found similar themes in her participants’ vocation stories. For example, they believed a vocation to the religious life is a call from God which one can follow or set aside. Many described
feelings of *inquietud* which led to a greater involvement in religious practice and to the consideration of the religious life. These young women often began to experience small daily occurrences which seemed to confirm a calling to the religious life.

Oftentimes these young women sought advice from a spiritual advisor and attended a vocation retreat to understand more about the religious life.

Various researchers have explored and discovered some of the factors significant to women who have chosen the religious life. The desire to live a communitarian life and to develop one’s spiritual life, as well as having a sense of being called, were found to be significant factors (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Kreis & Bardwell, 2011; Trzebiatowska, 2008; Wolf, 1990). Also, many Religious sisters cited the important influence role models have had on their decision (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Rieckelman, 2001; Trzebiatowska, 2008; Wolf, 1990; Zajac, 1999). Alongside the individual, the members of the religious community also continually discern whether the candidate has a genuine call and would be a suitable member (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Jackson, 2004; O’Reilly, 1989; SCRSI, 1983; Vogue, 2001).

The topic of vocation discernment with Latina women religious is an area of research that is still in its infancy and there is much to be learned on the nature of this discernment process. Following Creswell’s (1994) recommendation to use qualitative approaches with topics yet to be empirically explored, I utilize an ethnographic case study approach to explore further the vocation discernment process for Latin American women.
Chapter III

Methodology

I conducted an ethnographic case study borrowing some methods of critical ethnography as explained by Carspecken (1996), as well as other qualitative techniques described by additional researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Spradley, 1978). Critical ethnography methods, which are rooted in critical epistemology and theory, seek to employ research for the purpose of critiquing societal values and structures (Carspecken, 1996; Kinchloe & MacLaren, 1994). “Critical” researchers (those using critical theory) believe it is important to examine one’s own values before beginning research and to make those values explicit to readers (Carspecken, 1996; Kinchloe & MacLaren, 1994). I discuss my own values and worldview and their potential impact on the data collection, analysis and interpretation process at the end of the methodology section. There I also discuss my biases and feelings toward the participants as well as in the Pre-Interview De-briefing session which is recorded in Appendix H.

Many “critical” researchers share the following assumptions about research: 1) Research should support efforts for positive changes in society, 2) Certain groups are given more societal privilege than others, 3) Oppression is reproduced when the oppressed assent to their lower status as appropriate; hence research should be used to discern the subtleties of oppression, 4) All forms of oppression need to be researched
and challenged, 5) Mainstream research practices are often part of the problem
(Carspecken, 1996, pp. 6-7).

Alongside examining the vocation discernment process itself, I use critical inquiry
to briefly examine the role of the surrounding societal context on the religious sisters’
choice of a religious vocation. If the sister completes her process of discernment and
decides to become a consecrated religious sister, she will take vows of chastity, poverty,
and obedience. The choice to live a life of poverty, chastity and obedience may in itself
be a type of defiance to the worldly tenets of materialism, hedonism, oppression, and
power. In a world where many are exploited in sexual relations, these sisters choose to
forgo any sexual relationship to become the bride of Christ. In a world where
proponents of capitalism and socialism clash over how wealth should be distributed,
these sisters choose to live in poverty and unity with the poor. In a world where
individualism and personal freedom are adulated as gods, these sisters choose to
surrender their individual freedom and live in community, obedient to their Superiors.

Participants

Selection of participants. I used a purposeful sampling method, and sought to
locate individuals who are experiencing or have experienced the concept of vocation
discernment (Polkinghorne, 2005). The aim of the present study is not to generalize to
the population of all women discerning a vocation to the religious life, but rather to
explore the vocation discernment process for women of Mexican or Central American
ancestry. I therefore chose to conduct the case study on women in the religious order
the *Oblates of Cristo Rey (O.C.R.*) a religious order founded in Mexico in 1984 with more
recently established convents in Mexico City, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the United States.

Data was collected from religious sisters who are either in the process of discernment (novices or temporary professed sisters), or from religious sisters who have successfully completed discernment and are perpetually professed members of the Oblates. Suitable to a purposeful sampling strategy, both groups of religious sisters are either currently experiencing the phenomenon being studied or have already experienced it (Polkinghorne, 2005).

**General description of participants.** The religious sisters in O.C.R. are between the ages of 14 and 67. I chose to only interview religious sisters whom are over the age of 18. All of the religious sisters in O.C.R. are of Mexican or Central American descent, except for one sister who is of mixed Mexican and European-American descent. The table below gives a general description of the participants interviewed for the present study. The sisters each used a pseudonym and a couple of the sisters changed identifying details such as country of origin and/or age to protect their confidentiality.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Level of Formation</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sister Amabilis de Jesús</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Perpetually professed</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Bernadetta</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Perpetually professed</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Brígida del Rosario</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Perpetually professed</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Catalina de Jesús</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Temporally professed</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Dulce María</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Perpetually professed</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Faustina</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Perpetually professed</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Margarita del Lacoque</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Perpetually professed</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister Miriam Elisabet</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Perpetually professed</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample size. The guiding principle for selecting a sample size for qualitative research is to continue sampling until one has reached saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967.) Saturation is achieved by continuing to collect data from new participants until it becomes apparent that nothing new is being generated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Although little has been written about ideal sample sizes in qualitative research, Bertaux (1981) recommended a minimum sample size of fifteen for any type of qualitative research. However, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, (2006), found that the vast majority of data codes from their study on reproductive health care were generated after only six interviews. They concluded that with a homogenous sample one may reach saturation with a reduced sample size, such as at six (Guest et al., 2006).

Perhaps because of the religious, ethnic, and cultural similarities within the sample, and in congruence with the conclusions of Guest et al. (2006), I began to achieve saturation at eight interviews. However, I continued interviewing until I reached 14 participants so that I would have a surplus of data, rather than not enough.

Exclusion criterion. I did not interview religious sisters under the age of 18 because they are not considered legal adults in either the U.S. or Mexico. I recorded in an Excel spreadsheet the number of religious sisters I asked to participate, the number excluded because they did not meet age criteria, those who declined to participate, and the number who actually participated. Although several sisters declined to participate in the interviews and/or observations, the only significant difference between those who participated and those who did not is those who did participate seemed to be the sisters
who had come to know me better. The implications of this will be explored in the Discussion section in Chapter five. No sisters dropped out of the study prematurely.

**Compensation.** The religious sisters participated in the study as volunteers and were not compensated financially for their participation. However, I gave the sisters a small amount of money each week to cover the cost of room and board. I also spent a small portion of my time teaching English to members of the community, by request, in order to compensate the religious order for their participation in the research.

**Setting**

I first visited the religious sisters at the convent in the U.S. to conduct preliminary interviews over a period of a few days. At this time I had the opportunity to interview two religious sisters. However, I did not glean sufficient data from these two interviews and therefore did not include these two interviews in the present study. The reasons I was not able to obtain enough data from these two interviews are: my Spanish was inadequate to ask follow-up questions, the sisters only answered a couple of questions, and one of the two sisters did not allow voice recording so I only have the data from my own notes. However, this preliminary interview period helped to verify that my interview questions were relevant to my research questions and also helped me to realize I needed to simplify my interview questions. After this was completed, I traveled to Mexico to get to know The Oblates at the site of their Motherhouse convent for about a week. The Motherhouse convent is located on the plateau of Mount Saint Francis in a small town near Acapulco. There were about 34 religious sisters and eight religious brothers residing on Mount Saint Francis during the time of my visit.
Throughout my stay at each of the convents, I participated in the daily routine of the religious sisters: prayers, mass, recreation, meals, and occasionally, missions. The religious sisters spend roughly half of the year in a monastic lifestyle and the other half of the year in an active apostolate, going on missions into different parts of Mexico, Central America, and the United States.

After spending a week in Mexico, I was invited to go to Guatemala with the sisters to observe their profession of vows ceremony. I continued the participant-observation part of my study in Guatemala and resided with the sisters in a small town outside of Quetzaltenango for about two weeks. In the middle of my stay, I also took a two-week intensive Spanish immersion course, and lived in a home-stay with a Guatemalan family. I was not able to interview any of the religious sisters while I was in Guatemala. Since I was there for such a short time, it seemed I was not able to sufficiently gain the trust of the sisters to be able to conduct interviews.

After spending a month in Guatemala, I returned to the convent in the U.S. for two weeks. I continued with participant-observation and interviewed four sisters. I then returned to the Mexican convent and stayed for the remainder of my time, which was about a month. In Mexico I interviewed eight more sisters. Out of these interviews, I was not able to use one of them because unbeknownst to me the voice-recorder stopped in the middle of the interview. For the present study I analyzed and coded eight of the fourteen interviews. Three were not used for the reasons mentioned above and the other three were not used because I began to reach saturation at only eight interviews.
Procedure

**Gaining access.** I was previously acquainted with the religious order through volunteer work in 2008; I taught computer skills to the religious sisters and brothers for one month. In the spring of 2011, I met with the founder of the Oblates, Father Juan Bautista, O.C.R., to request his permission to do a study on the vocation discernment of the religious sisters in his order. After I received permission from him, I called the Mother Superiors of the convents in Mexico and the United States to work out the details of my stay and to obtain their consent as well.

**Informed consent.** Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Ball State University, I began the research process. At the convents in Mexico and in the United States, I met with a large group of the religious sisters and the Father Superior to go over the informed consent process. He and I explained the informed consent process, that their participation was voluntary, the risks and benefits of participation, and confidentiality. Those who were willing to participate in the study by being observed and video/audio-taped, signed a general informed consent form (see Appendices A).

Before I conducted individual interviews, I read the participants the informed consent form for interviews or asked the participant to read it out loud to me (Appendix B). After answering any questions they may have had, each interview participant signed the informed consent form for interviews (Appendix B). If a participant was willing to be both observed and interviewed, they signed the adult general informed consent with permission to interview form (Appendix C). These informed consent forms explained the
main purpose of the research, the data collection procedures, confidentiality, participants’ rights, known risks, benefits associated with participation, and a phone number for questions.

Confidentiality in qualitative research. Qualitative studies often contain rich, detailed descriptions of participants, which can make a study more interesting but at the same time can lead to a breach of confidentiality through means of deductive disclosure (Kaiser, 2009). Deductive disclosure occurs when details such as age, race, gender, or number of years within an organization make individuals identifiable to those familiar with the study’s sample (Seiber, 1992). In the dominant approach to participant confidentiality the qualitative researcher assumes the participant wants complete anonymity and decides which data to alter and how to alter it, also assuming these changes in the details do not compromise the meaning of the data (Kaiser, 2009). Kaiser recommends using an alternative informed consent process to address participant confidentiality which takes into account the desire of research participants. The goal of this alternative informed consent process is to be able to share rich data, maintain the meaning of the data, and respects participants’ perspectives of how to share their data. Kaiser recommends for the informed process to be continuous, discussing confidentiality not only during the onset of research, but also returning to the issue of confidentiality after participants’ have opened up to the researcher. This alternative approach moves away from the assumption that every participant wants complete anonymity and recognizes that some may desire to have their data presented accurately without alteration (Kaiser, 2009). Keeping these considerations in mind, I opted to give
participants the opportunity to indicate how they would like their data to be handled; whether they would like potentially identifying details such as age or race to be changed. Accordingly, I presented the Post-Interview Confidentiality Form (Appendix D) to participants at the end of the data collection process. This additional form allowed for me to address any sensitive issues the participant brought up during the interview and allowed for participant feedback on whether or not they would like this data shared, thus keeping the informed consent process more continuous.

**Stages of Critical Ethnography.** As I conducted an ethnographic case study, I spent less time in the field than during a typical ethnography. Thus I borrowed from only the first three stages of critical ethnography described by Carspecken (1996), although I will describe all five stages below. These stages are not always sequential and can be cyclical. In stage one I started to build a primary record of data using observations and participant-observations. Stage two describes the process of reconstructive data analysis and coding procedures; in my particular study I began this stage after stage three was completed. During stage three I generated dialogical data through conducting individual interviews. Carspecken also recommends using additional techniques such as focus group interviews. However, I did not use these techniques in the present study because of the relatively short amount of time I had to spend in the field. Normally, in stage four the researcher tries to discover relationships between social systems by examining various related sites. In stage five, the investigator looks for explanations of the findings using existing social-theoretical models. As mentioned above, I will not use these last two stages of critical ethnography.
**Stage one: Building a primary record.** This stage involves recording general and specific observations of the participants and surroundings, locating informants, and examining audio and visual materials.

*Participant-Observation.* Although Carspecken (1996) recommends starting with a period of passive observation before moving on to more active participation, I found that the sisters expected for me to participate in their daily schedule, and it seemed like the best way to build rapport with them, so I decided to start participating in their daily schedule right from the beginning. After spending time participating in their daily schedule, whenever I had a few moments free, I recorded general observations about the surrounding and inside area of my field site in a “field journal” (Carspecken, 1996). I included both descriptive and reflective field notes, such as physical descriptions of subjects, setting, events, and activities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Carspecken, 1996). I also included reflections on my methods and how they seemed to affect subjects. I included possible ethical conflicts and my own thoughts and feelings about participants and events (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

After I was in the field for some time and felt my participants were fairly comfortable with my presence in their daily life I began periods of more intense, passive observation to create thick notes. I recorded these thick notes in a separate journal from the field journal to build a primary record (Carspecken, 1996). I used both audio and visual recording and written observations to compile thick notes. I used Carspecken’s (1996, p. 47) guidelines for thick notes including: Background information, subjects’ body language, dialogue, vocal tone, frequent recordings of time, observer
comments, verbatim speech, and a diagram to describe the use of space. I tried to use a low-inference vocabulary in my thick notes, using tentative terms such as “it seems...” when I made subjective comments (Carspecken, 1996).

I sometimes used Carspecken’s (1996) method of priority observation as follows. I randomly chose one person on the site and recorded as much detail as possible about their words and actions for about five minutes. Then I recorded the actions of others who interacted with the first individual. As a last priority I noted everything else that occurred on site. Every few minutes I picked a new person to be at the center of my observational recordings. If something of interest occurred during this process, I shifted my focus of observation to the interruption until it ended and then continued with the method of priority observation. Normally, I conducted observations in one to two hour time blocks and I changed the time of day and activity I observed in order to observe the effects of routine and time of day.

*Documents and audio-visual materials.* To add to my primary record I reviewed private and public documents, photographs and videotapes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 1994). I also videotaped various events and social interactions at the convent to add to the audio-visual data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

*Informants.* As part of building a primary record, I identified key informants (Carspecken, 1996). An informant is “someone living on the site or in the culture of interest who is well connected and highly articulate” (Carspecken, p.50). I sometimes relied on informants to provide contextual information about the religious order and the sisters. My informants were the founding priest, other priests, and friends of the
religious order. I conducted formal interviews with some informants, and informal interviews or conversations with others, keeping in mind the goals of finding out more about the religious order and the vocation discernment process.

**Stage two: Reconstructive data analysis.** With the limited time I had in the field, I did not begin stage two reconstructive data analysis while I was in the field, but instead began this step after I had completed the interviews and observations and had returned home. At this point I began analyses of the data, which included transcribing, translating, coding, creating meaning fields and conducting pragmatic horizon analysis, all which will be described below.

*Transcribing and translating the data.* I listened to a couple of the recorded interviews and transcribed the data word for word into a Microsoft Word document. I used these transcriptions as an example for how I wanted the data transcribed and then hired several individuals who are fluent in Spanish to finish transcribing the remainder of the interviews. I then hired these individuals to translate the documents into English to make the analysis process go more smoothly and quickly for me. I read through the translations and listened to parts of the audio interview while looking at the translation to ensure an accurate English translation.

*Low-level coding procedures.* I based my coding procedures on the recommendations of Carspecken (1996) while adapting them to fit the structure of my study. First I read through the field journal and interview data in its entirety. As I read through the interviews I noted potential meanings for the dialogue and actions of participants and looked for patterns and anomalies. As I noted patterns or themes
within an interview I wrote them down and began a low-level coding for each individual interview. As I went through each interview I did the same, I looked for patterns/themes, noted them and created a low-level coding scheme for that particular interview. Around this time, I also began looking through my field journal to look for patterns and themes and to note how these patterns intersected with features from the interviews. After I had gone through all of the interviews, I examined them against one another and noted patterns between the interviews. I began a low-level coding scheme that pulled from all of the interviews and field journal similar patterns and themes. For this low-level coding, I referenced the more objective features of the interview data and field journal (Carspecken).

To illustrate my use of this basic low-level coding, I include here an example of some of the lower level codes I found during analysis.

Coding Scheme

Example: Int2line265-267 = Interview 2 text line 265-267

1. Social Background of the Participants
   A. Involved with the Catholic church (outside of Mass)
      a. Attended events at church, int1line58-63;72-74;80-81;90-94; int9line687-90; int11line309-310
      b. Attended Catechism, int1line52-53; int6line160-165;
      c. Taught catechism, int4line172-183; int9line315-316; int7line116-128
      d. Attended youth group, int1line74-76; int4line172-183
      e. Sang in the choir, int8line111
      f. Was a lector, int8line97-105
      g. Went on missions, int4line123-124;128-129;133-134
      h. Helped the sick or the poor, int6line178-191; int4line123-124;128-129;133-134
i. In a prayer group/Rosary Group and/or Charismatic Prayer group

During this lower level coding procedure, I began to notice more abstract concepts which began to emerge from the data. In order to explore the accuracy of these abstract and subjective concepts, I began to use these low-level codes to choose small sections of field notes for deeper analysis. This deeper analysis involved creating meaning fields and conducting pragmatic horizon analysis, the process of which will be described more below.

**Meaning fields.** Meaning fields, also termed meaning reconstructions, are attempts by the researcher to speculate the intended meaning of a participant’s words or actions. The researcher creates meaning reconstructions by writing down the possibilities of meanings for a participant’s speech and/or actions. Carspecken (1996) stated “...initial meaning reconstructions are performed to help researchers clarify the impressions of meaning they have received from their observations” (p.102). Often, the researcher cannot know for sure what a participant meant by an act, nor how the act was interpreted by other witnesses, however, meaning field reconstructions attempt to describe as closely as possible the intended meaning. Each act that is executed can be interpreted in many possible ways, the researcher uses “or”, “and”, “and/or” statements to suggest possibilities of meanings for particular acts (Carspecken, p. 96). Essentially, the researcher tries to make implicit meanings explicit for purposes of
analysis and interpretation, while at the same time explaining the action as the participant would explain it him or herself (Carspecken, 1996).

I selected short segments from my interviews, put them into a separate document and then performed meaning field analysis. To demonstrate the nature of a meaning field analysis, below is an example taken from my interview with Sister Bernadetta.

**Meaning Field**

[Observer Comment (OC): Sister Bernadetta is recounting to me the story about how she first met one of the nuns from her order]

Sister Bernadetta: And now I spoke to a Sister, and a very happy Sister, I tell her: “Ay! Hermanita (little Sister),” I say, “Excuse me, I want to be a religious, but what are the requirements needed?” [OC: she speaks in a whispery dreamy voice, sounds kind of hopeful]. She started, this was the question that she asked me, she says: “Ah, well, look, to have a vocation, to have the desire, and to want to love God.” I say, “Ay! Well, they are so easy and I want to be a nun, yes, I want to give my life to God, and I have the desire to be a religious!” [OC: She talks really fast in a whispery voice full of emotion]

Meaning Field:

I desire to be a nun.

[AND/OR] I (already) meet your requirements to be a nun.

[AND] I am ready to be a nun (in both requirements and desire).

[AND/OR] Your requirements are not difficult for me to meet.

[AND/OR] I am really excited about the possibility of becoming a nun.

[AND/OR] I desire for you to know this is something I want to do with my life.

[OR (possibly)] I desire for you to know how important this is to me.

By taking into account the subject’s tone, body posture, facial expressions, the researchers tries to explicate some of the possible meanings behind a person’s statement. These initial meaning reconstructions help provide the groundwork for pragmatic horizon analysis (Carspecken, 1996). I tried to keep my meaning
reconstructions at a low level of inference; my higher-levels of inference were made in the pragmatic horizon analysis described below.

*Pragmatic horizon analysis.* *Pragmatic horizon analysis* takes original meaning reconstructions and analyzes them further in order to: 1) Uncover the contextual background from which the participant spoke (termed *vertical analysis*) and, 2) To explicate what type of claim they are making (termed *horizontal analysis*). Carspecken (1996, p. 103) stated that “we only understand an idea against a horizon from which that idea is brought forth.” In order for members of a culture to communicate with one another, for the most part, they must use the same socially constructed symbols to communicate, and have a mutual understanding of these symbols (Carspecken). For example, each speech act contains several possible claims within its horizon. The categories of possible reference and claim within each speech act are: “1) A claim that the act is *intelligible*, 2) A claim that the act is *socially legitimate or appropriate*, 3) A claim that the actor has a certain *subjective state* (feelings and intentions) at the time of acting, 4) A claim that the actor has a certain *identity*, and 5) A claim that a certain *objective state of affairs* exists” (Carspecken, p. 104).

I used *horizontal analysis* to explicate which type of claim the actor is making by his speech act. Generally, the speech act falls into one of the categories discussed above: a normative-evaluative, subjective, identity, or objective claim (Carspecken, 1996). I used *vertical analysis* to uncover the implicit norms or values behind the participant’s dialogue, as well as to estimate how closely these norms are referenced within the dialogue. I used the term *foregrounded* if a norm is highly referenced within the speech
act, or \textit{backgrounded} to refer to a norm which is more remotely indicated (Carspecken, p. 111). To illustrate both horizontal and vertical analysis, I include another example from the same interview material.

\textbf{Pragmatic Horizon Analysis with Horizontal and Vertical Analysis}

Sister Bernadetta: And now I spoke to a Sister, and a very happy Sister, I tell her: “Ay! \textit{Hermanita} (little Sister),” I say, “Excuse me, I want to be a religious, but what are the requirements needed?” [OC: she speaks in a whispy dreamy voice, sounds kind of hopeful]. She started- this was the question that she asked me, she says: “Ah, well, look, to have a vocation, to have the desire, and to want to love God.” I say, “Ay! Well, they are so easy and I want to be a nun, yes, I want to give my life to God, and I have the desire to be a religious! [OC: She talks really fast in a whispy voice full of emotion]

Meaning Field:

\textbf{FOREGROUNDED}
I desire to be a nun. (Subjective)

[AND/OR] I (already) meet your requirements to be a nun. (Subjective/Objective)

\textbf{NEAR FOREGROUND}

[AND] I am ready to be a nun (in both requirements and desire). (Subjective/Objective)
[AND/OR] Your requirements are not difficult for me to meet. (Subjective/Objective)
[AND/OR] I am really excited about the possibility of becoming a nun. (Subjective)
[AND/OR] I am a person who desires to be a religious sister. (Identity)

\textbf{MID-RANGE}

[AND/OR] I desire for you to know this is something I want to do with my life. (Subjective)
[OR (possibly)] I desire for you to know how important this is to me. (Subjective)

\textbf{BACKGROUNDED}

[AND] The desire to be a nun is important in this vocation (Normative-Evaluative)
Using this technique I tried to understand the layers behind a participant’s speech or actions by articulating possibilities of claim as well as how closely they referenced that claim (Carspecken, 1996). This technique is helpful to pick up on subtleties that could be missed if one were to focus solely on the text and not the context. Furthermore, these techniques allowed for the data to be adequately prepared to be put into higher level codes for the purpose preparing the data for interpretation and the reporting of results.

*Higher-level coding procedures.* At this point I moved toward more abstract levels of coding, also called “high-level codes” (Carspecken, 1996, p.148). As I moved into higher-level coding and greater abstractions, I “triangulated” my data, that is, I validated my coding with data from other sources. I supported the high-level codes with pragmatic horizon analysis and peer-debriefing, and checked to see if high-level codes agreed with statements made by subjects during the interviews. I also conducted “member checks”; I followed up with the religious sisters and asked them to look over the major themes I had found and to validate if these themes were congruent with their own experiences.

*Stage three: Individual interviews.* After I gained informed consent with participants, I began interviews with participants, first in the United States and then in Mexico, as mentioned above. As mentioned in the informed consent section above, I obtained participant consent to videotape and/or audiotape the interviews in all cases except for one (in that case I did not audio or videorecord). I used a semi-structured interview format for individual interviews and interviewed each participant one to three times. I generally asked the sisters the same lead-off questions (see Appendix E), but
asked various follow-up questions as needed (S. Watson, personal communication, January 9, 2011; also see Appendix E). Carspecken (1996) has found in his qualitative research that asking abstract questions leads to subjects discussing their explicit theories about their given behavior, whereas, if they are asked concrete questions, the participant may reveal their unspoken theories. Therefore, I formulated a few concrete lead-off questions designed to elicit participant’s implicit views (Carspecken, 1996).

*Interviewer responses.* To respond to participants’ dialogue during interviews I adapted typical counselor interview responses to qualitative interviewing as described in Carspecken (1996). With great frequency I used bland encouragers, such as saying “hmm-hmm”, or nodding. I used non-leading leads to show interest and to help the participant to open up by saying something like “can you tell me more about that?” I occasionally used “medium-inference paraphrasing” which sums up a participant’s statement and takes it a bit further so as to reflect the meaning behind what the participant said (Carspecken, p.160). I used this carefully as I did not want to “put words” in the participant’s mouth. After I finished the interviews I transcribed some of the interviews, and hired Spanish translators to transcribe and translate the rest of the interviews. As mentioned above, it was at this point that I began the data analysis procedures described in stage two.

*Validation methods.* In preceding sections I briefly described some of the measures I took to support my validity claims. Here I will describe some of these procedures in more detail, using Carspecken’s (1996) suggestions for building as objective of a record as possible. Before entering the field, I utilized “peer debriefing” with my colleague,
doctoral psychology student, Emily Mastroianni, who interviewed me about my expected findings and biases. A record of this interview is included in Appendix H. During fieldwork I periodically considered my biases, and tried to remain aware of their influence on my thoughts as I collected and analyzed data. While building a primary record, I used multiple recording devices, such as ran a recording device while taking notes, I used an alternating observation schedule, and used a low-inference vocabulary.

During stage two, reconstructive analysis, I used peer debriefing, strip analysis and negative case analysis (Carspecken, 1996). Strip analysis involves sifting through my meaning reconstructions to see if they are consistent with “strips of the primary record” (Carspecken, p.141). When I found a negative case - a discrepancy between my meaning reconstructions or coding and the actual record - I conducted a negative case analysis. Using negative case analysis, I tried to determine whether my meaning reconstruction/coding were inaccurate or whether these particular cases employed a variant cultural schema. At any rate, I tried to find and to explain the reason for the discrepancy for any negative case. Furthermore, I kept a record of the negative case analysis and peer debriefings (see Appendices J and K).

During stage three, I used the following procedures to support my validity claims. When possible, I tried to interview the same participant more than once, in hopes that it would lead to more self-disclosure and a “larger data set for conducting consistency checks” (Carspecken, 1996, p.166). Consistency checks involve looking for contradictions between observed activities versus interview material (Carspecken). I did not find any contradictions between interview statements and observed activity,
however, I did find an inconsistency between interview statements so I went back and asked a participant to explain the discrepancy (Appendix K).

Furthermore, I made an effort not to ask leading questions or making leading comments during interviews. I also attempted to use the vocabulary of participants (Carspecken, 1996; Spradley, 1979). Finally, I asked a peer de-briefer, doctoral psychology student John McConnell, to look through interview transcripts to check for leading. A record of his de-briefing is found in Appendix I. The procedures I have described were designed to decrease the influence of researcher bias on the results, neutralize power relations between researcher and participants and consequently lead to a more objective and valid study.

**Researcher and Participant Positionality**

Although I made efforts to decrease the effects of my own biases on the data collection and analysis procedures, critical theory recognizes that “...fact can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription... (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008, p. 405). Therefore, I discuss below my own worldview and position toward the research subjects and toward the religious life, and how this point of view may have affected the study’s results. I will also briefly discuss my relationship with the research subjects, how they may have viewed me, and how their position toward me may have affected the results.

I am a mental health professional with a Catholic worldview. For the readers who are not Catholic, I will explain what this means in my life. I believe God created the universe, and that He created each individual for the purpose of knowing Him, loving
Him, and serving Him (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995). I believe that the dignity of each human person should be affirmed, and that in order to love God one must love others as oneself. I have a high regard toward those who decide to dedicate their lives to serving God, and especially toward priests and religious who take public vows to serve God and the Catholic Church in a particular way. This worldview affected my attitude toward my research subjects in that I desired to affirm their human dignity as well as to affirm and promote the special dignity of their religious vocation.

I became interested in studying vocation discernment through my own life experiences as a young Catholic adult. I have had numerous discussions with many of my Catholic friends who are at or have been at various stages of vocation discernment, seeking to discover which state in life God is calling him or her. I have also been discerning my own vocation in life, contemplating a call to the religious life and seeking the appropriate religious order. I chose to study the women from this Latin American religious order because I had access to them through previous volunteer work and because of a genuine interest and love for their culture. As a person also discerning a vocation to the religious life, it is possible that my own subjectivity could have entered into the data collection and analysis process, through selective attention to the themes that seemed most meaningful to my own frame of reference.

Furthermore, the participants held views toward me may have affected whether or not they opted out of participation in the study and/or the type and amount of data they chose to disclose to me. For example, for many or most of the members of the community, I was probably considered an “outsider”, first, because I am not a religious
sister myself, nor am I a member of their religious community, nor am I Latin American, but rather, from the United States. For these and other potentially numerous socio-political reasons, members of the community may have distrusted me or my motivations for doing the study. Although quite a few members of the community opted out of full participation in the study, even so, most of the sisters made efforts to include me in their daily routines and sought to help me to feel included. For some members of the community, I was granted temporary “insider” status in that they trusted me enough to tell me their stories. I may have been granted this temporary “insider” status because I am a fellow Catholic, because I spent enough time in the field for the sisters to get to know me and trust me, and also because they were encouraged to accept me and to participate in the study by the founder and Father Superior of the order. Furthermore, most of the sisters who volunteered to participate in the study were sisters who seemed more comfortable with me and my presence in their daily lives.

Rationale for Using Ethnographic Method

I believe it was necessary for me to spend a significant amount of time in the field in order to gain the trust of the participants so that they would open up to me about their vocation discernment. As mentioned above, I am pretty much an “outsider” to the religious sisters, and it would have been nearly impossible to gain their trust enough to do a successful open-ended interview without spending time with them first. Ethnographic methodology provided me with the necessary amount of time to have
daily interactions and conversations with the sisters so that they could come to know
and trust me, and thus participate willingly in the study.

The ethnographic methodology also allowed for me to gain a deeper
understanding of the sisters’ cultural and religious context, through daily observation of
the sisters and participation in their schedule. Through this observation and
participation, I came to understand what life is like in the convent, the individual and
group dynamics, the personalities and characteristics of the sisters, and the potential
factors which may have attracted candidates to the community.
Chapter IV

Results

The women I interviewed each had their own “vocation story”; the description of how each perceived and then answered a call from God to the religious life. However, as I coded and analyzed the interview and fieldwork data, I realized that the process of hearing and answering a call to the religious life seemed to follow a somewhat similar course for each religious sister. Here I will summarize some of the similarities in the vocation discernment process and then I will explain these themes in more detail below. The themes found through data analysis were as follows: 1) being raised in the Catholic faith, 2) having a sense of emptiness before conversion and/or entering religious life, 3) having a “conversion” or re-conversion experience, 4) becoming significantly involved with the Catholic Church, 5) feeling admiration for a religious sister she met or knew, 6) feeling joy/excitement when in the presence of religious sisters in her community, 7) seeking direction through spiritual methods, 8) a moment of clarity regarding her decision, 9) having to face and overcome obstacles, and 10) a sense of urgency to enter religious life as soon as possible. Below in Table 4.1 I summarize these themes.
Table 4.1

Themes Found within Religious Sisters’ Vocation Discernment Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raised in Catholic faith</td>
<td>At least one of her parents taught her about the Catholic faith, or brought her to church, yet in most cases the practice of the faith in her family of origin was described as lax.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of inquietud</td>
<td>Had a sense of restlessness, disquiet growing up. Felt something was missing in her life. Did not feel fulfilled by going to dances, partying, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversion or Re-conversion</td>
<td>First went through a period of not going to church, not feeling close to God, to coming back to a more zealous expression of faith, attending church, and/or praying more often.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement with church community</td>
<td>Became heavily involved with the church community: e.g. became a Catechism teacher, participated in a charismatic or rosary prayer group, attended youth group, sang in the choir, and/or went on missions, etc. Often this involvement was encouraged by a friend or family member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admiration for a religious sister</td>
<td>The experience of meeting a religious sister as a child or adolescent played a significant role in her life. Felt admiration for the religious sister, and thought, “I want to be like her.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of joy when around religious sisters</td>
<td>When she met a member of her current community she felt joy and excitement. She admired her personal qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking direction</td>
<td>She began to pray daily, consistently to know what God’s will was for her life. Prayed to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sought spiritual direction from a “holy” priest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moment of clarity</td>
<td>Described a religious or sensory experience in which she felt an overwhelming sense of peace, joy, or certainty that God was calling her. May have had a dream which confirmed her vocation. May have felt God was speaking through another person to reveal/confirm her vocation to the religious life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcame obstacles</td>
<td>Faced opposition to her religious vocation from her parents and/or other family members. It was difficult to leave her country, her family and her friends for her vocation. She may have had to break up with a boyfriend or quit a job to enter religious life. She had to face and overcome temptations against her religious vocation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of urgency</td>
<td>Desired to enter the religious life “right now” after meeting religious sisters or after receiving confirmation for her vocation. Was willing to (immediately) leave behind her country, her family and friends to enter the religious life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When reporting the results I will use the following words to signify the number of participants which articulated a specific criterion related to their vocation discernment.

Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical Reporting of Results</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All/each</td>
<td>8 of the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most/almost all</td>
<td>6-7 of the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a few/many/several</td>
<td>4-5 of the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A couple/a few</td>
<td>2-3 of the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>1 of the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>0 of the participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Psychosocial History

The first question I asked participants related to their life before entering the religious order. Generally speaking, I did not ask participants specific questions about their family background, but just asked them to tell me a little bit about their life before entering the religious order. I discovered many similarities in the family and social backgrounds of the religious sisters as each told me a brief summary of her life before entering the order. For example, many of the religious sisters had been raised by at least one parent in the Catholic faith, were the oldest child, or one of the oldest children in a large family. As a child, many of the sisters helped out their family either in the home by cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger brothers and sisters or by working outside of the home as a maid or other type of laborer. Without being asked about this specifically, most sisters reported that there was some type of problem(s) in their family of origin, with a range of problems reported, for example, alcoholism, abuse, or divorce.
Quite a few of the participants mentioned that their family did not go to church every Sunday, or did not go often at all, despite being Catholic. A few of the participants attended a Catholic school which was taught by either nuns or Catholic priests.

 Whereas many of the sisters mentioned that their families of origin did not attend church very often, many of the participants also described having a friend or a sister who had encouraged her to attend Mass, church events, or to get involved with the church in some way, or who at the very least had attended Mass with her. This encouragement from the friend, acquaintance or sister was described in such a way as to indicate having significance in her becoming more involved with the Catholic Church, and/or attending Mass. All of the sisters interviewed described becoming involved with the Church, in addition to attending Mass, through attending church events, attending or teaching Catechism, attending youth group, singing in the choir, going on missions, helping the sick or the poor, and/or attending prayer groups before entering the religious order. Interestingly, two of the sisters interviewed already had a family member in the Oblates; one had a cousin, and the other a biological sister. On a side note, in addition to the group of sisters I formally interviewed, there are several sets of biological sisters, cousins, and aunts/nieces within this religious order.

A couple of the Sisters were unable to complete much education (beyond elementary school) in their parents’ home because of poverty, or lack of access to a school, or because she needed to help out at home. A couple of other sisters preferred to enter the religious order first before completing their high school education. Some
sisters graduated from high school or did not discuss their educational history at all.

One of the Sisters interviewed completed some college before entering the religious life.

**Inner Void**

Many of the sisters mentioned that as a child or adolescent she felt an “inquietud”, restlessness, or void that she mentioned could not be filled by any material comfort or person. Sister Dulce Maria said:

...and even before – before entering the community, I felt that there was something missing, I felt there was an emptiness in my heart, I said, but, what is missing? I have all of the material things that I needed, since, thanks be to God, my parents always gave them to me, we always had food at home, we had food, whatever it might be, thanks be to God because we always had food, and- but I felt that I was missing something, and I couldn’t connect that something with anything. I went to the dances like any young woman, I would go to the dances....But in this something was missing inside of my core, inside of me. It didn’t fill me, but instead I felt like something was missing and, in the beginning, I didn’t go to church very much, because my parents didn’t go very often, and so I didn’t go.

Similarly, Sister Catalina described it this way:

I felt that void that I felt that I couldn’t fill with anyone, I couldn’t fill it with anyone... I would find someone or something else in order to fill that void in my heart, but no, I never found anyone that could fill that void in my heart...

Each of the Sisters who described an inner void or restlessness described it in the context of then experiencing the filling of that void through finding a relationship with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, or through attending Church, or even through becoming a religious sister. For example, Sister Catalina continued the discussion of the “void” in this way:

...I never found anyone that could fill that void in my heart until the day that I met Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament... Jesus, the Holy Virgin and the saints, I felt the void fill and now I feel that I don’t have a void in me anymore. I feel
completely happy; when I go on missions, or giving a talk to the children or youth or ladies I feel completely happy.

**Conversion**

Most of the sisters described having some type of “conversion” experience where their relationship with God and/or the Church was strengthened in some way or gained more importance in their lives. A couple of the sisters experienced a strengthening in their relationship with God, then turned away from the practice of their faith for some time, only to return to a stronger practice of her faith once again. This conversion or re-conversion experience often seemed to precipitate the hearing of the call to become a religious sister, or sometimes coincided with hearing the call. On the other hand, one sister heard the call at age nine but then described having a deeper conversion when she met the religious sisters in her order.

**Admiration for Religious Sisters**

Almost all of the sisters reported first hearing the call to religious life as a child or adolescent. For many of the participants this was preceded by meeting a religious sister for the first time. For one sister hearing the call was directly preceded by seeing a religious sister in a movie. Those participants who met a religious sister in person as a child or adolescent described this experience in a positive light, and often indicated that this experience had made some kind of lasting impression on her. They told me stories related to their experience of meeting a religious sister that often contained elements of admiration and expressed their desire to become like the religious sister. For example,
when I asked Sister Margarita how she knew God was calling her she told me this anecdote:

> When I was about fourteen year old I saw her, I saw that nun, how she would give her talks, how she would open up to the youth and the children, and how she would sing. She played the guitar beautifully, always smiling. And to me- perhaps it seemed very little, very little- but for me it was a great thing to watch her. Then, I was surprised when I looked at the religious woman... then I would say deep down inside, “I want to be like her.” That was my wish at fourteen; “I want to be like her, I want to be like her.”

Sister Miriam Elizabeth expressed similar sentiments, feelings of admiration for the nun she had met:

> And then I started going to church and from there I met a nun. A Madrecita (A term of endearment meaning Little Mother). And I said, "I want to be like her", and from there started the process of my vocation...

**Sense of Joy**

Likewise, most of the women I interviewed described feeling joy, happiness, or excitement upon meeting a member of their current community for the first time. They also mentioned being influenced by the example or qualities of the religious sisters in the order. Sister Catalina described her experience in first meeting two members of her community:

> I felt a joy in my soul at seeing two nuns so full of love, so, I don't know how to explain it; I felt a joy in seeing them, even though I didn't know them and I started speaking with them and talking to them about what their lives are like and everything.

When comparing her experience of meeting her current community with a different community Sister Bernadetta says: “On the other hand, when I saw The Oblates, oh, I don’t know, I became so excited, I said well, of course I didn’t even think
of what their charism could be, or anything...” Other sisters reported similar emotional experiences when meeting the religious sisters, brothers, or Priests of their religious order for the first time.

Almost all of the participants described the qualities or “way of being” of the religious sisters from the Oblates. Other participants mentioned various qualities they observed and admired in the religious sisters of their community, such as simplicity, humility, and joy. These positive descriptions of the members of their community were mentioned throughout almost all of the interviews. The qualities of the religious sisters in her religious order seems to have played a part in choosing her particular religious order and may have also played a part in her choosing of the religious life in general. This factor will be explored in more detail in the section below titled, Explicit Reasons for Choosing the Religious Life.

Seeking Direction

Many sisters reported that after she started to sense God was calling her she prayed persistently over time to know God’s will for her vocation. Many of the sisters also described making visits to the Blessed Sacrament, going to Holy Hours, and/or asking God when receiving Communion that she may know what God wanted her to do with her life. Many also reported or recommended praying to the Virgin Mary for help in making her vocation decision. Also, a few of the sisters mentioned that a good priest provided spiritual direction or helped guide her in choosing her vocation to the religious life.

Moment of Clarity
Each of the sisters reported having a moment of clarity or confirmation when it came to making her final decision to enter the religious life. This moment of clarity generally consisted of an interior religious experience, an external sign/experience, a dream, or a sense that God was speaking to her through someone else. Additionally, a couple of the sisters reported dreams in which she believed God helped to confirm her vocation to the religious life. Below are examples of some of these experiences.

**Interior sensation.** Several sisters experienced some type of interior sensation either during prayer or through a conversation with another person which she interpreted as a call or confirmation from God about her vocation.

*I read the Psalms, I prayed a lot, cried a lot, I would ask God to enlighten me. And one day I arrived at the... the back of the house and ....then I sat there. I would cry and pray to God and in that moment I saw a light, like a light came to me, I felt like this. I thought that it was the light from the...the moon...but from that moment I felt that impact in my heart. I felt such joy; I felt that my life is dedicated to God.* -Sister Catalina

*On the other hand, when I met a priest, by the name of Father Juan Bautista, he went to conduct some retreats, a mission, when he began to preach about the love of God and about the Holy Purity and of that love that God has for us, I experienced like a flame of love in my soul, something very powerful, and later the Father said that he had missionaries, that they went to the mountains and that were contemplatives, in other words they were both things, right. That they contemplated God, and what they contemplated they would give to the poorest; in other words that they went to many places. When the priest said this, my heart felt like it was going to explode from happiness, a very wonderful experience.* -Sister Amabilis

**Dreams.** A couple of the Sisters reported receiving dreams which they believed were instrumental in helping her to decide to choose the religious life.

*I was already confused and did not know what to choose but then I had dreams...Dreams about our Virgin Mary, dreams about our Virgin Mary...Then that's when the Virgin Mary helped me more than anything to decide, to fight*
against those temptations, the temptations that I had, then I had a dream of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Guadalupe... And it was a very nice dream that I had because she told me ‘why, why I was hurting her son?’...That why I was hurting her son, I was hurting him, her son, like hurting God, Our Lady told me not to hurt Jesus, that I should not make him suffer, and that if I wanted, I could hurt her but not her son, that I should not make Him suffer...-Sister Miriam Elizabeth

God speaks. Similarly, a few of the sisters told me that they believed God spoke directly through another person which confirmed her vocation or instigated a desire to become a religious sister. In Sister Bernadetta’s case, she believed that her mother helped plant the seed of her vocation. She said:

So then, I was talking with my mother, then I told her –my mother says, “Oh, my daughter, how I wish that you would become a religious sister.” And I tell her, “Oh Mommy, well, take me then, to a convent. If you want me to become a religious (sister) then take me.” I was nine years old. My mother says, “No, my dear, you are too young; nine years old. When you are thirteen I will take you.” So then, that night, it stayed with me, I impressed upon myself that my mother will take me to a convent. I don’t know (if) God put it in my heart, it remained that I had to be a religious. And I think that God spoke through my mother. Right? And from this day that my mother spoke of the religious life, it was never again erased from my mind, I always had it in mind that ‘you are going to be a religious, you are going to be a religious’.

Sister Catalina was on the verge of deciding whether or not to enter the convent and described God speaking to her through the Mother Superior of the convent this way:

And that’s when I saw God’s will, the One who spoke through the person, which is the Mother Superior, was God, who told me, “Daughter I want to see you today at four in the afternoon I want to see you, I’m waiting for you already.” And I saw God’s will; that God wants for me to be in God’s house; that God is telling me, that is your vocation.

Sister Faustina believed the Father Superior of her order helped to confirm her vocation to the religious life.
...and I don’t know why but it came to my heart to say, “Jesus, if you want me to dedicate myself to You let me know through Father.” And then I heard a voice that said, “If you want a job ask for it”. And then I said, “Oh Lord, can you initiate it as least?” So, when it was Father’s turn to come and pray for me he laid hands on my head. He said, “Oh my child...you would be a very good missionary.” And I said, “Father, did you know I was just praying to Jesus, ‘If You would like me to give myself to You for me to know it through him (Father)’”. And so I felt that it was a confirmation there.

Obstacles

Even after receiving confirmation from God about her vocation, oftentimes the young woman was not able to enter the religious order immediately because of external circumstances. During the course of the interviews, all of the sisters discussed having to overcome certain obstacles before she was able to successfully enter the religious order. These items were presented as being potential obstructions to being able to answer the perceived call of God on her life. Sometimes these obstacles involved minor details such as she needed to apply and wait for a Mexican visa first. Most of the Sisters reported at least some type of family opposition to her growing desire to enter the religious life. Out of these sisters about half reported that at least one parent was directly opposed to her decision and did not want her to enter the religious life. The other half reported that their mother was supportive of her decision but cried profusely and expressed a great deal of pain about her daughter’s decision. A few of sisters also struggled with feeling obligated to stay home to help her mother/family instead of entering the religious life. One sister described to me very severe initial opposition to her vocation from her father:

...so when he found out that I was going to go with the Sisters, he grabbed a stick like this and said, “I’m going to hit you.” He was going to hit me. “Where
are you going? Where are you going? Why didn’t you tell me where you were going? Are you going around with the sisters?” I don’t know who told my father. And he was hitting me with a stick, a very thin stick, on my back he was hitting me; and I knelt down and told him, “Hit me! Hit me! Jesus was hit more than me, more than me. They hit Him more than me, hit me.” I knelt down with such strength, with that… I was no longer afraid of my father. Before I was afraid of him, I would hide from him, if he saw me he would hit me and I would run. I let him hit me so that he, that is to say, he would say so many things to me and I didn’t pay him any attention and suddenly, my mom came between us. My father and my mother started to… I mean, my mom started to defend me, and my mom told me, “Go! Go!”, and I was kneeling there crying and my mom said, “Run! Go!” Right then the bus came and I got in the bus...and I arrived with the sisters. I arrived with the sisters to visit them.

In addition to parental opposition, many of the sisters also described opposition from other family members, such as siblings or aunts, and from friends. Sister Bernadetta imitated her aunt who said, “You are not going to go to the convent! They eat hard beans there, they eat spoiled food there!” And Sister Amabilis reported that many people tried to “put a lot of setbacks” before her and told her that entering religious life is a “waste of her life”.

A few of the sisters had a boyfriend at the time they were discerning a call to the religious life and needed to break up with him in order to enter the religious life. Many of the sisters mentioned the difficulty they had saying goodbye to, or “renouncing” their friends, family, employment, roots, and in some cases country, in order to make the choice to enter religious life. A few sisters, both during the interviews and during the course of fieldwork, mentioned to me that they had to renounce the possibility of getting married and having children in order to pursue this path. In addition, quite a few of the sisters discussed having to overcome temptations, either from the world or from the devil, in order to enter or persevere in the religious life.
Sense of Urgency

At different points in her vocation discernment, many times after meeting a religious sister or a member of the Oblates, the sisters responded by expressing a desire to enter the religious order as soon as possible. Many of the sisters reported telling their parents or the members of their community that they wanted to go (to become a religious sister) and they wanted to go right now. Here are some examples of how they described this sense of urgency.

‘Father, if it’s possible, take me right this moment (to the convent)! Take me!’
- Sister Bernadetta, at age 15

And I got to the house screaming like crazy, ‘I’m going to be a nun.’
- Sister Catalina, at age 13

‘Dad, I want to go with the sisters.’ And, he didn’t say yes or no. He didn’t say anything to me. And I then told my mother, ‘Mom, I want to go with the sisters.’
– Sister Brigida, at age 15

I grabbed my things and said, ‘Mommy take me over there, I want to go now.’ And my mom said, ‘But you want to go right now?’ ‘Now, I want to go now, take me.’
- Sister Margarita, at age 17

Explicit Reasons for Choosing the Religious Life

Although the focus of this thesis is on the vocation discernment process, rather than the “reasons” women give for choosing religious life, I will report below the reasons given to me by the sisters when they were asked. Their answers generally fell into five general categories. Some sisters gave me only one reason and others gave more than one reason. They are listed here below.
1. To help others in the salvation of their souls/ to work for their conversion (4 sisters); for the salvation of her family (1 Sister) [but also inferred in the accounts of 3 other Sisters (to be discussed more below)]
2. To evangelize as a missionary (2 Sisters)
3. For her own salvation/ to reach holiness (3 Sisters)
4. To love/serve/work for God, (2 Sisters)
5. To help others (1 Sister); to help her religious order (1 Sister)

Explicit Reasons for Choosing her Community

The participants gave me the following reasons for why they chose their particular religious order as opposed to another religious order. Their reasons fell into the following five general categories.

1. Qualities of the religious sisters/community
   a. Community lives in peace, unity, charity, (1 Sister)
   b. Joy/happiness (2 Sisters)
   c. The way the sisters treat each other (1 Sister)
   d. Their “way of being”- Simple (1 Sister)
   e. Humility (1 Sister)
   f. Obedience to their Holy Rule and to the Catholic Church (1 Sister)
2. The Charism of being Contemplative Missionaries (3 Sisters)
3. Believes God called her to this community (3 Sisters)
4. The Founder and Father Superior, is a “good man”/ “holy priest”/“great saint” (2 Sisters)
5. No Minimum Educational Level (2 Sisters)

Community Discernment

As discussed in the literature review, many times communities have their own process for determining whether a candidate would be a suitable member for the religious order. Sometimes women need to pass physical and psychological exams to be admitted to a community. The Oblates of Cristo Rey have a more informal “getting to know you” process whereby they help a young woman to discern whether or not God is
calling her to their community. The Sisters I interviewed stressed a few main starting points they use to discern and accept new women into their order. Their Holy Rule states they must not promote vocations by inviting young women to come join the order, but rather that vocations will come through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit through the Sisters’ example of joy, simplicity, and form of life. They therefore do not spend a lot of money in order to promote vocations. The religious sisters generally do not approach a young woman to ask her if she is interested in becoming a nun, but rather, the young woman usually indicates her interest first. For the Oblates, most new vocations come through doing missions; many young women approach the sisters to ask questions about being a religious sister and what she would need to do to enter the community. There are some exceptions to this guideline, if, for example, a sister notices a young woman who is always coming early to the missions eager to help and displays many beautiful interior qualities, the sister may ask the young woman if she is interested in becoming a religious sister.

The only entrance requirements the community insists upon are for the candidate to desire to love and serve God and to have the desire to be a religious sister. If a young woman approaches them with this desire, the sisters may invite her to a “Come and See” vocation retreat where she can come and try out the life of the religious sisters by spending time praying and living the daily schedule with the sisters. After this retreat, the young woman can decide if she would like to enter or not, but is usually required to get to know the community first through letters, phone calls, and visits, while still living in her own home for a period of about six months to a year. After
the community feels they know the woman sufficiently well, and if she still desires to enter the community, she will normally be allowed to enter. The Superiors of the order may request an interview with her first, and/or require for her to write a short essay about her reasons for wanting to be a religious and her reasons for choosing that community. The Sisters consistently emphasized the choice to enter the religious order is a “free decision” and that they are careful not to impose a religious vocation on anyone.

Summary

Although each vocation story was unique, the vocation discernment process did seem to follow similar phases in the life of each participant. For example, many of the sisters discussed a persistent feeling of *inquietud* that she experienced as a child or a teen before entering the religious life, which led to her seeking fulfillment in a relationship with Jesus through attending church, and/or through considering the religious life. Almost all of the sisters reported a “conversion” or re-conversion experience where their relationship with God and the Catholic Church was strengthened, which often preceded or coincided with hearing the call. Each of the sisters described becoming involved in the Church community life, often serving as Catechists, or participating in prayers groups, youth group or missions. Many of the sisters described being encouraged or supported by a peer or her sister to become more involved with the Catholic Church. Several of the sisters first heard the “call” to religious life at a very young age when she first met a religious sister (or saw one in a movie) and felt a sense of admiration. The participants also recalled feelings of joy and happiness
when they first met a religious sister from the *Oblates*, coupled with an admiration of her personal qualities. All of the participants indicated some type of profound experience which provided clarity or confirmation of her vocation to the religious life. This generally consisted of an interior religious/sensory experience, an external sign/experience, or sense that God (or the Virgin Mary) spoke to her through a dream or another person. Quite a few of the participants mentioned that they used spiritual methods such as prayer and/or spiritual direction to discern their call. Each of the sisters described significant obstacles she had to overcome in order to enter the religious life. Many of the participants indicated that they felt a strong desire or urgency to enter the religious life as soon as possible.
Discussion

This study attempted to explore the vocation discernment process for women of Latin American descent who are currently members of The Oblates of Cristo Rey. I looked at similarities between participants’ backgrounds and vocation stories and tried to explain the major aspects of the sisters’ process of discernment. Half of the sisters included in the present study currently reside at the convent in the United States and the other half currently reside in Mexico, therefore the results may potentially apply to Latinos living in the United States as well as those living in Mexico.

Vocation Discernment

Without being asked about it specifically, several of the participants in the present study mentioned having a sense of *inquietud* or a “void” before they entered the religious life. Interestingly, Lester (2005) reported that her participants reported a sense of *inquietud* before they had entered the religious life and that within the context of their religious formation these postulants learned to interpret this sense of *inquietud* as a potential indicator that she had a vocation to the religious life. Lester explained that generally her participants initially dealt with this void by seeking to fill it with tangible things such as friends or boyfriends, but eventually turned to religious/spiritual activities to fill the void. Those participants in my study who mentioned this sense of
*inquietud* also explained how they began to attend church more often, or how they eventually found the fulfillment of their void by finding a relationship with Jesus, or through entering the religious life.

Similarly, many of the participants told me about how they had once been further away from the Church, but then decided to start attending church more often, or went from endorsing Protestant beliefs to becoming Catholic again in a process of conversion or re-conversion. This process of returning to their faith often preceded or coincided with hearing a calling to the religious life. These results were similar to those of Hernandez et al. (2011) whose participants often went through a period of questioning their Catholic faith and sometimes leaving it, only to return to a stronger practice of their faith before or during the process of discerning their career calling.

As was expected based on the vocation discernment literature, social influences were particularly relevant to the vocation discernment process and decision for these participants. The participants in the present study indicated some kind of early positive contact with nuns, as did the participants in Zajac’s (1999) study, which led “these young women to consider the religious life for themselves” (p.54). Most of the sisters consistently pointed out the positive qualities that she had observed in the religious sisters in her particular order before joining it and many of the sisters listed the qualities of the sisters as one of the reasons she had chosen her specific order. This finding is very consistent with findings from other studies on religious sisters which found that the example of other sisters often played an important influence on a woman’s vocation decision (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Kreis & Bardwell, 2011; Trzebiatowskia, 2008; Wolf,
VOCATION DISCERNMENT

1990; Zajac, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). This social aspect may have been particularly influential for the religious sisters in the present study because many had a cousin, aunt, or biological sister already in the order. Similarly, Zajac’s (1999) participants often had family members who were also members of the religious order they decided to join.

Consistent with a theoretical article on career calling which explains that some people have experienced a Divine inspiration in which God revealed a special career path (see Dik et al., 2009), the present study found that many of the participants experienced a moment of clarity in which she felt God revealed or confirmed her special life calling - a vocation to the religious life. My findings also resemble those of Lester (2005), whose participants indicated that they received “signs” or small daily occurrences which confirmed her vocation and those of Broyles (2011) whose participants believed they received signs from God indicating a calling to ministry in the Protestant faith. Along the same lines, Zajac’s (1999) participants recalled an “aha” moment in which their calling was made more clear to them. Although the sisters I interviewed did not use the word “signs” many of them indicated a special experience in which God spoke to her through another person, through a dream, or through other sensory or emotional means to reveal or confirm a calling to the religious life.

Consistent with other studies in the religious vocation and career calling research, the women I interviewed believed God had called them in a special way to this vocation, but that it was her choice whether or not to respond to the call. For example, Lester’s (2005) Mexican postulants believed God called her to the religious life but it was her choice whether or not to answer, and Wolf’s (1990) elderly women religious
believed they were chosen by God but had made a choice to say “yes” to His call. In Hernandez et al. (2011), the participants believed their career calling was based on a mutual relationship with God, but it was their personal responsibility to answer the call.

Many of participants in the current study described spiritual means, such as persistent prayer to discern their vocation, which was consistent with the means used by the participants in Hernandez et al. (2011) study. Several participants said they had received spiritual direction or guidance from a priest for help deciding her vocation; this is similar to the results of Bendyna and Gautier (2009), Lester (2005), and Hernandez et al., whose participants had sought spiritual direction or counseling to discern their respective vocations or careers. However, this result is also somewhat in opposition to the results of Bendyna and Gautier who found that although participants found spiritual direction to be helpful in discerning a vocation, diocesan priests were the least likely to be supportive or encouraging of a person’s religious vocation. The religious sisters in the present study, in Lester, and in Bendyna and Gautier, who attended a vocation retreat to learn more about the religious life generally found it helpful in their vocation discernment and/or in making a final decision regarding whether or not to enter the religious life.

The most surprising result, which I did not find in any of the calling or vocation literature I reviewed was the sense of urgency, explained to me as a feeling of “I want to join right now” by the sisters I interviewed. There could be various factors which for these women led to a desire to enter the religious order as soon as possible, in a manner that seemed as if it were urgent. It would seem that age could be a factor
because most of the women in the Oblates joined as an adolescent, and adolescents are known for making more hasty decisions. However, this does not explain the reason for the finding fully, because even sisters who had joined the order as a young adult or older adult described to me a similar sense of urgency to join as soon as possible. Culture could be another potential explanation, however, Lester (2005) also studied Mexican women and she did not give any indication of this finding. Furthermore, I interviewed one sister who has more European-American ancestry then Latin American ancestry and she also described to me this same sense of urgency.

One sister whom I interviewed informally told me that she thinks the reason for her urgency was that if she did not go right at that moment she would not have gone at all. Sister Catalina offered a similar reason for her urgency, explaining it in terms of the Biblical story of Lot, where God tells Lot to leave Sodom and not to look back. On her way to enter the convent, she literally ran on the shortest back road possible and did not look to the right or to the left, because she did not want to become distracted. Sister Dulce María believed the reason for her sense of urgency was that God gave her grace to desire to leave everything immediately and follow Jesus:

... I remember that I was at home making tortillas, and it was around four o’clock in the afternoon, I remember well, and they said- they began to ring the bells, “the nuns arrived”, I said: “The nuns arrived!!” I said. “Now, yes. I’m going to go! Now I’m not going to stay! I’m going to go!” But I felt a very, very great joy in my heart that...I already wanted to go with them. I already wanted to. “Now, yes: I’m not going to stay! I’m going to go!” In that moment, I couldn’t, I couldn’t think about my family. If, oh! But my mom- who’s going to stay with my little brothers and sisters- nothing! But I only felt that emotion, a very great joy in my heart, and I believe that is what helps us also, to follow Jesus. Just like, just like it says that St. Peter, upon seeing Jesus left everything, and he followed Him, he didn’t mind that he left everything that he had there, no, he left everything
there, and he followed Jesus. I think that God also gives us that grace, that joy of only seeing the path of God and not seeing to either side. It seems that once the participants had determined to what state in life God was calling them, that they did not want to be distracted by anything else, but to follow this call as soon as possible. This explanation is also made feasible by the fact that these sisters were very aware of the sacrifices she needed to make to become a religious sister. As mentioned in the results section, many of the sisters described having to “renounce” their family and friends, to break up with a boyfriend, and/or to quit a job in order to pursue this calling. Although this is merely speculation, perhaps the sisters’ attempts to enter the religious life as soon as possible, was not only a grace from God, but also a psychological strategy to avoid being distracted by what they were leaving behind, and to focus on what lied ahead. This strategy may have helped give these women the strength and momentum to pursue this challenging vocation.

Explicit Factors for Choosing the Religious Life

The religious sister’s answers to the question, “Can you list for me what are some of the reasons you have decided to become a religious sister?” turned out to be somewhat idiosyncratic to this particular order and did not coincide exactly with previous vocation discernment literature. However, there are some similarities. For example, the participants in the Bendyna and Gautier (2009) study said that the desire to be of service was an important factor, and a couple of the participants in the present study said that the desire to “help others” (in a physical way) was a motivating factor. Bendyna and Gautier’s participants endorsed the desire for spiritual growth as a motivating factor, yet only a couple participants in the present study mentioned
wanting to “save her own soul” or to grow in holiness as a motivating factor.

Furthermore, unlike the results of Bendyna and Gautier, and those of Kreis and Bardwell (2011), the desire to be part of a community, the positive qualities of the sisters, and a sense of inner call, were not listed as pertinent factors leading one to choose to become a religious sister in the present study. The sisters in the present study mentioned more often that they wanted to work for the conversion of others (to Catholicism) and to help others (including their own family members) in the salvation of their souls, to evangelize as a missionary, and to love and serve God more. It seems that the sisters in the present study chose more idealistic and spiritual goals as their motivating factors for choosing the religious life.

**Explicit Factors for Choosing her Community**

As displayed in the results section, the participants in the present study most frequently stated that the qualities of the members of their religious sisters were the reason for their choice of their particular community. This finding coincides with those of other researchers who found that one of the factors which attracted a person to their particular community was the example of the members (Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Kreis & Bardwell, 2011; Trzebiatowska, 2008; Wolf, 1990; Zajac, 1999). The participants from these studies, like the participants in the present study, often mentioned the joy and happiness of the members, as well as other personal qualities. The participants in this study often stated that they were attracted to the charism of being a contemplative missionary, and this was an important factor in their choice of religious orders.

Participants in the Bendyna and Gautier study, and in the Kreis and Bardwell study also
ranked their community’s charism as a significant factor in their choice of religious orders. Other similarities between the present study’s religious sisters and those in Bendyna and Gautier and Lester (2005) are that participants felt a sense of calling to her particular institute, and the participants felt a special attraction toward the founder of the order and/or his/her life/works/teachings.

**Other Factors to Consider**

In the literature review I discussed Rational Choice Theory and the possibility that religious sisters could potentially choose a religious vocation because they believed it provided more “benefits” and required less “costs”. Stark and Finke (2000) noted some of the benefits to religious life are the close relationships one has while living in community as well as the special recognition and treatment one might receive from wearing the religious habit. Ebaugh (1993) suggested that western women in previous years (pre-Vatican II) chose religious life for its potential to offer more educational and professional opportunities than were available for women in the secular world at that time. For women living in Latin America, there could potentially be material and personal security benefits to be gained from entering the religious life as well. For example, for those coming from a life of extreme poverty, the religious life could provide more economic stability, and for those coming from abusive homes, the religious life could provide an “escape” from the abuse. The religious life may also offers spiritual benefits to its members: the security of knowing one is serving God, the
potential to make more sacrifices for God and thus merit a greater amount of glory in
the next life.

Correspondingly, the religious life requires certain costs from its members. Religious sisters (and brothers) must renounce intimate sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex, or either sex for that matter, with their vow of chastity. Members of religious orders surrender their own will to obey the will of their Superiors. Religious sisters and brothers also take a vow of poverty, which means they do not own anything individually, but give up any material possessions to be used for the good of the community. I will discuss below how Rational Choice Theory may or may not apply to the vocation discernment process for the religious sisters in this study.

Stark and Finke (2000) noted that one benefit religious sisters/brothers might receive from the religious life is special treatment for wearing the religious habit. However, the sisters in the present study did not list the religious habit as playing a significant role in their choice to become a religious sister or in choosing a particular religious order. A couple of sisters mentioned that she liked that the order wore a religious habit, or that she liked the style/color of the habit, and one mentioned that she did not join a different order because she did not like their habit. However, the religious habit was generally not listed as a significant factor for the choice of religious life or for the choice of her particular community. However, it is important to keep in mind that, in general, the participants were only asked open-ended questions, so they were not asked about the habit specifically, unless she first initiated the topic. It is also possible that the wearing of the religious habit played a more important role than the sisters
realized, perhaps the recognition of the “benefit” of wearing a habit is at a subconscious level. It is also feasible, that as the sisters reported, the wearing of the religious habit did not play a major role in their decision.

As mentioned in the Results section, a couple of the sisters in this study did not have the opportunity to obtain education beyond the elementary or middle school before entering the religious life. These sisters were interested in entering the religious life, but were excluded from joining other orders, because most orders require a person to have completed a certain amount of education. The Oblates do not require that a woman have completed a certain amount of education before joining, and in fact, provide at least a high school education to all of its members in need of an education. Of the sisters who lacked education, only two sisters gave this as a reason for choosing this particular order, but said it was a secondary reason, along with one or more of the other reasons mentioned above. Young women who already have a desire to enter the religious life may see obtaining an education as a positive benefit to joining this particular religious order. And likely, women without an education who desire to enter the religious life might not have many other options to choose from. However, it does not seem logical for one to choose to enter the religious life for this benefit alone. Obtaining a high school education can hardly be considered “benefit” enough for the corresponding “costs” of the religious life.

**Escaping Poverty and Abuse.** Only one of the sisters I interviewed explicitly mentioned the poverty and abuse she had experienced growing up. Others alluded to having suffered from the effects of poverty as a child/adolescent. Certainly, many might
suspect that a person would choose to enter the religious life so as to escape from extreme poverty or from abuse suffered in the home. While this is a possibility, I consider here what one of the Sisters told me:

_I, I didn’t know what to do, stay in my mother’s house or go to be a religious person or get married. I thought, I’m not going to... since previously I was planning to go to the house of God in order to escape all of the problems in my house, but I said, ‘If I go like this, just to escape the problems, I’m not going to be happy there because it isn’t my vocation...’_

Although this sister had every reason to want to “escape” from her home life of poverty and abuse, she was also very aware of her desire to “escape” and spent time considering her motivations and asking God for guidance. Over time, she came to believe that she did in fact have a calling from God to the religious life and chose likewise. Furthermore, my observational data suggests that she was genuinely happy and content with the life she had chosen. Other sisters did not explicitly discuss a background of poverty, nor its potential implication on their vocation decision. Furthermore, many of the sisters in the order came from a more middle-class background and sacrificed modest material prosperity to live the vow of poverty with this religious order.

**Community Discernment**

The community discernment process for the Oblates seems to be a more relaxed, informal process that that of the religious orders in the United States. The Bendyna and Gautier (2009) study describes a potentially complex process that involves psychological testing, passing a physical, obtaining letters of recommendation and other
“hoops to jump through” before one can gain admittance to most religious orders in the United States. The Oblates only require that a woman have an authentic desire to love God and to be a religious sister in order to join. They do take time to get to know the individual who is interested and make it clear that she must be the one to pursue the religious life, as they believe that the decision must come from the individual and not be forced upon anyone.

**Family Support**

In the vocation discernment literature, participants sometimes listed family support, encouragement, and influence, or having a God centered family/community as a motivating factor for entering the religious life (Kreis & Bardwell, 2011; Trzebiatowska, 2008; Wolf, 1990; Zajac, 1999). Although only one of the participants in the present study discussed family support/influence as a motivating factor for her decision, many of the sisters describe growing up in a home where they were influenced by the strong faith of their mother. A few of the sisters described the religious formation she had received from her parent(s) as providing the right formation from which a vocation to the religious life could spring forth.

In regards to the career development of Latinos, a consistent finding in the career counseling literature is the important influence of parents and other relatives on the career aspirations and academic self-efficacy of Latino youth (Griggs et al., 1992; Navarro et al., 2007). In one qualitative study, Latina participants described the important role of one’s parents as a source of support and encouragement, or as a deterrent to following a non-traditional career path (Gomez et al., 2001). In the present
study, many of the participants described what could be termed ‘heroic’ support for her vocation from her mother. The circumstances varied in these situations, however, some of these stories are worth telling, albeit briefly here. One young woman insisted at the age of thirteen that her mother take her to a convent so that she could become a nun and this is how her mother responded:

At thirteen years old, a little more than thirteen, a Saturday, I was coming to my First Communion classes. Every Saturday I went to class, I arrived, I sat there with my mother, I say, “Mother, remember that at thirteen years old you are going to take me to the convent.” And my mother says, “Yes, my daughter I remember.” “Well, I want to go to the convent.” My mother says, “Then on Monday we’ll go.” She didn’t even say no, nor did she tell me ‘no, why are you going to go to the convent?’ No- my mother says, “Well, on Monday I’ll take you.” I don’t know if she was testing me as well, to see if I really would do it or that I would go forward, that my mother would say that: “I will take you or you will wait” – No. But my mother, very firmly says, “On Monday I will take you.” That’s it. Sunday went by and Monday I was ready, and my mother says “let’s go.”

Others described how painful it was for her mother to let her daughter leave to go to the convent as a teenager, however, many of these mothers remained supportive of their daughter’s decision. As an adolescent Sister Margarita told her mother about her desire to be a nun, knowing it would hurt her mother deeply because her younger brother had just left Mexico to live in the United States, yet her mother responded with unwavering support:

So, afterwards, I stayed a bit longer at home and I... told my mom, “Mommy”, I said, “I want to be a nun.” And my mom just stared at me, she sat me down in the living room, she made me sit and said, “Daughter”, she hugged me and said, “Daughter, I know that you are going to be able to do this.” Those were the only words my mom said to me. “I know that you can do it, go for it.”

Family Opposition
Unfortunately for my participants, all too often she faced opposition to her vocation decision from her parent(s), and other family members. This is consistent with many other studies, which found that participants often faced family opposition to their religious vocation or career calling (e.g. Bendyna & Gautier, 2009; Gomez et al., 2001; Hernandez et al., 2011; Lester, 2005). In the case of the present study’s participants, parental opposition did not stop a woman from pursuing her personal vocation. However, during the course of my fieldwork with the sisters and the Latino community, I spoke with Latina laywomen who told me about how they had desired to be a religious sister as an adolescent, but were discouraged by a parent. These women ended up marrying, but expressed to me an unfulfilled desire to be a religious sister that is now blocked by their life circumstances.

Interestingly, several sisters said that their parents were originally unsupportive of their vocation and not practicing the Catholic faith, but through the sacrifice of her life in the religious vocation, her parents have now come back to the Catholic faith, and/or her family has become closer to God in various ways. These sisters either implied or directly stated that God has heard her prayers and seen her sacrifice, and has in a sense “rewarded” her with the conversion of her family. Four of the sisters told me that God somehow indicated to her that if she concerns herself with His business (i.e. evangelizing, going on missions) He will concern Himself with her things, (i.e. the spiritual well-being of her family members). This does not seem to be an idiosyncratic belief of the women in this order alone, because the Mexican Postulants in Lester’s
(2005) study also explained their choice to enter religious life as a means to help bring about the salvation of their respective families.

Limitations

As with all studies, this study has limitations that are important to keep in mind when considering the implications of its findings. First, the sample size was very small, with only eight participants represented in the interview responses. I chose not to limit the scope of the study, but instead presented a broad overview of vocation discernment with Latinas, without exploring any particular aspect of this topic in depth. This leaves the door open for further research to explore specific aspects of vocation discernment with Latinos in more detail. Since I used mainly only open-ended questions during interviews and relied on the data given to me by participants, I was not able to explore identity development/self-concept, or other concepts in more detail, because they were not topics that were brought up by the participants. Furthermore, my facility with the Spanish language was not always conducive to asking particularly insightful follow-up questions, which also limited the themes that may have been explored in more detail.

There may have also been a selection bias, because sisters who were more comfortable with me were more likely to volunteer as my participants. The sisters whom I had gotten to know better were also more likely to speak at least some English, and/or to have more familiarity with U.S. culture, and these sisters were more likely to seek me out for conversation. This could have created a bias in favor of more U.S. acculturated individuals as participants. However, it must be said that at least four of the eight participants spoke little to no English, so it was not a completely biased sample
in favor of U.S. acculturated individuals. Also, I only studied women from one Latin-American religious order, so potentially some of the findings could have been idiosyncratic to this particular religious order.

I was unable to interview the Postulants who were at the beginning stage of their vocation discernment process, because these women were under eighteen years of age, and therefore disqualified from participation in the study. Therefore most of the women I interviewed were at a later stage in their vocation discernment as most were temporary professed or perpetually professed sisters. This may have also affected the results of the study because these women have had more time to reflect on the reasons for their vocation decision, and even to develop a “reason” for her decision that may not have existed at the very beginning of the discernment process.

Implications for Further Research

This study has raised some interesting questions which merit further research into the vocational discernment process for Latina women. It would be interesting to perform a quantitative analysis on the numbers of Latinos who have had the desire to enter the religious life, but have decided against it because of parental or familial opposition. How would parental opposition to vocation be affected by the age of the person discerning? Would a younger person be more or less likely to be deterred by parental opposition and/or more likely to follow a religious vocation because of parental support for a vocation? Another interesting line of research to follow up on is to find out how much of a role does wanting to “save” one’s family through the pursuit of a religious vocation play into a woman’s decision. Also, most of my participants gave
somewhat lofty reasons for their choice to enter religious life. It would be interesting to find out if young women at the beginning stages of their discernment would offer the same abstract reasons. Perhaps these more abstract spiritual ideals have developed as a woman became more formed as a religious sister, whereas her initial reasons for joining may have been more humanist, social, or even psychological.

**Conclusion and Implications for Practice**

This thesis has explored the vocation discernment process for Latina women religious using an ethnographic case study approach. Although each participant’s story was unique, the vocation discernment process followed similar phases in the life of each individual. Many of the sisters described a persistent feeling of *inquietud* that she experienced before entering the religious life, which led to seeking fulfillment through religious means. The sisters reported some type of “conversion” where their relationship with God was strengthened; and this often preceded or coincided with hearing the call. Participants became heavily involved with the church community which was often encouraged by a peer or family member. Participants often first heard a call to the religious life when they met a religious sister for the first time and felt a strong admiration for her. Further, the participants recalled feeling joy and admiration when they first met a religious sister from their current religious order. Several of the participants used spiritual methods such as prayer and spiritual direction with a priest to discern their call. Each of the participants recounted a religious or sensory experience which provided clarity to her vocation decision. Each of the participants needed to face and overcome significant obstacles, and in particular family opposition, in order to enter
the religious life. All of the participants also indicated a sense of urgency; once they knew they were called, they acted upon their desire to enter the religious life as soon as possible.

The results of the present study suggest several guidelines for counselors working with persons, and in particular Latinos, who are discerning a vocation to the religious life. First, it may be helpful to discuss family support or resistance to one’s vocational aspirations and how this support of lack thereof affects one’s decision-making process. It may also be helpful to discuss other social supports, such as friends and the church community, and their role in helping to support or foster one’s vocational aspirations, especially if the client faces substantial family resistance. Counselors may want to collaborate with spiritual directors or pastoral counselors to help provide a holistic approach for the client. If the counselor does not come from a Roman Catholic perspective, he may consider educating himself more outside of the session and consider allowing the client to play the role of expert informing him of her religious values. In helping the client to choose a religious order, counselors might consider interventions involving a values assessment in addition to other personality assessments in order to help narrow down her focus. Furthermore, counselors need to be provided with adequate supervision and cultural/religious sensitivity training, beginning in graduate school, in order to provide counseling for a client with a vocation discernment focus.

While current research in the vocational discernment area helps contribute to recognizing the religious vocation as a viable option, much is left to be discovered in
terms of providing counseling to those discerning a religious vocation. It is my hope that a deeper understanding of the influence of religious and spirituality on the career development of religious individuals, and in particular Latinos, may be gained through further research and practice. I hope for a deeper inclusion of religious and spiritual factors in the training and professional development of counselors so that we may better serve our clients. May this inclusion help to close the existing gap between secular career counseling and vocational discernment and development.
References


Appendix A

Adult General Consent Form

Ball State University
2000 West University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-1099
Institutional Review Board, (765) 285-5070

VOCATION DISCERNMENT FOR WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS ORDERS
You are invited to participate in research study conducted by Melanie Bruss, B.S. Before you consent to volunteer, I would like for you to read the following and ask any questions you need to understand what your participation entails.

INVESTIGATOR
I am a graduate student at Ball State University in the Counseling Psychology department. I am the primary researcher and my name is Melanie Bruss. The faculty member supervising the research is Jacob Yui-Chung Chan, Ph.D., CRC.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the process of vocation discernment for women discerning a call to the religious life. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a religious sister, are in the process of discerning a call to the religious life, or are associated with the religious order in some way.

PROCEDURES TO BE USED DURING THE STUDY
The primary researcher, Melanie Bruss, has chosen to use ethnographic methods to do this research study. Ethnographic studies use a variety of methods to obtain a holistic understanding of the participants’ culture and lifestyle.
If you agree to participate in the study the following may occur:
• I may ask to meet with you for individual interviews lasting between one to two hours. I will spend time with you and talk to you about your everyday life and your vocation discernment. With your signed consent, these conversations will be audio-recorded and/or videotaped.
• I will also spend time at The Oblates of Cristo Rey convent(s)/monastery observing the lifestyle and social interactions of the religious sisters and brothers. I will take notes about my observations. I will also spend time participating in the daily routines with the religious sisters and brothers, which will include meals, prayers, recreation, and other events and activities. I may also accompany the religious sisters and/or brothers in the mission field and participate in missionary activities with the community.
• I may take photographs and/or videotapes of you, with your consent.
Your participation in the study may take a lot of your time. I cannot estimate a total number of hours, however, the project is scheduled to last three months.

**RISKS**
At times during the interviews the interviewer might inadvertently bring up emotional material for you, and you may feel uncomfortable or upset. Please understand that you are free to decline to answer any questions, to stop participating in the conversation, or to leave the room at any time.

**BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH**
There are not any known direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. However, the researchers hope to learn more from the study that may help others in the future. Your participation in this study may lead to a greater understanding of the vocation discernment process for women.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
The researchers will make every effort to respect your privacy and your wishes for the level of confidentiality of the interview material. In your answers to interview questions, you will select a pseudonym and only I and my advisor will have access to your real name. I may enlist the help of other researchers with transcription, translation and analysis, however, they will not have access to your real name. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed without your permission or as required by law. The results of this research may be published in scientific journals or presented at psychological conferences, however, your name and participation in the study will remain confidential. At the end of the interview process, you will be given the opportunity to decide which of your identifying information besides your name you would like to be changed for the final report.

The exceptions to confidentiality as required by Indiana state law are as follows, if a participant were to report: (1) intentions to harm self or others [IC 12-26-5-1], (2) previously harming a child [IC 31-33-5-1], or (3) previously harming endangered adults [IC 12-10-3-9(a)]. You should know that although it is extremely rare, under certain circumstances data could be subpoenaed by court order.

**SUBJECT COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**
While there is no direct compensation to you, I will be teaching English or basic computer skills to any member of the religious community who requests it.

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS AND WITHDRAWAL**
VOCATION DISCERNMENT

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw at any point. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will have no influence on your membership in The Oblates of Cristo Rey. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings, please let me know and I will ensure you receive a summary of the research findings.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH
I have tried to explain the purpose and nature of the study to you and to answer any questions you might have. If you have further questions, you may contact me at: (586) 335-3234 or mebruss@bsu.edu, or you may contact Dr. Chan at: (765) 285-8040 or ychan@bsu.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, at: 765-285-5070 or irb@bsu.edu.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Only adults over the age of eighteen are able to participate in this research project. If you are not an adult eighteen years of age or older, please notify the researcher and do not sign the informed consent below.

SIGNATURE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the consent form and have asked any questions I have about my participation in the study. I agree to participate in the study and to allow myself to be audio and/or video-taped during group interactions. However, I am aware that I can withdraw my participation at any time. I am aware the data from my participation will be retained for an indefinite period of time and may be used in a Master’s thesis, doctoral dissertation, journal article, psychological presentation, and/or future research projects, and I give permission for the use of this information in the aforementioned projects. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the Master’s thesis submission. I know that by signing this consent form I am not handing over any of my legal rights. I have been given the option to receive a copy of this contract.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT __________________________ DATE: ________________

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR __________________________ DATE: ________________
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Interviews

Ball State University
2000 West University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-1099
Institutional Review Board, (765) 285-5070

VOCATION DISCERNMENT FOR WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS ORDERS
You are invited to participate in research study conducted by Melanie Bruss, B.S. Before you consent to volunteer, I would like for you to read the following and ask any questions you need to understand what your participation entails.

INVESTIGATOR
I am a graduate student at Ball State University in the Counseling Psychology department. I am the primary researcher and my name is Melanie Bruss. The faculty member supervising the research is Jacob Yui-Chung Chan, Ph.D., CRC.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the process of vocation discernment for women discerning a call to the religious life. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a religious sister, are in the process of discerning a call to the religious life, or are associated with the religious order in some way.

PROCEDURES TO BE USED DURING THE STUDY
During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions about your vocation discernment and the factors that led you to choose your vocation to this particular religious order. You will also be asked some general questions about your background before you entered the order and the experiences you have had as a Religious Sister. The interview is designed to last approximately one to two hours long. However, please feel free to speak as much as you wish about the topic. Also, if there are any questions you feel you cannot answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, feel free to indicate this and we will move on to the next question. The interviews will be video-taped and/or audio-recorded with your signed consent below.

RISKS
At times during the interviews the interviewer might inadvertently bring up emotional material for you, and you may feel uncomfortable or upset. Please understand that you are free to decline to answer any questions, to stop participating in the conversation, or to leave the room at any time.

BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH
There are not any known direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. However, the researchers hope to learn more from the study that may help others in the future. Your participation in this study may lead to a greater understanding of the vocation discernment process for women.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The interviewer will make every effort to respect your privacy and your wishes for the level of confidentiality of the interview material. In your answers to interview questions, you will select a pseudonym and only I and my advisor will have access to your real name. I may enlist the help of other researchers with transcription, translation and analysis, however, they will not have access to your real name. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed without your permission or as required by law. The results of this research may be published in scientific journals or presented at psychological conferences, however, your name and participation in the study will remain confidential. At the end of the interview process, you will be given the opportunity to decide which of your identifying information besides your name you would like to be changed for the final report.

The exceptions to confidentiality as required by Indiana state law are as follows, if a participant were to report: (1) intentions to harm self or others [IC 12-26-5-1], (2) previously harming a child [IC 31-33-5-1], or (3) previously harming endangered adults [IC 12-10-3-9(a)]. You should know that although it is extremely rare, under certain circumstances data could be subpoenaed by court order.

SUBJECT COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION
While there is no direct compensation to you, I will be teaching English or basic computer skills to any member of the religious community who requests it.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS AND WITHDRAWAL
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw at any point. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will have no influence on your membership in The Oblates of Cristo Rey. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings, please let me know and I will ensure you receive a summary of the research findings.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH
I have tried to explain the purpose and nature of the study to you and to answer any questions you might have. If you have further questions, you may contact me at: (586) 335-3234 or mebruss@bsu.edu, or you may contact Dr. Chan at: (765) 285-8040 or ychan@bsu.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, at: 765-285-5070 or irb@bsu.edu.
EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Only adults over the age of eighteen are able to participate in this research project. If you are not an adult eighteen years of age or older, please notify the researcher and do not sign the informed consent below.

SIGNATURE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the consent form and have asked any questions I have about my participation in the interview. With the understanding that I can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, I consent to participate in interviews. I grant permission for the interviews to be video and/or audio-recorded. These recordings will be used for the purposes of data transcription and analysis. I am aware the data from my participation will be retained for an indefinite period of time and may be used in a Master’s thesis, doctoral dissertation, journal article, psychological presentation, and/or future research projects, and I give permission for the use of this information in the aforementioned projects. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the Master’s thesis submission. I know that by signing this consent form I am not handing over any of my legal rights. I have been given the option to receive a copy of this contract.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT __________________________ DATE: ____________

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR __________________________ DATE: ____________
Appendix C

Adult General Consent Form with Permission to Interview

Ball State University
2000 West University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-1099
Institutional Review Board, (765) 285-5070

VOCATION DISCERNMENT FOR WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS ORDERS
You are invited to participate in research study conducted by Melanie Bruss, B.S. Before you consent to volunteer, I would like for you to read the following and ask any questions you need to understand what your participation entails.

INVESTIGATOR
I am a graduate student at Ball State University in the Counseling Psychology department. I am the primary researcher and my name is Melanie Bruss. The faculty member supervising the research is Jacob Yui-Chung Chan, Ph.D., CRC.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH
The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the process of vocation discernment for women discerning a call to the religious life. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a religious sister, are in the process of discerning a call to the religious life, or are associated with the religious order in some way.

PROCEDURES TO BE USED DURING THE STUDY
The primary researcher, Melanie Bruss, has chosen to use ethnographic methods to do this research study. Ethnographic studies use a variety of methods to obtain a holistic understanding of the participants’ culture and lifestyle.
If you agree to participate in the study the following may occur:

- I will spend time at The Oblates of Cristo Rey convent(s)/monastery observing the lifestyle and social interactions of the religious sisters and brothers. I will take notes about my observations. I will also spend time participating in the daily routines with the religious sisters and brothers, which will include meals, prayers, recreation, and other events and activities. I may also accompany the religious sisters and/or brothers in the mission field and participate in missionary activities with the community.

- During my observations, I may take photographs, audiotapes, and/or videotapes of you, with your signed consent below.

- I may ask to meet with you for one or more individual interviews. I will spend time with you and talk to you about your everyday life. I may ask you some questions about the factors that led you to choose your vocation to religious
life and to this particular religious order. I may also ask general questions about your background before you entered the order and the experiences you have had as a religious sister (or priest/brother). The initial interview is designed to last approximately one to two hours. However, please feel free to speak as much as you wish about the topic. Also, if there are any questions you feel you cannot answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, feel free to indicate this and we will move on to the next question. With your signed consent below, these conversations will be audio-recorded and/or videotaped.

- Your participation in the study may take a lot of your time. I cannot estimate a total number of hours, however, the project is scheduled to last for a total of approximately three months.

**RISKS**
At times during the interviews the interviewer might inadvertently bring up emotional material for you, and you may feel uncomfortable or upset. Please understand that you are free to decline to answer any questions, to stop participating in the conversation, or to leave the room at any time.

**BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH**
There are not any known direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. However, the researchers hope to learn more from the study that may help others in the future. Your participation in this study may lead to a greater understanding of the vocation discernment process for women.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**
The researchers will make every effort to respect your privacy and your wishes for the level of confidentiality of the interview material. In your answers to interview questions, you will select a pseudonym and only I and my advisor will have access to your real name. I may enlist the help of other researchers with transcription, translation and analysis, however, they will not have access to your real name. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed without your permission or as required by law. The results of this research may be published in scientific journals or presented at psychological conferences, however, your name and participation in the study will remain confidential. At the end of the interview process, you will be given the opportunity to decide which of your identifying information besides your name you would like to be changed for the final report.

The exceptions to confidentiality as required by Indiana state law are as follows, if a participant were to report: (1) intentions to harm self or others [IC 12-26-5-1], (2) previously harming a child [IC 31-33-5-1], or (3) previously harming endangered adults
[IC 12-10-3-9(a)]. You should know that although it is extremely rare, under certain circumstances data could be subpoenaed by court order.

**SUBJECT COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**
While there is no direct compensation to you, I will be teaching English or basic computer skills to any member of the religious community who requests it.

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS AND WITHDRAWAL**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to participate in this study, or to withdraw at any point. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research will have no influence on your membership in The Oblates of Cristo Rey. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings, please let me know and I will ensure you receive a summary of the research findings.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH**
I have tried to explain the purpose and nature of the study to you and to answer any questions you might have. If you have further questions, you may contact me at: mebruss@bsu.edu, or you may contact Dr. Chan at: (765) 285-8040 or ychan@bsu.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, at: 765-285-5070 or irb@bsu.edu.

**EXCLUSION CRITERIA**
Only adults over the age of eighteen are able to participate in this research project. If you are not an adult eighteen years of age or older, please notify the researcher and do not sign the informed consent below.

**SIGNATURE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**
By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read the consent form and have asked any questions I have about my participation in the study. I agree to participate in the study and to allow myself to be observed, photographed, audio and/or video-recorded by the investigator. I consent to participate in interviews, and I grant permission for the interviews to be video and/or audio-recorded. These recordings will be used for the purposes of data transcription, translation, and analysis. I am aware the data from my participation will be retained for an indefinite period of time and may be used in a Master’s thesis, doctoral dissertation, journal article, psychological presentation, and/or future research projects, and I give permission for the use of this information in the aforementioned projects. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the Master’s thesis submission. I also understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and for whatever reason. I know that by signing this consent form I am not handing over any of my legal rights. I have been given the option to receive a copy of this contract.

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

__________________________

**DATE:** __________________
SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR __________________________DATE: __________________
Appendix D

Post-interview Confidentiality Form

It is my goal and responsibility to use the information that you have shared responsibly. Now that you have completed the interview, I would like to give you the opportunity to provide additional feedback about how you prefer to have your data handled. When I present the final study, I will be changing the name of the religious order and your personal name in order to protect your privacy. Please let me know below how you would like for me to share the rest of your data.

___ You may share the rest of my information just as I provided it. I realize that others might be able to identify me based on the data, even though my name will be changed.

___ You may share the information I provided; however, besides changing my name, please change details that might make me identifiable to others. In particular, it is my wish that the following specific pieces of my data not be shared without first altering the data so as to make me unidentifiable (describe the data you would like changed in the space below):

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

___ You may contact me if you have any questions about sharing my data with others. The best way to reach me is:________________________________________________________

Participant’s signature___________________________ Date__________________

Investigator’s signature___________________________ Date__________________
Appendix E

Instructions before Individual Interviews

I will be asking you several questions regarding your thoughts, feelings and experiences as a religious sister with the Oblates of Cristo Rey. I will also ask you questions about how you have decided to enter religious life and this particular order. I am interested in your thoughts and feelings and there are not right or wrong answers. Please feel free to share with me openly how you are feeling. If at any time during the interview you do not want to answer a question you are free to skip that question and to ask me to move on to a different topic. You may feel a range of feelings during the interview and that is okay. Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have before, during or after the interview.
Appendix F

Interview Protocol

A. Demographic Information
Date and time:
Pseudonym:
Convent:
Age:
Years in the Order:
Status (i.e. novice/postulant):
Racial/ethnic background:
Native country:

B. Lead-off Questions
a. Please give me a general timeline of the events that happened in your life prior to joining the community.
b. Can you tell me your “vocation story”?...Please tell me about when you first remember having the idea to become a religious sister... (Follow-up question) What happened then? Can you take me through step by step?
c. [If she does not cover this already in (b)] Have you had experiences with any other religious communities? If so, please tell me about them...
d. Can you tell me about the various experiences you have had since you began living with (or have known) the community? (Follow-up question) What has been the best experience you have had and what has been the worst experience?
e. Please walk me through the community discernment process for a new woman who is a candidate to join the community. Who is involved, what is the time frame, etc.?
f. Can you tell me about your friendship with the other sisters...and with the surrounding community?
g. Can you list for me what are some of the reasons you have decided to become a religious sister?....and the reasons for choosing this particular community?
h. Can you tell me what you think some of the reasons are for the other women in your community for choosing religious life and/or choosing this community?

C. Possible Follow-up Questions
• You mentioned that you sensed a “call” from God- can you tell me what that felt like, how you heard the call, where you were, etc.?
- What other types of experiences might you like to have with your community?
- Sounds like you had been thinking about joining a religious community for a long time before you came here, what do you think made you decide to take the step to join?
- Seems like the Oblates of Cristo Rey have been actively involved with the community... can you tell me more about that?
- What challenges have you had in living with the community?
- I’m hearing that you have been through a lot of life challenges throughout your life, how has your time with the religious order impacted you while you were going through these challenges?
- Have you had any “religious experiences” that you would like to talk about?
- You have not mentioned anything about your ethnic identity or culture in relationship to the community, and I was wondering what part that might play in your involvement and experiences with the community, if any.
- Imagine that you were not a part of the community, what would the Oblates be like without you?
- If you could change one thing about the community or your involvement with it, what would that be?
- Is there anything else that we’ve missed that you would like to tell me about?
Thank you for your participation in the study. The purpose of this study was to help identify some of the ways in which women discern and follow a “call” from God to the consecrated religious life. Your participation will help mental health professionals and others to understand more about this process and the various factors affecting one’s decision. Please understand that your individual answers to questions and participation in the study will remain confidential as identifying details about you will be changed to protect your privacy, unless you have indicated the desire for your information to be presented without changes. If you would like a copy of the results of this study, please contact the principal investigator, Melanie Bruss.

Melanie Bruss
Graduate Student
Department of Counseling Psychology & Guidance Services
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Phone: 586-335-3234
mebruss@bsugmail.net

Jacob Yui-Chung Chan Ph.D., CRC
Assistant Professor
Department of Counseling Psychology & Guidance Services
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Phone: 765-285-8040
ychan@bsu.edu

Please let me know how you felt about participating in this research and if you have any additional questions or concerns.
Appendix H

Peer Debriefing - Pre-Field Work Interview

- Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student Emily Mastroianni conducted a pre-fieldwork interview with me before I began research.

1. What are your expected findings?
   a. Based on career development research with Latinos, I expect that family values may be important to the participants. However, their family values may not have as strong of a hold in this case because they are “independent” women (in the sense that they have left their families to join a religious order), but still decision may have been influenced by family members.
   b. In regards to previous research with Latinos showing that they have high career aspirations but low expectations, I don’t believe this will be the case for these women.
   c. I believe self-efficacy may be related to their vocation decision, they may wonder: “can I handle this lifestyle?”
   d. I expect for the religious sisters to have interesting and varied stories about how they were called (i.e. dreams, signs, etc.)

2. What are your biases?
   a. I have a general positive feeling toward this group.
   b. I have spent time with this group of women (as a volunteer) and found them to be warm, hospitable, funny, open, innocent, and “cool”. Others I found to be more reserved or busy.

3. What does “cool” mean?
   a. Open and nonjudgmental, were able to laugh about the language barrier between English speakers and Spanish speakers.

4. Any stereotypes about nuns?
   a. I had a stereotype before my first experience with the sisters that nuns were strict and prayed all the time.
   b. Through my first experience with the sisters I found that they broke all of these stereotypes (for me).
   c. I remember they used hot sauce all the time.

5. What are your preconceptions about Latinos?
   a. I really like them and think they are “cool”.
   b. I find them to be funny, hardworking, warm, and often are Catholic.

6. What are your biases about the participants being Catholic?
a. I expect that they adhere to the Church’s teachings.
b. My guess is that they are not super educated about the Church, that they have had more informal religious formation.
c. Perhaps they have had less background education on Church teachings and dogma.

7. How will your Catholic faith affect your interaction with the participants?
   a. I will perhaps be more of an insider than if I were not Catholic.
   b. I will still be (considered) a white American, but Catholic.
   c. I believe I will be more sensitive to their religious beliefs.
   d. I have overall positive views about our shared faith.

8. Any concerns?
   a. Some of the sisters may be suspicious of me and not want to open up to me.

9. Why do you think this research is important?
   a. There is not enough research in this area with this population.
   b. Latinos have high rates of being religious and Catholic so may be important to their career development.
   c. There is a lot of emphasis on multiculturalism (in the psychology literature) but, there seems to be an anti-Catholic bias, and not much empirical research on vocational discernment.
   d. Vocation discernment is an interesting topic.

10. What are your personal reasons for wanting to do research in this area?
    a. The Church promotes vocations to the priesthood, but in many dioceses does not promote vocations to the religious life for women as much.
    b. I would therefore like to raise awareness of the religious life for women as a life option with the hope that more women (and men) will consider this vocation.
    c. My Catholic faith is an important part of my life.
    d. I admire this particular group of religious sisters, they are a good example of being godly women. I realize that I may “idealize” them, but will probably get to know their faults after several months of research with them.
    e. This research may play a part in my own vocation discernment.
    f. The image of their being the “spouse” of Christ is beautiful to me.
Appendix I

Peer Debriefing - Interview Transcripts

- Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student John McConnell checked Interview Transcripts for Leading

It is very evident that you did a lot of work on these. I really like your coding scheme, its elaborate and good for record keeping. To answer your question, I did not see you being "biased" explicitly in any of these interviews. They (as any set of semi-structured interviews would be) have similar questions that you ask, but have some divergence. To me there was no evidence of you directing the interviews in a biased manner in any of the follow-up questions, but you also will know a little more of why you asked particular questions. I found it interesting that some of your interview with the sisters had different styles. For example, one of them has a very large amount of the sister talking without much interjection from you. On many other of the interviews, you seemed more interactive. How does this affect the results?

I took a pretty good look at all of these and their respective coding schemes. I did not manage to find anything that stuck out that you had not already included in your 'themes between interviews." Again, it is evident that you are very knowledgeable about the ins and outs of these interviews.
Appendix J

Peer Debriefing - Pragmatic Horizon Analysis

- Counseling Psychology Doctoral Student Juno Park gave feedback on Pragmatic Horizon Analysis

I reviewed your interview notes and a brief horizon analysis. In general, I can see your effort to conduct this study. Also, the interview quality seems good. Here is something that I want to input in your work. It was a bit difficult to review your horizon analysis because your analysis was based on the interview data. As you may have noticed, there seems nothing further or deeper than what your interviewees said. I was not able to see the necessity of critical analysis for the interview transcriptions. I think you may just use your interviewees’ statements and code them as a theme. It seems like your interviewees said what their statement literally means. Frankly speaking, I don’t see much values of doing critical ethnographic analysis so far. However, I was able to see some aspects in the interview transcription were quite interesting. Also, you may need to interpret some of the aspects. If your observation is the subject of data analysis, I would say it is much worth of analyzing the data using critical ethnography. In my perception, interview data in critical ethnography may be a supplemental material that guides researchers to be less biased and to represent the research subjects’ world view.

I am wondering what you think about this. Please let me know if something that I misunderstood.

I attached my feedback on the pragmatic horizon analysis. (below)
Pragmatic Horizon Analysis

(feedback in red print from Juno Park)

1. Sister Bernadetta

[OC: Sister Bernadetta is recounting to me the story about how she first met one of the nuns from her order] SB: And now I spoke to a Sister, and a very happy Sister, I tell her: “Ay! Hermanita,” I say, “Excuse me, I want to be a religious, but what are the requirements needed?” [OC: in a whispey dreamy voice, sounds kind of hopeful]. She started, this was the question that she asked me, she says: “Ah, well, look, to have a vocation, to have the desire, and to want to love God.” I say, “Ay! Well, they are so easy and I want to be a nun, yes, I want to give my life to God, and I have the desire to be a religious! [OC: She talks really fast in a whispey voice full of emotion]

Meaning Field:

FOREGROUNDED
I desire to be a nun. (Subjective)
[AND/OR] I (already) meet your requirements to be a nun. (Subjective/Objective)

NEAR FOREGROUND
[AND] I am ready to be a nun. (Subjective/Objective) [Comment JP: In both my requirements and my desire.] [AND/OR] Your requirements are not difficult for me to meet. (Subjective) [Comment JP: I think this also includes objective aspects too along with subjective because requirements is a type of objective criteria.] [AND/OR] I am really excited about the possibility of becoming a nun. (Subjective) [AND/OR] I am a person who wants to give my life to God. (Identity) [Comment JP: As far as I know, I haven’t seen identity category yet, can you check this again?] [AND/OR] I am a person who desires to be a religious sister (Identity)

MID-RANGE
[AND/OR] I desire for you to know that this is something I want to do (Subjective) [Comment JP: To do in my life] [OR (possibly)] I desire for you to know how important this is to me. (Subjective)

BACKGROUNDED
[OR (possibly)] I desired for her to know becoming a nun is important to me (Subjective) [Comment JP: I think this might need to be a more general statement. E.g., “The desire to become a nun is important in this vocation.”]
Sister Bernadetta: It is very special for me. Perhaps every order is very special, but for me, it is very special, because, I feel that it is so loved by God, right? And that God sends (us) a lot of vocations, and we have a very good Father, and he loves us so much and he gives everything for the vocations. And what didn’t he do for my vocation? Many things. Right? He would always say to me, he would always say to me, “My little daughter, when do you want to go to the convent?” When I was already fifteen years old. “Father, if it’s possible, take me right this moment (ahorita mismo)” [she laughs and I join her] “Take me!” [OC: when she says ‘llevame (take me)’ she sounds sort of desperate almost like she is begging] But he couldn’t because I didn’t have Mexican documentation. I had to have the visa changed. But this action of my heart was very special for me. And it was very special because God sent it directly to me. [OC: She stresses the word God and sounds resolved.]

Meaning Field:

FOREGROUNDED

I want to go with you to become a nun right now. (Subjective) [Comment JP: May need to specify this.]
[and] I wish I could go with you right now to become a nun. (Subjective)
[and] if it were possible I would go with you right now (Subjective) [Comment JP: These two are a bit similar to the first statement, although there is a distinction between want and wish.

BACKGROUND

[and/or (possibly)] My desire is to leave right now to become a nun, even though I know I cannot. (Subjective) [Comment JP: This may be a bit objective as a reflection on her reality.]
[or] I have nothing stopping me in my desire to be a nun (Subjective) [Comment JP: It seems like you are referring to the idea, “Mentally, I have nothing that bothers me from becoming a nun.”]

MORE BACKGROUNDED

[or] I want you to know how badly I want to go with you. (Subjective) [Comment JP: How about “Follow your calling”?] [or] I am very serious/resolved about wanting to become a nun. (Subjective) [Comment JP: I am not sure about this statement.]

2. Sister Margarita
[OC: Sister Margarita went on a diocesan vocation retreat where she met the Oblates of Cristo Rey. She wanted to go on a vocation retreat to get to know the Oblates more and in the text below she is telling me about trying to get permission from a nun from the diocesan retreat (who is from a different religious order) in order to go on a vocation retreat with the Oblates of Cristo Rey.]

SM: I told her, Sister Amelia, “I would like, I would like to go with the Oblates to do a one week retreat that’s called “Come and See”. And she said, the sister, the nun, Amelia said, “No, no you can’t go.” I asked her, “but, why?” “You can’t go because you have to complete another retreat, aside from ‘Previda’, because you didn’t write their name down. I said, “but I want to go with them, I want to get to know them.” “No, you can’t go.” And then, well, she got upset. The nun got upset, and she [pause], she yelled at me through the telephone [OC: MB gasps]. And then I started to cry because she told me that I definitely could not go. I started to cry and cry and went to my house and, and then... I was crying in my room (she laughs). I said, ‘I can’t go with the sisters. What am I going to do? What will I do?’

Meaning Field:

MORE FOREGROUNDED
I cried because she would not let me go on the retreat with the sisters. (Objective)
I cried because my wish was defeated. (Subjective) [Comment JP: What do you think about adding this?]
[and] I didn’t know what to do when I found out I could not go on the retreat. (Objective) [Comment JP: This may not be true. How about this, “Was not eligible to go on the retreat.”]
[and] I really wanted to go on the retreat with the sisters. (Subjective)
[and] I really wanted to get to know the sisters. (Subjective)

NEAR FOREGROUND
[and] I was sad because I could not go on the retreat with the sisters. (Subjective)
[and/or] I was upset/disappointed that I could not go on the retreat with the sisters. (Subjective)

MID-RANGE
[and/or] I felt lost/confused after I found out I could not go on the retreat with the sisters. (Subjective)
[or] I really cared about going on the retreat. (Subjective)
[or] I had hoped to get to know the sisters more by going on the retreat (Subjective).

BACKGROUNDED
[And/or] I was confused because she would not let me go on the retreat with the sisters. (Subjective) [Comment JP: There is something that I cannot do with my desire/wish. If you can address a type of outside influence (e.g. rule) in her behavior (going on the retreat with the sisters), it would be nice.]
[or (possibly)] I thought the only way I could get to know the sisters was by going on the retreat. (Subjective/ Normative-evaluative)

MORE BACKGROUNDED
[or (possibly)] It hurt my feelings that the nun yelled at me on the phone. (Subjective) [Comment JP: This may go to the mid-range]
Appendix K

Negative case analysis

From Higher-level Coding and Pragmatic Horizon Analysis

1. Theme from coding: **We do not ask women (first) if they want to become a nun, they must indicate the desire (to become a nun) first.**
   
   a. int1line309-316; Umm, first, when we see that the young lady has the desire to enter the religious life, she is not instantly asked, you want to enter into the religious life? And then she’s in the community. No. Instead, first we look at the young lady to see if she is mature and also, the young lady, she has to demonstrate a desire to join our community; we aren’t the ones that will approach her. Rather, she has to show her desire to enter our community. So she has to come to us and ask, Mother could we go, could I go visit all of you at Monte San Alfonso? Could I spend a week or a weekend or my vacation with you? Yes, of course, we will tell her, come and visit us. And she goes and visits us.
   
   b. int2line323-325; We have never said, “Do you want to be a nun?” We don’t do that, to say “You want to be a nun, come, come with us.” No, we don’t say this because what if the young woman doesn’t want to, if would be like forcing her.
   
   c. Int2line335-339 On the contrary, all of those who have entered, they themselves have said, “I want to go with you.” And, if we see young women, we never say to them, “Come with us.” No. Rather one says, “I want to go” and no one obligates them, no one obligates them to enter into this community, no one has entered by force, but each one has chosen voluntarily, freely.

2. The norms that seem to be referenced here (from pragmatic horizon analysis)
   
   a. **We are careful about who we ask about their interest in the religious life (or becoming a nun)**
   
   b. **We do not want to push a religious vocation on anyone.**

3. Negative case analysis of interview data that seemed to contradict theme of: “we do not ask women (first) if they want to become a nun, they must indicate the desire (to become a nun) first.

Int7line52-68; And waiting until they arrived, then uh, we came across the surprise that in the neighborhood where my parents live was a procession point chosen by the sisters, there in the, in the chapel that is there in the, in the neighborhood. Everyone got together. And from there, we went praying and processing the rosary until arriving
at the church where everyone met. And so, well, that is where I began getting motivated. Um, one of the sisters that, who arrived at the processions, uh, encouraged me, encouraged me. Uh, like this, “Girl, come. And come here, girl.” And like that, friendly, no? So, it was, it was like the motivation, as well as that one feels. I was sensing. And, and well, I tried to help motivate, no? I tried to help motivate in the mission and in everything. I remember that she asked me if I knew how to play the guitar. Actually, I learned in, in boarding school I learned. So, ah, I told her, well I know, but it isn’t, it isn’t anything, no, I know very little, I know very little. So she told me, bring your guitar, come help us motivate the children. Well, and then I went, I went where, uh, the sister asked me, “Listen, do you want to be a religious sister?” and I told her, “No, I don’t want to be a religious sister.” (laughs) And that stayed with me, that question stayed very deep within me. Before, when I was fourteen years old, I had thought about being a religious sister.

[OC: Later on in the same interview Sister Brigida reflects on this topic]

int7line88-95; “And, well, what a surprise it was for me when the sisters arrived, when one sister said to me, “Do you want to be a religious sister?” I, well, without thinking about it, said to her, “No.” I told her, “No.” And during that very mission week that the sisters were there in the town, I told my father…My father and mother were there. The two of them were there when I told them, “Dad, I want to go with the sisters.” And, he didn’t say yes or no. He didn’t say anything to me. And I then told my mother, “Mom, I want to go with the sisters.” And my mother told me, “No.” Well, I don’t remember what she, what she told me directly, no. But, like that, they didn’t give me an answer.”

4. From pragmatic horizon analysis the meaning fields here seems to be:
   a. The religious sister asked me if I wanted to become a religious sister and I said no.
   b. Even though I told the sister ‘no’ I secretly/actually wanted to become a religious sister.”

5. I followed up with a religious sister on this topic, to figure out the reason for the apparent inconsistency between the religious orders “norms” and “practice”. Record of phone conversation on 10/20/12:

   MB: Are there times when the Sisters might ask a woman if she is interested in becoming a nun?
   S: Yes, of course.

   MB: Under what circumstances?
   S: After we have gotten to know each other and we see that they have a lot of beautiful qualities. Or they might ask us about becoming a religious sister. If it seems it would be the right time. We don’t just go up to someone and ask them if they want to become a nun. I think we are guided by the Holy Spirit if we would ask. But we use prudence. If we see that the person
enjoys being with us... Some people are too bashful to ask (us). But normally, they are the ones that ask (us) “how did you become a nun?” By the questions they ask and then we will return their questions. Normally they will be the people who ask. Normally they will have a little curiosity. Father Pablo says if they have a little curiosity those would be the people to ask to come on a retreat. Give them an opportunity see if they would like to come on a retreat. (For example) If at a mission, I see that someone is really helpful...coming early to the mission eager to help, then I (might) ask them.

MB: What does your Holy Rule say about this topic?
S: We do not do promotions for vocations...We have never announced in a newspaper or in a magazine “Come join our order”. When (someone) enjoys being with us, seeing our way of our life than they want to come be with us.

6. Conclusions:
   a. Sisters normally wait for the woman to ask about becoming a religious sister first.
   b. If, however, a woman indicates her (possible) desire to become a religious sister in other ways, such as being eager to help the sisters at a mission, or asking them a lot of questions, then the sisters may ask about her interest.
Formulario de consentimiento general de adultos participantes

Ball State University
2000 West University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-1099
Institutional Review Board, (765) 285-5070

MUJERES EN DISCERNIMIENTO HACIA UNA VOCACIÓN RELIGIOSA

Deseamos invitarle a participar en el trabajo de investigación realizada por Melanie Bruss. Antes de dar su consentimiento para participar como voluntaria, me gustaría que leyera lo que a continuación se encuentra, y le agradecería hiciera todas las preguntas que tenga para el mejor entendimiento de lo que implica su participación en esta investigación.

INVESTIGADOR

Soy una estudiante de posgrado en Ball State University en el departamento de Psicología de Orientación. Me llamo Melanie Bruss, y soy quien dirige este estudio. El miembro de la facultad que supervisa esta investigación es Jacob Yui-Chung Chan, PhD., CRC.

PROPÓSITO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN

El propósito de este estudio es obtener un mejor entendimiento sobre el proceso que conlleva la decisión de elegir una vocación para mujeres que sienten un llamado a la vida religiosa. Ustedes fueron seleccionadas por ser hermanas religiosas, están en el proceso de tomar una decisión en el llamado a la vida religiosa, o están, de alguna manera, asociadas con la orden religiosa.

PROCEDIMIENTOS UTILIZADOS DURANTE LA INVESTIGACIÓN

La investigadora de éste proyecto, Melanie Bruss, ha decidido escoger métodos etnográficos para llevar a cabo este trabajo de investigación. En los estudios etnográficos se utiliza una variedad de métodos para obtener un entendimiento integral e individual de la cultura y forma de vivir de los participantes. Si usted accede a participar en el estudio, esto implica lo que citamos a continuación:

- La posibilidad de que yo le pida tener una entrevista individual que dure entre una o dos horas. Durante esta entrevista, tendrá la oportunidad de pasar
tiempo con usted y hablarle acerca de su vida cotidiana y su discernimiento vocacional. Con su consentimiento, dichas conversaciones serán grabadas en audio y/o video.

- Al mismo tiempo, pasaré una temporada en el convento/monasterio “Los Oblatos del Cristo Rey”, observando la vida diaria y la interacción social de las hermanas y hermanos religiosos. También estaré tomando apuntes de todas éstas observaciones. Durante el tiempo de mi estadía en el convento, estaré participando en todas las rutinas de la Comunidad las cuales incluirán las comidas, horas de oración, recreación, entre otras actividades y eventos. Así mismo, es posible que asista a las actividades misioneras con la comunidad junto con los hermanos y hermanas religiosas.

- Yo le podría tomar fotografías y/o video bajo su consentimiento.

- Su participación en este estudio podría tomarle mucho tiempo. No podría decirle el número exacto de horas incluidas, lo que sí le puedo asegurar es que este proyecto está programado para una duración de tres meses.

**RIESGOS**

Durante las entrevistas puede haber momentos en los cuales el entrevistador, sin querer, presente material que implique ciertas emociones, y es posible le haga sentir incómodo o molesto. Por favor, entienda que usted es libre de negarse a contestar cualquiera de mis preguntas, renunciar a la participación en la conversación o salirse del lugar donde se conduce la entrevista en cualquier momento que usted lo desee.

**BENEFICIOS DEL ESTUDIO**

No existen beneficios directamente vinculados a su participación en éste estudio. Sin embargo, los investigadores tienen la esperanza de llegar por medio de este estudio, a un mejor entendimiento de lo que podría ayudar a otras personas que se encuentran en el proceso de discernimiento vocacional para las mujeres.

**CONFIDENCIALIDAD**

Los investigadores harán todo lo posible por respetar su privacidad y sus deseos en relación con el nivel de discreción del material de entrevistas. Un seudónimo, elegido por usted, será utilizado para sus respuestas durante las entrevistas. Los únicos con acceso a su nombre real seremos mi consejero y yo. Es posible que yo solicite la ayuda de otros investigadores con transcripciones, traducciones y análisis, sin embargo, ellos
no tendrán acceso a su verdadero nombre. Toda información obtenida en conexión con este estudio y que pueda ser identificada con usted, permanecerá confidencial y no será publicada sin su consentimiento, o como lo exija la ley. Los resultados de esta investigación podrán ser publicados en revistas científicas o presentados en conferencias de psicología, sin embargo, su identidad y participación en el estudio permanecerán confidenciales. Al final de las entrevistas, usted tendrá la oportunidad de decidir qué parte de la información que le identifica, aparte de su nombre, le gustaría que se cambie para el reporte final.

Las excepciones a la confidencialidad, como lo requiere el estado de Indiana, son las siguientes, en el caso de que alguna participante fuese a reportar: (1) intenciones de lastimar a alguien o a sí mismo [IC 12-26-5-1], (2) previamente haber lastimado a algún niño [IC 31-33-5-1], o (3) previamente haber lastimado a algún adulto en dificultades [IC 12-10-3-9 (a)]. También deberá usted saber que, aunque es poco común, bajo ciertas circunstancias, la información podría ser citada por orden de la corte.

**COMPENSACIÓN POR SU PARTICIPACIÓN**

Aun cuando no haya una compensación directa para usted, estaré enseñando inglés así como computación básica a cualquier miembro de la Comunidad que así lo desee.

**DERECHOS DEL PARTICIPANTE Y OPCIÓN PARA RETIRARSE**

Su participación en ésta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Usted estará libre de renunciar a su participación en este estudio, u optar por retirarse en cualquier momento. Su decisión de participar o no en este estudio no afectará su membresía en la Comunidad de “Los Oblatos del Cristo Rey”. Si desea recibir un resumen de los resultados del estudio, por favor déjeme saber y yo me aseguraré de que usted lo reciba.

**PREGUNTAS ACERCA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN**

He intentado explicarle el propósito y naturaleza de la investigación y contestar toda pregunta que pueda tener. Si tiene alguna pregunta, puede comunicarse conmigo al (586) 335-3234 o mebruss@bsu.edu, o puede comunicarse con Dr. Chan al (765) 285-8040 o ychan@bsu.edu. Si tiene alguna duda sobre sus derechos como participante de este estudio, puede ponerse en contacto con el director de la oficina de Integridad de la Investigación al (765) 285-5070 o irb@bsu.edu.

**EXCLUSIÓN DE CRITERIA**
Sólo adultos con edad de 18 años en adelante, podrán participar en este proyecto de investigación. Si usted no es un adulto de dicha edad requerida para su participación, por favor notifique al investigador y no dé su firma de consentimiento más adelante.

**FIRMA Y CERTIFICACIÓN**

Al firmar, reconozco que he leído la forma de consentimiento y que he hecho todas las preguntas que tengo en relación con mi participación en este estudio. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en este estudio y de permitir que mi persona sea grabada tanto en audio como en video durante la interacción de grupo. Sin embargo, estoy consciente de que puedo retirar mi participación en cualquier momento. Estoy consciente de que los datos de mi participación serán retenidos por un periodo indefinido y que también pueden ser utilizados para la tesis de una maestría, tesis doctoral, artículo de alguna revista, presentación psicológica, y/o futuros proyectos de investigación, y autorizo el uso de esta información en los proyectos anteriormente mencionados. Tengo el derecho de revisar, comentar y/o retirar información previa a la presentación de la tesis de maestría. Entiendo que al firmar este formulario de consentimiento, no estoy renunciando a mis derechos legales. Me han dado la opción de recibir una copia de éste contrato.

Firma del Participante:
_________________________________________________________

Fecha: __________________

Firma del Investigador:
_________________________________________________________

Fecha: __________________
Appendix M

Formulario de consentimiento de entrevistas

Ball State University
2000 West University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-1099
Institutional Review Board, (765) 285-5070

MUJERES EN DISCERNIMIENTO HACIA UNA VOCACIÓN RELIGIOSA

Deseamos invitarle a participar en el trabajo de investigación realizada por Melanie Bruss. Antes de dar su consentimiento para participar como voluntaria, me gustaría que leyera lo que a continuación se encuentra, y le agradecería hiciera todas las preguntas que tenga para el mejor entendimiento de lo que implica su participación en esta investigación.

INVESTIGADOR

Soy una estudiante de posgrado en Ball State University en el departamento de Psicología de Orientación. Me llamo Melanie Bruss, y soy quien dirige este estudio. El miembro de la facultad que supervisa esta investigación es Jacob Yui-Chung Chan, PhD., CRC.

PROPÓSITO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN

El propósito de este estudio es obtener un mejor entendimiento sobre el proceso que conlleva la decisión de elegir una vocación para mujeres que sienten un llamado a la vida religiosa. Ustedes fueron seleccionadas por ser hermanas religiosas, están en el proceso de tomar una decisión en el llamado a la vida religiosa, o están, de alguna manera, asociadas con la orden religiosa.

PROCEDIMIENTOS UTILIZADOS DURANTE EL ESTUDIO

Durante este estudio, se le pedirá que conteste algunas preguntas sobre su discernimiento vocacional y los factores que le llevaron a seleccionar su vocación en esta orden religiosa en particular. También se le hará preguntas generales acerca de su vida antes de entrar a esta orden y sus experiencias como hermana (o persona) religiosa. La entrevista está diseñada con una duración de aproximadamente una a dos horas. Sin embargo, siéntase en libertad de hablar cuanto desee sobre el tema. Igualmente, si hay alguna pregunta que no pueda contestar o no se sienta cómoda/o
VOCATION DISCERNMENT

contestándola, siéntase en libertad de indicármelo y pasaremos a la siguiente pregunta. Las entrevistas serán grabadas en video y/o en audio con su previo consentimiento por medio de un documento que usted firmará más adelante.

RIESGOS

Durante las entrevistas puede haber momentos en los cuales el entrevistador, sin querer, presente material que implique ciertas emociones, y es posible le haga sentir incómodo o molesto. Por favor, entienda que usted es libre de negarse a contestar cualquiera de mis preguntas, renunciar a la participación en la conversación o salirse del lugar donde se conduce la entrevista en cualquier momento que usted lo desee.

BENEFICIOS DEL ESTUDIO

No existen beneficios directamente vinculados a su participación en éste estudio. Sin embargo, los investigadores tienen la esperanza de llegar por medio de este estudio, a un mejor entendimiento de lo que podría ayudar a otras personas que se encuentran en el proceso de discernimiento vocacional para las mujeres.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Los investigadores harán todo lo posible por respetar su privacidad y sus deseos en relación con el nivel de discreción del material de entrevistas. Un seudónimo, elegido por usted, será utilizado para sus respuestas durante las entrevistas. Los únicos con acceso a su nombre real seremos mi consejero y yo. Es posible que yo solicite la ayuda de otros investigadores con transcripciones, traducciones y análisis, sin embargo, ellos no tendrán acceso a su verdadero nombre. Toda información obtenida en conexión con este estudio y que pueda ser identificada con usted, permanecerá confidencial y no será publicada sin su consentimiento, o como lo exija la ley. Los resultados de esta investigación podrán ser publicados en revistas científicas o presentados en conferencias de psicología, sin embargo, su identidad y participación en el estudio permanecerán confidenciales. Al final de las entrevistas, usted tendrá la oportunidad de decidir qué parte de la información que le identifica, aparte de su nombre, le gustaría que se cambie para el reporte final.

Las excepciones a la confidencialidad, como lo requiere el estado de Indiana, son las siguientes, en el caso de que alguna participante fuese a reportar: (1) intenciones de lastimar a alguien o a sí mismo [IC 12-26-5-1], (2) previamente haber lastimado a algún niño [1C 31-33-5-1], o (3) previamente haber lastimado a algún adulto en dificultades [1C
12-10-3-9 (a)]. También deberá usted saber que, aunque es poco común, bajo ciertas circunstancias, la información podría ser citada por orden de la corte.

**COMPENSACIÓN POR SU PARTICIPACIÓN**

Aun cuando no haya una compensación directa para usted, estaré enseñando inglés así como computación básica a cualquier miembro de la Comunidad que así lo desee.

**DERECHOS DEL PARTICIPANTE Y OPCIÓN PARA RETIRARSE**

Su participación en ésta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Usted estará libre de renunciar a su participación en este estudio, u optar por retirarse en cualquier momento. Su decisión de participar o no en este estudio no afectará su membresía en la Comunidad de “Los Oblatos del Cristo Rey”. Si desea recibir un resumen de los resultados del estudio, por favor déjeme saber y yo me aseguraré de que usted lo reciba.

**PREGUNTAS ACERCA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN**

He intentado explicarle el propósito y naturaleza de la investigación y contestar toda pregunta que pueda tener. Si tiene alguna pregunta, puede comunicarse conmigo al (586) 335-3234 o mebruss@bsu.edu, o puede comunicarse con Dr. Chan al (765) 285-8040 o ychan@bsu.edu. Si tiene alguna duda sobre sus derechos como participante de este estudio, puede ponerse en contacto con el director de la oficina de Integridad de la Investigación al (765) 285-5070 o irb@bsu.edu.

**EXCLUSIÓN DE CRITERIA**

Sólo adultos con edad de 18 años en adelante, podrán participar en este proyecto de investigación. Si usted no es un adulto de dicha edad requerida para su participación, por favor notifique al investigador y no dé su firma de consentimiento más adelante.

**FIRMA Y CERTIFICACIÓN**

Al firmar este documento reconozco que he leído la forma de consentimiento y que he hecho las preguntas necesarias acerca de mi participación en ésta entrevista. Entendiendo que puedo retirarme en cualquier momento y por cualquier razón, acepto participar en las entrevistas. Concedo mi permiso para que las entrevistas sean grabadas tanto en audio como en video. Estas grabaciones serán utilizadas con el propósito de transcripción y análisis de los datos. Estoy consciente de que la información de mi participación será retenida por tiempo indefinido y podrá ser usada.
en la tesis de una maestría, para una tesis doctoral, para el artículo de una revista, una presentación psicológica, y/o para futuros proyectos de investigación, y doy mi permiso para el uso de esta información en los proyectos anteriormente citados. Tengo derecho de revisar, comentar, y/o retirar información antes de que sea sometida en la tesis de maestría. Entiendo que al firmar ésta forma de consentimiento, no he renunciado a ninguno de mis derechos legales. Me han dado la opción de recibir una copia de éste contrato.

Firma del Participante:

_________________________________________________________

Fecha: __________________

Firma del Investigador:

_________________________________________________________

Fecha: _________________
Appendix N

Formulario de consentimiento general de adultos participantes con permiso para entrevistar

Ball State University
2000 West University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-1099
Institutional Review Board, (765) 285-5070

MUJERES EN DISCERNIMIENTO HACIA UNA VOCACIÓN RELIGIOSA

Deseamos invitarle a participar en el trabajo de investigación realizada por Melanie Bruss. Antes de dar su consentimiento para participar como voluntaria, me gustaría que leyera lo que a continuación se encuentra, y le agradecería hiciera todas las preguntas que tenga para el mejor entendimiento de lo que implica su participación en esta investigación.

INVESTIGADOR

Soy una estudiante de posgrado en Ball State University en el departamento de Psicología de Orientación. Me llamo Melanie Bruss, y soy quien dirige este estudio. El miembro de la facultad que supervisa esta investigación es Jacob Yui-Chung Chan, PhD., CRC.

PROPÓSITO DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN

El propósito de este estudio es obtener un mejor entendimiento sobre el proceso que conlleva la decisión de elegir una vocación para mujeres que sienten un llamado a la vida religiosa. Ustedes fueron seleccionadas por ser hermanas religiosas, están en el proceso de tomar una decisión en el llamado a la vida religiosa, o están, de alguna manera, asociadas con la orden religiosa.

PROCEDIMIENTOS UTILIZADOS DURANTE LA INVESTIGACIÓN

La investigadora de éste proyecto, Melanie Bruss, ha decidido escoger métodos etnográficos para llevar a cabo este trabajo de investigación. En los estudios etnográficos se utiliza una variedad de métodos para obtener un entendimiento integral e individual de la cultura y forma de vivir de los participantes. Si usted accede a participar en el estudio, esto implica lo que citamos a continuación:
• Pasaré una temporada en el convento/monasterio Los Oblatos del Cristo Rey, observando la vida diaria y la interacción social de las hermanas y hermanos religiosos. También estaré tomando apuntes de todas éstas observaciones. Durante el tiempo de mi estadía en el convento, estaré participando en todas las rutinas de la Comunidad las cuales incluirán las comidas, horas de oración, recreación, entre otras actividades y eventos. Así mismo, es posible que asista a las actividades misioneras con la comunidad junto con los hermanos y hermanas religiosas.

• Durante mis observaciones, yo le podría tomar fotografías, grabaciones de audio y video bajo su consentimiento.

• La posibilidad de que yo le pida tener una o más entrevistas individuales. Durante ésta(s) entrevista(s), tendré la oportunidad de pasar tiempo con usted y hablarle acerca de su vida cotidiana. Se le pedirá que conteste algunas preguntas sobre los factores que le llevaron a seleccionar su vocación religiosa y en esta orden religiosa en particular. También se le hará preguntas generales acerca de su vida antes de entrar a esta orden y sus experiencias como hermana (o persona) religiosa. La entrevista inicial está diseñada con una duración de aproximadamente una o dos horas. Sin embargo, siéntase en libertad de hablar cuanto desee sobre el tema. Igualmente, si hay alguna pregunta que no pueda contestar o no se sienta cómoda/o contestándola, síéntase en libertad de indicármelo y pasaremos a la siguiente pregunta. Con su consentimiento firmado más adelante, dichas conversaciones serán grabadas en audio y/o video.

• Su participación en este estudio podría tomarle mucho tiempo. No podría decirle el número exacto de horas incluidas, lo que sí le puedo asegurar es que este proyecto está programado para una duración de aproximadamente tres meses.

RIESGOS

Durante las entrevistas puede haber momentos en los cuales el entrevistador, sin querer, presente material que implique ciertas emociones, y es posible le haga sentir incómodo o molesto. Por favor, entienda que usted es libre de negarse a contestar cualquiera de mis preguntas, renunciar a la participación en la conversación o salirse del lugar donde se conduce la entrevista en cualquier momento que usted lo desee.

BENEFICIOS DEL ESTUDIO

No existen beneficios directamente vinculados a su participación en éste estudio. Sin embargo, los investigadores tienen la esperanza de llegar por medio de este estudio, a
VOCATION DISCERNMENT

un mejor entendimiento de lo que podría ayudar a otras personas que se encuentran en el proceso de discernimiento vocacional para las mujeres.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Los investigadores harán todo lo posible por respetar su privacidad y sus deseos en relación con el nivel de discreción del material de entrevistas. Un seudónimo, elegido por usted, será utilizado para sus respuestas durante las entrevistas. Los únicos con acceso a su nombre real seremos mi consejero y yo. Es posible que yo solicite la ayuda de otros investigadores con transcripciones, traducciones y análisis, sin embargo, ellos no tendrán acceso a su verdadero nombre. Toda información obtenida en conexión con este estudio y que pueda ser identificada con usted, permanecerá confidencial y no será publicada sin su consentimiento, o como lo exija la ley. Los resultados de esta investigación podrán ser publicados en revistas científicas o presentados en conferencias de psicología, sin embargo, su identidad y participación en el estudio permanecerán confidenciales. Al final de las entrevistas, usted tendrá la oportunidad de decidir qué parte de la información que le identifica, aparte de su nombre, le gustaría que se cambie para el reporte final.

Las excepciones a la confidencialidad, como lo requiere el estado de Indiana, son las siguientes, en el caso de que alguna participante fuese a reportar: (1) intenciones de lastimar a alguien o a sí mismo [IC 12-26-5-1], (2) previamente haber lastimado a algún niño [IC 31-33-5-1], o (3) previamente haber lastimado a algún adulto en dificultades [IC 12-10-3-9 (a)]. También deberá usted saber que, aunque es poco común, bajo ciertas circunstancias, la información podría ser citada por orden de la corte.

COMPENSACIÓN POR SU PARTICIPACIÓN

Aun cuando no haya una compensación directa para usted, estaré enseñando inglés así como computación básica a cualquier miembro de la Comunidad que así lo desee.

DERECHOS DEL PARTICIPANTE Y OPCIÓN PARA RETIRARSE

Su participación en ésta investigación es completamente voluntaria. Usted estará libre de renunciar a su participación en este estudio, o optar por retirarse en cualquier momento. Su decisión de participar o no en este estudio no afectará su membresía en la Comunidad de Los Oblatos del Cristo Rey. Si desea recibir un resumen de los resultados del estudio, por favor déjeme saber y yo me aseguraré de que usted lo reciba.
**PREGUNTAS ACERCA DE LA INVESTIGACIÓN**

He intentado explicarle el propósito y naturaleza de la investigación y contestar toda pregunta que pueda tener. Si tiene alguna pregunta, puede comunicarse conmigo al mebruss@bsu.edu, o puede comunicarse con Dr. Chan al (765) 285-8040 o ychan@bsu.edu. Si tiene alguna duda sobre sus derechos como participante de este estudio, puede ponerse en contacto con el director de la oficina de Integridad de la Investigación al (765) 285-5070 o irb@bsu.edu.

**EXCLUSIÓN DE CRITERIOS**

Sólo adultos con edad de 18 años en adelante, podrán participar en este proyecto de investigación. Si usted no es un adulto de dicha edad requerida para su participación, por favor notifique al investigador y no dé su firma de consentimiento más adelante.

**FIRMA Y CERTIFICACIÓN**

Al firmar, reconozco que he leído la forma de consentimiento y que he hecho todas las preguntas que tengo en relación con mi participación en éste estudio. Estoy de acuerdo en participar en éste estudio y de permitir que mi persona sea observada, fotografiada, y/o grabada tanto en audio como en video por la investigadora. Yo accedo de participar en las entrevistas y concedo mi permiso para que las entrevistas sean grabadas tanto en audio como en video. Estas grabaciones serán utilizadas con el propósito de transcripción, traducción, y análisis de los datos. Estoy consciente de que la información de mi participación será retenida por tiempo indefinido y podrá ser usada en la tesis de una maestría, para una tesis doctoral, para el artículo de una revista, una presentación psicológica, y/o para futuros proyectos de investigación, y doy mi permiso para el uso de ésta información en los proyectos anteriormente citados. Tengo derecho de revisar, comentar, y/o retirar información antes de que sea sometida en la tesis de maestría. También, entiendo que puedo retirarme del estudio en cualquier momento y por cualquier razón. Entiendo que al firmar ésta forma de consentimiento, no he renunciado a ninguno de mis derechos legales. Me han dado la opción de recibir una copia de éste contrato.

Firma del Participante:
__________________________________________

Fecha: __________________
Firma del Investigador:

_________________________________________________________

Fecha: ____________________
Appendix O

Formulario de confidencialidad posterior a la entrevista

Es mi objetivo y responsabilidad usar la información que usted mismo ha compartido responsablemente. Ahora que usted ha completado la entrevista, me gustaría darle la oportunidad de proveer sugerencias adicionales sobre cómo usted prefiere que se maneje su información. Al presentar el estudio final, cambiaré el nombre de la orden religiosa al igual que su nombre real, para así proteger su privacidad. Por favor, déjeme saber cómo le gustaría que yo comparta el resto de su información.

Puede compartir el resto de mi información tal y como se la di. Entiendo que otros podrían identificarme a base de los datos, aunque mi nombre haya sido cambiado.

Puede compartir la información que le he dado; sin embargo, además de cambiar mi nombre, por favor también cambie los detalles que me puedan identificar. Sobre todo, es mi deseo que los siguientes datos que se identifican en las líneas subsiguientes no sean publicados sin antes ser modificados, de modo que no pueda ser identificado. (Describa la información que le gustaría fuese modificada).

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Se puede poner en contacto conmigo si tiene alguna pregunta acerca de la publicación de mi información. La mejor manera de comunicarse conmigo es:__________________________

Firma del Participante:
________________________________________________________________________
Fecha: __________________

Firma del Investigador:
________________________________________________________________________
Fecha: __________________
Appendix P

Instrucciones antes de las entrevistas individuales

Le haré varias preguntas acerca de sus pensamientos, sentimientos y experiencias como hermana religiosa o como miembro integrante de “Los Oblatos del Cristo Rey. También le haré preguntas del cómo tomó la decisión de entrar a la vida religiosa y a esta orden en particular.

Estoy interesada en sus pensamientos y sentimientos, por lo cual, no hay respuestas buenas o incorrectas. Por favor siéntase libre de compartir abiertamente conmigo, la manera de cómo usted se está sintiendo en cuanto a ésta decisión. Si en algún momento en el transcurso de la entrevista usted no desea contestar alguna de las preguntas, usted está libre de pasar a la siguiente y dejarme saber que prefiere pasar a otro tema. Usted podría experimentar una variedad de sentimientos, lo cual está bien. Por favor, siéntase en confianza de preguntarme cualquier cosa que usted desee antes, durante o después de la entrevista.
Appendix Q

Protocolo de la entrevista

A. Información demográfica

Fecha y hora:
Seudónimo:
Convento:
Edad:
Años en la orden:
Estatus (i.e. novicia o postulante):
Historial étnico y/o de raza:
País natal:

B. Preguntas acerca del camino a la decisión de su vocación

a. Por favor, proporcionéme una cronología general de los acontecimientos que transcurrieron en su vida antes de hacerse miembro de la Comunidad.
b. ¿Puede expresar la “historia de su vocación”?... Por favor cuénteme sobre la primera vez que recuerda haber sentido el llamado a convertirse en una hermana religiosa... (pregunta de seguimiento), ¿Qué ocurrió entonces? ¿Me lo puede relatar paso a paso?
c. [en caso de no estar cubierto en la respuesta de la parte (b)], ¿ha tenido experiencias con otras comunidades religiosas? Si fue así, hábleme acerca de ello...
d. ¿Me podría hablar sobre las diversas experiencias que ha tenido desde que comenzó a vivir con (o conocido a) la Comunidad? [pregunta de seguimiento], ¿cuál ha sido la mejor y la peor experiencia que ha tenido?
e. Por favor, cuénteme sobre el proceso que sigue la Comunidad para considerar a una mujer que es una posible candidata nueva para la Comunidad. ¿Quiénes están involucrados, cuanto puede durar el proceso, etc.?
f. ¿Cómo es su amistad con las otras Hermanas?... y cómo es su relación con la comunidad a su alrededor?
g. ¿Me podría nombrar algunas de las razones por las cuales usted ha decidido convertirse en una hermana religiosa?... ¿y cuáles son las razones que la llevaron a escoger esta Comunidad en particular?

h. ¿Me podría dar su opinión sobre cuáles pueden ser las razones por las que las otras mujeres en su Comunidad han escogido la vida religiosa y/o esta Comunidad?

**Posibles preguntas de seguimiento**

- Usted mencionó que sintió un “llamado” de Dios - ¿me puede decir qué fue lo que sintió, cómo escuchó ése llamado, dónde estaba, etc.?
- ¿Qué experiencias adicionales podría gustarle tener con su Comunidad?
- Suena como que usted había estado pensando en unirse a una comunidad religiosa por un buen tiempo antes de llegar a ésta, ¿Qué cree usted que le hizo tomar la decisión de ingresar a la Comunidad?
- Al parecer, los Oblatos de Cristo Rey han estado involucrados en la comunidad de manera activa... ¿me puede hablar más acerca de esto?
- ¿Qué retos ha tenido viviendo con la Comunidad?
- Por lo que me ha dicho, entiendo que usted ha pasado por muchos retos durante el transcurso de su vida, ¿cómo le ha impactado su tiempo con la orden mientras pasaba por todos esos retos?
- ¿Ha tenido alguna “experiencia religiosa” de la cual le gustaría hablar?
- No ha mencionado nada acerca de su identidad étnica o cultural en relación con la Comunidad, y me preguntaba qué impacto, si alguno, ha tenido esto en su participación y experiencias con la Comunidad.
- Imagine que no fuese parte de la Comunidad, ¿Cómo serían los Oblatos sin Usted?
- Si pudiese cambiar algo en la Comunidad o su relación con la misma, ¿qué sería?
- ¿Hay algo que no se ha tocado en la entrevista y que a usted le gustaría contarme?
Appendix R

Información final para los participantes

Gracias por su participación en el estudio. Éste estudio fue hecho con el propósito de ayudar a identificar algunas de las formas en las cuales las mujeres disciernen y siguen el “llamado” de Dios para la consagrada vida religiosa. Su participación ayudará a profesionales en salud mental y a otros a entender más acerca de éste proceso y de los varios factores que afectan la decisión de una persona. Por favor entienda que sus respuestas individuales a las preguntas y su participación en el estudio permanecerán de manera confidencial ya que los detalles sobre usted serán cambiados para proteger su privacidad, a menos que usted haya indicado el deseo de que su información sea presentada sin cambio alguno. En caso de que usted quiera una copia de los resultados del estudio, por favor comuníquese con la investigadora a cargo del mismo, Melanie Bruss.

Melanie Bruss
Estudiante de posgrado
DePARTamento de Psicología de Orientación y Servicios de Orientación
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Phone: 586-335-3234
mebruss@bsugmail.net

Jacob Yui-Chung Chan Ph.D., CRC
Assistant Professor
DePARTamento de Psicología de Orientación y Servicios de Orientación
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306
Phone: 765-285-8040
ychan@bsu.edu

Por favor, déjeme saber cómo se sintió acerca de su participación en ésta investigación y si tiene alguna duda o pregunta adicional.