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Political Involvement and Civic Engagement of Millennials on a Small College Campus

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POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT OF MILLENNIALS ON

A SMALL COLLEGE CAMPUS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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By

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
SUPERVISION BY <u>Ashley R. Appleman</u> ENTITLED <u>Political Involvement and Civic
Engagement of Millennials on a Small College Campus</u> BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF <u>Master of Arts</u>.

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to assess whether one private, residential campus had created an atmosphere and culture that encouraged political involvement and civic engagement. This ethnographic study consisted of observational findings, content analysis of institutional documents, and three focus groups composed of residential students who attended Midwestern College. Five central themes were indentified as meaningful influences on Millennial students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement: (a) Campus Connection with the Community, (b) Family-like Campus Atmosphere, (c) Emphasis on Community Service, (d) Awareness of Local, National and Global Issues, and (e) Foundational Quaker Values. These themes were integrated into varied aspects of campus life, developing a campus climate that positively influenced students' levels of civic engagement and political awareness. It was found that the core Quaker values were the foundation for students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement, as well as the other four themes.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the baristas at the Emporium & Underdog Café, Dino's Cappuccinos, and Brother Bear's, providing positive energy and hot coffee from start to finish.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As members of Generation X graduated from college, a new generation of students stepped onto college campuses, bringing with them a different set of values and beliefs. The Millennial generation, born between 1982 and 2002, is known for being team-oriented, cooperative, and energetic—characteristics ideal for the creation of an appreciative and compassionate society (Howe & Strauss, 2007). However, these qualities are not being developed to their full potential by the current educational system.

The current P-12 educational system reflects the importance of community service and social service organizations early in a student's academic career, requiring students to complete service projects or volunteer within their community in order to graduate from high school (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Conversely, political opinions are rarely included in the high school curriculum in order to prevent students from being swayed by teachers' ideologies, among other reasons (Stern, 2006). The absence of political courses and discussion in high school classrooms leaves students' political views unchallenged and undeveloped during the primary years of their identity development. Today's colleges and universities have an important responsibility to provide political education for their students, the Millennial generation.

The political climate surrounding the Millennial generation has changed significantly from one president's administration to the next. President Bill Clinton introduced AmeriCorps, which encourages young adults to dedicate one year of their

lives to service, yet prohibits public displays of political involvement (Hollander &
Longo, 2008). Hollander and Longo continued to explain that many Millennial students
protested the war in Iraq and opposed numerous policies initiated during President
George W. Bush's terms in office. These perceptions of the political climate left many
students feeling powerless, disillusioned and angry in regards to activism (Quaye, 2007).
Quaye continued to explain that the onset of the 2008 presidential election inspired many
Americans to become interested and involved in politics once again. Students became
more hopeful for the future with campaigns that centered on political change (Quaye,
2007). President Obama won the election with a campaign of hope, personally inviting
Americans to become involved in politics and encouraging them to do so in multiple
forms, including technology driven formats (Hollander & Longo, 2008). With this
invitation the attitudes of many Americans, including students, have changed. Where
young adults were once feeling disillusioned, many are confident in their ability to lead
and assist in political change (Marklein, 2009).

To capitalize on these attitude changes, the higher educational institutions of
America can help students transition from apathy to activism by personally inviting them
to be politically active. In order to incite this change and help students develop their own
political views, colleges and universities need to create a supportive and open atmosphere
that encourages political engagement. By creating a supportive political climate on
campus, students will develop the skills and knowledge they need to be active in campus,
local, state, and national politics during their college career and beyond. One of higher
education's goals should be to create citizens who are nationally and globally aware, with
the ability to think critically and make decisions that are best for an entire community.

Without opportunities for politics and civic engagement in higher education, these skills will not be developed for most young adults. And finally, a clearer view of the positive side of political activism—knowledge, empowerment, and the satisfaction of diverse involvement— would stimulate the Millennial generation to become active politically (Quaye, 2007).

The current study examined a campus's climate, levels of student engagement, and developmental benefits of students' involvement in politics. It was conducted at a small private residential institution as a pilot study for future research. The study explored ways in which a campus climate influenced students' political involvement and civic engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Research that measures campus climates' effects on Millennial students' levels of political activism needs to be expanded upon because Millennial students possess the characteristics to make positive changes in current society. This researcher believes that if institutions create supportive and inviting atmospheres for political activism, cooperative and team-oriented Millennial students will become more involved civically and politically from the campus to the global level. The purpose of this study was to assess whether one private, residential campus had created an atmosphere and culture that encouraged political involvement and civic engagement.

Significance of the Study

A universal goal of American institutions is to prepare students for their futures, empowering them to develop the skills, knowledge, and values to lead a fulfilling life and make worthwile contributions to society. Through their education, students should

become informed citizens who contribute to society and act as leaders in their communities. It was the researcher's goal to contribute to current research about institutional effectiveness in promoting and supporting political involvement and civic engagement among Millennial students. This study examined how an institution's climate influenced a student political involvement and civic engagement both on campus and in the global community. It adds to previous research by examining the Millennial generation's attitudes towards the national current political climate, their specific campus climate, their political involvement, and their civic engagement. In addition, provides the foundation for future research about Millennial political activism.

Research Question

What fosters Millennial students' participation in political engagement and civic involvement on a small campus?

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined for this study:

Activism: Combination of the terms political involvement and civic engagement.

Atmosphere: The pervasive attitude and mood on a campus.

Campus climate: A combination of a campus' physical features, the characteristics of groups of people, the dynamics of organizational structures, and the collective meanings members construct around these dimensions, which influence human behavior and perceptions (Strange, 2003).

Civic engagement: Participation in activities that sustain a community; working collectively for a common good; interest and/or awareness of civic issues and/or ideologies (Youniss, McLellan, & Mazer, 2002; Kirlin, 2002).

Culture: The collective behaviors, norms, and customs of a particular social group or campus.

Millennial Generation: Americans born between 1982 and 2002, known for being team-oriented, cooperative, and energetic (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

Political involvement: Direct participation with a political party or a campaign for election, from the collegiate to the national level; includes voting in an election and the various forms of protest; interest and/or awareness of political issues and/or ideologies (Youniss et al., 2002).

Protest: A statement or action showing disapproval of someone, something, or an idea; organized public demonstration against a policy, an authority, or the actions of an authority.

Social Change: Improvement or alteration regarding social conditions, structures, and behaviors within a society or a community.

Scope

This study was limited to the student population of a small, private four-year college and therefore is not representative of Millennial students who attend institutions of other sizes and classifications. This researcher decided to limit the study to one college and its specific cultural variables in order to learn about the characteristics and dynamics of small, private colleges.

Summary and Overview of the Document

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the rationale of the study. Chapter 2 will introduce the importance of student development theory to the topic, discuss the history of student activism along with current trends, and communicate the role of the university

in regard to student activism. Chapter 3 will outline the paradigm, methodology and methods of the study. Chapter 4 will state the themes and findings of the study. The final chapter will discuss the study's results; provide implications for both further research and the profession; state the study's limitations; and summarize the research in its entirety.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The following literature review delves into the dimensions of Millennial student activism on college campuses. Three foundational aspects of the study were student development theories, current trends of Millennial student activism, and the presence of activism on college campuses. Each of these topics was explored using current and applicable literature to provide a basic understanding of Millenial students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement.

Student Development

Activism is essential to students' education and development (Rhoads, 1997). Chickering (2006) stated that colleges and institutions were the most significant resources for helping students move from early developmental stages of cognition to more complex ways of thinking. Institutions that encouraged active participation challenged students' attitudes and beliefs with the implementation of educational programs and opportunities for open forums (Strange & Banning, 2001). Through activism, students developed higher levels of thinking, greater emotional intelligence, and were more inclusive of diverse populations (Chickering, 2006). In addition, Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) found that any form and amount of behaviors centered on others had beneficial effects on students' attitudes and civic orientations. Activism also helped students to see beyond themselves, learning how their lives connect to other students on campus and people around the world (Quaye, 2007).

Kirlin (2002) suggested that college students need to develop a specific skill set to make positive changes in society after they graduate. According to Kirlin, students who participated in campus organizations gained skills such as teamwork, delegation, communication, network development, and problem solving. Through activism students also established professional skills in public speaking, as well as working with the media, institutional boards, and the local government (Bernard, 2008). Bernard also found that students gained a better understanding of politics through involvement in activism and social service organizations on campus. Students learned basic civic skills that helped them to become future leaders of social change through collegiate activism (Kirlin, 2002).

Astin and Astin (2000) found that students developed 10 qualities and values, in regards to social change, through group and individual commitment to leadership. Group commitment to leadership involved the ability to collaborate, develop a shared purpose, disagree with respect, divide labor, and establish an environment where people can learn about each other and themselves, as well as acquire self-knowledge, interpersonal competencies, and technical skills. Individual qualities that students developed were self-knowledge, commitment, empathy, competence, authenticity, and integrity. The authors found that these qualities and values were interconnected and often enhanced each other during students' experiences with social change.

According to a study completed by Jones and Hill (2003), students who remained committed to civic engagement throughout college reported that their involvement was an important aspect of their identities. Several students connected civic engagement with self and believed that a reciprocal nature existed between the two. These students realized

that civic engagement helped develop their own identities; they were engaged in meaning making, which involved reflecting on who they were and what their place in the world would be. In addition, the students felt more responsibility for making the lives of others better. Involvement in service brought clarity to the self that few other life experiences had afforded the students at this point in their lives.

Activism Today

Current American undergraduates are engaged in more social causes, such as community service, than any other generation (Lindsay, 2005). In addition, increases in student activism reflect the Millennial generation's values. Howe and Strauss (2007) found that Millennial students were team-oriented, enjoying group work, cooperative activities, and involvement in something larger than themselves. Student activism, such as community service and volunteerism, was the norm because it was integrated into students' high school curriculum and was expected in a collegiate experience (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

Students' levels of political involvement have changed throughout the past 20 years. Millennial students were voting and participating in more political activities than Gen-X students of the 1980s and 1990s (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The authors found that the voter turnout for 18 through 24-year olds during the 2004 election was 11 points higher than the previous election. Furthermore, in 2005 the number of college freshmen who worked in a political campaign office was the highest since 1971. During the 2008 presidential election a record 35.6% of first-year students reported they frequently discussed politics in the past year; the previous high was 33.6% in 1968 (Marklein, 2009). Although student activism has increased, it has not completely surpassed the Baby

Boomer Generation's involvement. Between 1966 and 1970, 56.7% of college students reported that keeping up with politics was essential verses 36.9% of students between 2004 and 2008. The same study concluded that more students between 2004 and 2008 planned to be involved in protests than those between 1966 and 1970. In addition, Millennial students have exhibited higher levels of participation than previous generations regarding the importance of influencing the political structure and social values (Marklein, 2009).

Although student activism is at an all time high, the manifestation of political involvement and civic engagement can be quite different from previous generations' actions. Activism has not only changed in form from the protest of the 1970s, but also has become more dispersed (Alvarado, 1999). Lindsay (2005) found that although protests and sit-ins continue to occur on American campuses, student activists and student organizations have begun to think outside the box. For example, students at the University of Missouri organized a *Save the Ales* at a local pub (Horgan, 2008). The event brought attention to the northward relocation of hop crops, a common ingredient in beer, due to global warming. The students used beer, a popular beverage for college students, to encourage their peers to become involved in environmental issues and environmental policy.

Hollander and Longo (2008) found that Millennial students tended to reject the language of politics because of the negative political and economic climate during the Bush administration. Students in Hollander and Longo's study did not want to be involved in the political system but preferred being a part of creating social change.

These perceptions led them to more non-traditional political engagement, which included service politics, the combination of community service and conventional politics.

Panel discussions, lectures, and film screenings have become popular ways to educate students about political, environmental, and social concerns (Lindsay, 2005). Lindsay described the current trend of benefit concerts, pageants, and other entertainment-based fundraisers that attract a large portion of the student population. Event leaders advocate for their cause through information tables, opening and closing speeches, decorations, and refreshments.

Alvarado (1999) found that the current generation of American students was more racially and economically diverse than any generation before their time. The generational demographics of Alvarado's study sample, and the political climate of the time influenced which issues were deemed most important to the students involved. Students in Lindsay's (2005) study were less unified in their causes because they were concerned with a diverse range of issues from local to global levels. While students of the 1960s were involved in the concentrated efforts of civil rights and the Vietnam War, consequent campus activism has grown to encompass human rights, campus diversity, affirmative action, animal rights, labor issues, and environmental concerns, among others (Lindsay, 2005; Alvarado, 1999). Even though activism is now more dispersed, it remains influential and continues to shape the lives of students involved (Alvarado, 1999).

Alvarado (1999) found that technology might have contributed to the changes in activism. Students involved in his study were more informed through instant access to current issues and research on the internet. In addition, social networking websites, e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, and discussion-based forums also provided

information to students quickly and easily. Students not only had access to information but also had the ability to advertise and organize events by sending mass emails to the entire student body (Alvarado, 1999; Rhoads, 1997). Rhoads (1998) posited that the greatest advantage of the internet was its ability to connect a community of activists and to foster a sense of identity among people who otherwise would not have been united.

Institutions and Activism

Quaye (2007) suggested that colleges and universities embrace learning in a variety of educational contexts, combine action with reflection, and ensure that students receive the maximum benefits of activism. Additionally, Quaye (2007) recommended that students discuss their activism experiences with their peers after a campus or organization event. Listening to the perspectives of other students and defending their own opinions helped students connect classroom learning to out of classroom experiences. Prenger (1999) stated that colleges should consider facilitating a student's first introduction to diverse groups of people with varied life experiences, as it could be the first time their values and opinions are challenged. Reflection and group discussion helped students to appreciate differing viewpoints, challenge and support one another, and understand the implications of their actions (Quaye, 2007).

Rhoads (1997) made the critical point that the conflicts inspired by student activists often brought campus groups together around dialogue, leading to a greater understanding of democracy and diversity. Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2003) noted that instructors should provide students with information about different opinions, behaviors, and perceptions in order to make class time and discussion more meaningful.

Institutions should offer students the opportunity to explore different perspectives in a setting where expression and individual opinions are respected (hooks, 1994).

Quaye (2007) found that college students could easily become upset or disappointed with societal problems and inequalities. A study completed at Cornell University (Cohn, 2007) indicated that students were often reluctant to get involved in political activities because of disillusionment with the current political environment. Institutions should support students through times of disappointment and encourage them to become involved in opportunities for social change, instead of allowing them to feel powerless (Quaye, 2007). According to Quaye, when students became active, they often embraced values of higher education, such as appreciating of diversity, expressing their opinions, and becoming connected with the global society. Once educators recognize the positive outcomes of student activism, they will welcome the opportunity to help students develop their identities and sustain the values of higher education (Quaye, 2007).

Jones and Hill (2003) discovered that a number of college students were not involved in civic engagement because they had difficulty finding opportunities. Others were unable to find transportation to off-campus events. According to the authors visibility and accessibility were two of the greatest factors affecting civic engagement on campus. Students at smaller institutions were found to be more aware of civic events and opportunities than those at larger universities because there was greater access to opportunities. In order for students to gain the skills for long-term social change, institutions need to ensure that students have access to civic events (Jones and Hill, 2003).

Astin and Astin (2000) stated that a major problem in modern America is that too few citizens are actively engaged in bringing about social change. The authors challenged institutions to empower students by helping them develop the skills and attitudes that will enable them to be agents for change while they are in college and once they leave campus. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that the impact of academic environments and activities on students' sociopolitical views were directly related to the following, 1) administrators, 2) students' peers on campus, 3) students' academic experiences. In addition, Strange (2003) found that students who exhibited behaviors, values, attitudes, and expectations similar to those of their campus environment were encouraged to use their strengths to develop into responsible citizens. Astin and Astin (2000) noted that students were unlikely to commit to activism and social change in society unless their institution demonstrated similar commitments. When a college or university encourages students to be civically engaged, it should support and implement social change into its educational philosophies. Institutions should be involved in the work of the community, model leadership and problem solving skills, and demonstrate how to accomplish change for the common good (Astin & Astin, 2000).

Astin and Astin (2000) developed a list of opportunities that enabled student affairs professionals to take a more active role in political involvement and civic engagement, included were: service learning, institution-wide leadership-development, living/learning communities, accountability development, outcomes assessment, student-centered initiatives, civic responsibility, and freshman courses. The authors found that these components were necessary for holistic student development and long-term commitment to activism and social change.

Summary

As previously mentioned, although activism was manifested differently throughout the generations of college students, it was essential to students' education and development. Howe and Strauss found that Millennial students were team-oriented, enjoying group work, cooperative activities, and involvement in something larger than themselves. Therefore, when students became active, they often embraced the values of higher education, such as appreciating diversity, expressing their opinions, and becoming connected with the global society. Astin and Astin found that students were more engaged when colleges openly supported social change and implemented it into educational philosophies. To influence Millennial students' levels of involvement and engagement, institutions should demonstrate how students can accomplish change for the common good, provide students with opportunities to develop leadership and problem solving skills, and develop strong connections with the surrounding community.

CHAPTER 3

EPISTOMOLOGY, PARADIGM, METHODOLOGY, & METHODS

The following chapter explains the research methods and design used for this study. Information relating to the sampling procedures, population, data gathering, data analysis, and trustworthiness will be covered.

Epistemology & Paradigm

A s*ocial constructivist epistemology* and an *interpretivist paradigm* were used due to the importance of dialogue between researcher and participants in creating meaning and reality. An epistemological assumption addresses how the researcher perceives the world around them and interprets research (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, the basis of the social constructivist epistemology specifically focuses on the philosophy that there is no absolute truth and that meanings are derived from interactions with others, as well as cultural and historical norms that are constantly in flux (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, the researcher relied on participants' complex views of the situation and their culture to develop theories and patterns of meaning.

A paradigm, or worldview, is the researcher's set of beliefs that guide action and interpretation of researcher (Creswell, 2007). The interpretivist paradigm was chosen because it is a dialogue that attempts to understand situations from the subjects' the points of view (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Interpretive research assumes that reality exists in the perceptions of each individual involved in the study (Samdahl, 1999). Samdahl continued to explain that under this paradigm the researcher honors the participants'

reality by using repeated interviews, or focus group, and asking participants to verify that their stories are accurately represented. Given that the purpose of this study was to assess whether one private, residential campus created an atmosphere and culture that encouraged political involvement and civic engagement, both the epistemology and paradigm were appropriate.

This *ethnographic* study consists of observations, document analysis, and focus groups composed of students who attended the chosen institution. In an ethnographic study, the researcher describes and interprets the shared values, behaviors, and beliefs of a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2007). An ethnographic methodology was chosen in order to provide a description of Midwestern College's (MWC) campus climate and the relationship with current Millennial students. In order to understand students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement, an evaluation of the campus culture and atmosphere needs to be included along with interview data. Ethnographic methodology also provided an understanding of subjective meaning and experiences.

A qualitative research design was chosen because the results of the study would include detailed descriptions derived from individuals, objects, and words (Creswell, 2007). These descriptions provided the researcher with a clear view of the campus climate, as well as students' unique experiences. A quantitative approach would have been insufficient on account of the researcher's thinking style, the aim of the research, and the emergent nature of the study.

Setting

The setting of the study was a private residential Quaker college of 1,200 students. For the purposes of this study, the institution will be referred to as Midwestern College

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(MWC). The setting was chosen with regard to the institution's location and size, as this researcher was interested in the cultural dynamics of private institutions. In addition, the MWC campus was optimal because no prior relationship existed between the researcher and the college, which was intended to minimize biases and preconceived perceptions.

Population & Participant Selection

The target population of this study consisted of students between the ages of 18 and 27 who were enrolled at the college. The population was chosen to provide a variety of perspectives and experiences of the MWC campus. The sampling procedure primarily relied on *purposeful maximum variation* in order to ensure that a variety of students on a continuum of political involvement and civic engagement levels were represented (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell, purposeful maximum variation allows the inquirer to select individuals with diverse identities because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem.

Students were targeted through flyers in residence halls and high-traffic locations on campus. E-mail messages were sent to on-campus residents and members of student organizations from various *gatekeepers*. Gatekeepers, or key-members of the cultural group, were indentified to provide information on the campus and the best methods of reaching students (Creswell, 2007). Gatekeepers at Midwestern College provided access to campus facilities, information on whom to contact, and information on how to best contact students and staff members. Additionally, a table providing information and the ability to sign up for the study was placed in a high traffic area. Students were instructed to contact the researcher in order to ensure that they meet the study criterion.

To form focus groups, the researcher met with students who were involved in student organizations. Seven males and 21 females were represented, as well as both traditional and transfer students ranging from first-year students to seniors. Students rated their levels of involvement and engagement on the post-discussion comment sheet, allowing the researcher to monitor the various levels of involvement and engagement among participants. Focus Group 1 consisted of service leaders whose self-indicated involvement ranged from moderate to high. Focus Group 2 consisted of resident assistants, whose involvement ranged from low to high. Lastly, Focus Group 3 consisted of members of a nondenominational faith-based service group, whose members were moderately to highly involved in the community and on campus.

Data Collection Methods

The data collected included the following ethnographic methods,

- Observations of the MWC campus to define the institution's climate,

- Content analysis of documents posted at various locations on the MWC campus,

- Analysis of documents available on the MWC website,

- Three 1-1 1/2 hour focus groups comprised of 6 to 15 Millennial students.

Observations were conducted during a guided tour of the MWC campus, individual walks through residence halls and academic buildings, and time spent sitting in various high-traffic areas. Observation periods occurred at five separate occasions during both fall and spring semesters and lasted between 1-4 hours each. Aspects of campus buildings, events and activities, and student interactions were recorded descriptively and reflectively (Creswell, 2007). For example, the presence of bulletin boards, recycling bins, and photograph displays were noted and counted in each building. Furthermore, the

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researcher took note of institutional traditions that were apparent simply through photographs, monuments, and relics. The researcher developed a spreadsheet for recording notes in the field and took notes throughout each visit.

Document analysis first involved locating print materials on campus and analyzed them for common *themes,* or reoccurring ideas, which will be further explained in the data analysis section. Documents were gathered at information stations, bulletin boards, and visits to administrative offices. Additionally, the MWC website was used for contact information and details about campus policies and events. Each document was thoroughly read once to develop a general understanding of the document's message and purpose. Documents were reviewed a second time during the *coding* process. Coding involves developing categories to sort text and images, gauging the presence, as well as the frequency or occurrence, of words and ideas (Creswell, 2007).

Focus groups were comprised of students who were affiliated with the aforementioned organizations. Each focus group consisted of 10-15 predetermined questions (see Appendix A) and multiple unscripted follow-up questions. The open-ended questions led participants to describe the general campus atmosphere and opportunities for political involvement and civic engagement on-campus. Each focus group lasted 1 to 1 ½ hours and was audio recorded. Each was then transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of preparing and organizing data, reducing data into themes through coding, then representing the data through discussion and descriptions (Creswell, 2007). The information obtained from observations, document analysis, and

focus group transcriptions were coded and analyzed to identify common themes.

Constant comparative refers to the process of identifying incidents and constantly

comparing them to emerging categories throughout the research process (Creswell,

2007).

Observation Coding

Observations were recorded on a worksheet generated by the researcher (see

Appendix B). After all observations were complete, the researcher read each observation

worksheet carefully thoroughly. The researcher read through the observations once again,

underlining common and reoccurring terms and ideas. Once the researcher was familiar

with the data and the underlined terms, a list of common themes was generated. Each

underlined term was then labeled with a letter or abbreviation that coincided with the list

of generated themes. Once the observation worksheets were coded, the frequency of each

theme was calculated by *code counting,* or counting each occurrence, which resulted in a

final tally for each (Creswell, 2007). Having a final count of each common theme

allowed the researcher to determine which themes were most prominent in on campus

observations.

Document Coding

Each document was read thoroughly by the researcher. Basic, important

information was indicated on a document analysis worksheet created by the researcher

(see Appendix C). On a second thorough reading, the researcher underlined common

words, themes, and ideas that were present in each separate document, providing the

researcher with an idea of the messages administrators were sending to students. Once

each document was read and underlined, a list of common themes was generated using

findings from all analyzed documents combined. Each underlined term was then labeled with a letter or abbreviation that coincided with the list of generated themes. Similarly to observation coding, code counting was used document by document. This resulted in a final tally for each document. Having a final count of each common theme allowed the researcher to determine which themes were most prominent in institutional documents.

Focus Group Coding

Recordings from the focus groups were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. Every word that the focus group participants said was typed out verbatim during the transcription process. Once the three focus groups were transcribed, the researcher thoroughly read through each transcription once for review. Similarly to observation and document coding, the researcher read through each transcription once again to underline common themes and ideas. For focus groups *open coding* was solely used as opposed to code counting. Open coding involves segmenting data from data collection methods into a small number of categories (Creswell, 2007). The original codes were carefully considered, broken down and combined to create a more manageable and meaningful list of categories. A list of common themes was generated using information from each of the three focus groups. On a third read, the researcher began coding the document by labeling themes and highlighting significant quotations according to a small number of generated categories. Following open coding, the researcher engaged in *axial coding*. Axial coding identifies a central phenomenon or theme and then attempts to determine what caused it to occur, how participants responded to it, the context and conditions of the theme, and its consequences (Creswell, 2007).

Triangulation

The data from the focus groups were *triangulated* with the climate observations and document analysis components of the research, helping to provide a view of shared meanings and experiences on campus. To triangulate data, researchers use multiple sources and research methods to provide corroborating evidence and identify common themes (Creswell, 2007; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). Once common themes were identified from the three data collection techniques, the researcher began creating warrants and assertions.

Trustworthiness

Peer review, *reflection*, and triangulation of data sources were implemented to enhance *credibility*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. Credibility refers to accurate results and interpretations of meaning from the participants, observations, and document analysis involved in the study (Creswell, 2007). Peer review helped to minimize personal bias and supported interpretations and theme development during the research process. Each quarter graduate students engaging in the thesis process met for peer review, examining each other's work, offering feedback, and providing an external check of the research and findings (Erlandson et al., 1993). Additionally, member checking, taking initial transcriptions back to the participants to verify that there were no miscommunications, was used to assess that each participant's meaning was communicated clearly during the transcription process (Schuh, 2009). Participants were sent their focus group's transcription and give the ability to amend or add to comments.

Dependability is enhanced if the researcher provides the audience with evidence that the study has the potential to be replicated within a similar context (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). In addition to enhancing credibility, member checking was used to improve dependability in the present study. The use of multiple data collection methods (observations, document analysis, and focus groups) helped to increase dependability by providing various techniques and strategies for research on a small campus. Additionally, to provide the audience with a clear illustration of the study's context, data collection and analysis techniques are clearly defined and explained through in-text descriptions and appendices.

Transferability is the extent to which the study's findings can be applied in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Descriptions and interpretations of the context, setting, population, and personal characteristics were included to provide a general illustration of the study's (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Rich* descriptions, quotations and excerpts containing significant detail, and *thick* descriptions, quotations and excerpts of great length, provided details on the research participants and setting, enhancing transferability for institutions with similar characteristics (Creswell, 2007; Erlandson et al, 1993).

Confirmability is the degree to which the study's findings were the product of inquiry and not the researcher's biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability was addressed through the aforementioned techniques of peer review and member checking. In addition, this researcher triangulated the data from the observations, document analysis, and focus groups to strengthen results and attempt to overcome biases.

Summary

This ethnographic study consisted of observational findings, content analysis of institutional documents, and three focus groups composed of residential students who attended MWC. Data was interpreted and analyzed through a social constructivist

epistemology and an interpretivist paradigm to assess campus climate and Millennial

students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement. Information gained from

this study will be the foundation for further research and provide valuable information on

the current generation of college students.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results from this study are presented in response to the principle research question. Five central themes were indentified by this study as meaningful influences on Millennial students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement on a small campus: (a) Campus Connection with the Community, (b) Family-like Campus Atmosphere, (c) Emphasis on Community Service, (d) Awareness of Local, National and Global Issues, and (e) Foundational Quaker Values. Themes were generated through focus group, document, and observational analysis to illustrate what fostered Millennial students' participation in political engagement and civic involvement on a small campus. Each theme is substantiated by thick and rich quotations from focus groups, as well as excerpts and theme frequencies in documents and observations.

Focus Group 1 consisted of service leaders whose self-indicated involvement levels ranged from moderate to high. Focus Group 2 consisted of resident assistants, whose involvement ranged from low to high. Lastly, Focus Group 3 consisted of members of a faith-based service group, whose members were moderately to highly involve in the community and on campus. Male and female students were represented, as well as traditional and transfer students ranging from first-year students to seniors.

Campus Connection with the Community

The theme Campus Connection with the Community commonly occurred throughout document analysis and campus observations. However, its level of importance

was identified through the three focus groups. When discussing their perceptions of the college and their experiences, students often mentioned the current plight of the surrounding community, the college's connection to the surrounding community, and personal experiences volunteering within the community. The following quotations were pulled from focus groups, illustrating the importance of community in students' political involvement and civic engagement.

MWC students explained that the college had a long-standing relationship with the people and organizations within the community. This connection to the surrounding community was an important influence on students' levels of involvement:

> I think that it helps that MWC has always been doing community service and involved in the community. They've built a really good reputation and the students are well respected with the internships that they're placed in. So it's not like "Oh! The economy is horrible! They need our help now. Let's go do all this stuff." They've been constantly doing it. – service leaders

This relationship not only aided students in securing internships, but also provided established service opportunities throughout the community. Additionally, students felt "led" to maintain the positive rapport between the college and community businesses and organizations. Because the college communicated that community relations were an institutional value and an asset to students' learning and involvement, students were led to follow community issues and become involved service opportunities.

Focus group participants continued to explain the connection between the college and the surrounding community. The following quotation implies that students view

volunteerism within the community as a privilege and exciting opportunity, not a
requirement placed upon them by the college:

> I like how the college isn't a separate entity from the town. We all come together.
> We get to go out and socialize with people that aren't here. Like [a student] said,
> we get to go to the soup kitchen, and we get to talk to people who live and work in
> [town]. It's not just college kids 24/7. – faith-based service group

Students felt a connection with the surrounding community and invested interest in
helping community members in need. Knowledge of the community's plight through
institutional emphasis on involvement and service helped to create this connection, which
influenced students' levels of involvement.

The following two quotes explain campus initiatives for community outreach. The
first excerpt describes a gardening program that was developed through the campus civic
engagement center. This initiative brought community members on campus and provided
students with first-hand experiences in community outreach and service:

> We work to bring food access into our community with low income/fixed
> income/middle income families through community gardening, backyard gardens,
> school gardens, different types of garden programs with the youth, different
> farmers markets, buy local initiatives, and then also kind-of working with farmers
> and coordinating and fixing them up with restaurants and local businesses to buy
> that produce. It's a really community supported program. – service leaders

The following excerpt describes "buy local" initiatives that connect the campus with the
community:

And the whole buy local thing, keeping the community and the campus

intertwined. We do a lot of projects through the VISTA program that they have a

buy local [sic]. We have a farmer's market that is all local vendors. We have,

students have the opportunity to get a sticker on their ID that says Buy Local and

if you show that to certain organizations down town they'll give you discounts.

They're just trying to make sure that the community is sticking together and being

strong in this time when unemployment is so high and things are not the best for

[the community]. – faith-based service group

These initiatives communicated the institution's mission to aid and support the

community. Students personally connected with members of the community and were

encouraged to patronize local establishments. Additionally, MWC provided students with

the option to participate in the Buy Local initiative. This allows students to make a

conscious choice about their involvement instead of forcing them to participate. The

availability of community-centered opportunities, as well as first-hand experiences with

community members and organizations, influenced these Millennial students' levels of

involvement.

Community was the number one institutional value listed in the MWC booklet of

core values. The administration encouraged "broad participation and active engagement,"

as well as "openness, empowerment, and shared responsibility for decision-making, and a

culture that emphasizes continuous improvement and growth." The booklet described

"community" as an idea, encouraging students to develop a shared partnership with all

persons whom students interact. Additionally, a MWC pamphlet listed opportunities for

direct community participation and special programs for the community, as well as a list

of MWC employees who were involved in community organizations and activities. MWC mentioned community in every analyzed document that was created and printed by the institution's administration.

On-campus observations found that banners and signs featuring the word, "community," were posted inside and outside of the student center and in various academic and administrative buildings. The seven institutional values, of which community was included, were posted at both entrances of the student center. Indoor signs were often accompanied by a wall of photographs featuring students, faculty, and staff members engaging with members of the community and participating in community service. Additionally, the community garden project was located on campus near the academic buildings, providing students the opportunity to check progress and possibility interact with community members. Lastly, flyers and posters about community events and service opportunities were posted on various bulletin boards in high traffic areas around campus.

The importance of community, both on the MWC campus and the surrounding town, was communicated to alumni, students, faculty, staff, and members of the region through these means, as well as institutional values, policies, events, publications, and organizations. Because MWC communicated the importance of community to its students, they were able to understand the importance of being engaged and saw the impact of their involvement first-hand.

Family-like Campus Atmosphere

The atmosphere of MWC was one of the top reasons why a majority of focus group participants decided to attend and complete their education at MWC. Focus group

participants felt close connections with their peers, faculty, and staff. Additionally, these students sensed a high level of accountability toward both the college community, often referring to it as a family.

The following quotations describe students' perceptions of the MWC atmosphere. Participants in all three focus groups sentimentally described the campus atmosphere as a family:

> Everybody knows everybody, and knows everything about everybody. Someone sneezes, you'll know within the next five minutes on a campus like this. But, I think that it has positives and negatives. When tragedy strikes, you want family surrounding you; and you have that here. – resident assistants

This family atmosphere helped students to feel connected to one another and the campus as a whole. The development of a supportive on-campus community was largely attributed to the family-like atmosphere. The service leaders focus group stated that, "It's like a family. You feel like you belong. You know you truly feel like part of the school. You know every body. It's really family like." Members of the faith-based service group bolstered this sentiment, "There's a lot of accountability on campus, which is really important to me. I want to be held accountable and I want to hold other people accountable. I think that's how you grow in a community."

The following quotations describe how this family-like atmosphere affected students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement. Connection with the college community influenced students' levels of engagement and involvement on campus. Focus group participants indicated that if students did not become involved

within their first years on campus, it was less likely that they would be involved during their college careers:

> One thing that I've noticed is that if students aren't involved by like the beginning of their sophomore year, it's pretty hard for them to get involved. Because, its because they've already passed that open door to get connected with the people who are going to keep hounding you to get involved. – resident assistants

Students in both the service leaders and resident assistant groups mentioned that current students were more apt to participate if there was a sense of accountably to their participation, or if students' friend groups were apt to participate. A member of the service leaders focus group said, "Like, your friends are more apt to do outreach projects if they're going to be with friends and people they know … They're going to enjoy doing it and they're going to put forth more effort at projects."

The family-oriented campus environment was a common theme in a majority of analyzed documents. The MWC handbook promised to, "create an environment of civility, respect and trust," for its students. Furthermore, one admission's booklet stated that:

> You'll learn in an environment that is caring, supportive and interested in your success. Because of our emphasis on equality and the importance of the individual, you'll be on a first-name basis with your professors, the college staff, and even the president … MWC will provide you with a unique education, the tools you need to succeed and an environment that is supportive and puts the student first. That is our mission and goal.

The MWC administration wanted future students to know that they would be an integral component of the campus community, equal in importance to even the college president. Because students were treated with respect and trust, their sense of belonging and accountability increased. Therefore, the atmosphere created by past MWC administrators, faculty, and staff members has been sustained, influencing current students levels of involvement and engagement.

Campus observations also indicated a family-centered atmosphere. Academic, administrative, and social spaces contained entire hallways dedicated to photographs of current and past MWC students. These photographs celebrated students' athletic achievements, community service involvement, participation in campus traditions, and academic pursuits. Often these photographs were featured in conjunction with a list of the institution's core values. Additionally, each building designated multiple spaces for students to post upcoming events, opportunities for jobs and volunteerism, and campus announcements. These simple methods helped to connect students to the college, one another, and the community.

Focus group participants felt close connections with their peers, faculty, and staff, often referring to the campus as a family. Both the physical and ideological prevalence of core values on campus served to influence students' levels of involvement and engagement.

Emphasis on Community Service

The theme of Emphasis on Community Service was a common among focus groups, documents, and observations of campus. Students were exposed to community service during their first days as MWC students through involvement in orientation

projects. A member of the Service Leaders focus group stated, "From day one, like from your first day here as a freshman, there's a community service project."

MWC set the standard for involvement by integrating community service into students' experiences from day one. Students' initial participation in community service projects created student satisfaction, communicated the institutional core values, and influenced student's later participation:

> Going back to the service project at orientation, I still remember what I had to do and everything. When I decided to come here I was really unsure that this was the place that I was supposed to be at. And I just sort of went with it and said that if I need to transfer, then I can transfer. But when I found out that we would be doing that service project, that's what made me sure that I wanted to be here, because that's always been a big part of my life and an important thing to my family. So it helped me decide to stay. – faith-based service group

The placement of this activity communicated that community service was a priority to the institution. Additionally, students who had a previous interest in community service were granted an instant connection to the college community and the institutional values.

MWC also encouraged students to be involved in event planning and community service coordination. Leadership roles in community service events provided students with a greater connection to their involvement and to the college:

> One thing about [the group] is that the number of projects that come out of here is just tremendous. We have some big projects like tutoring programs and Relay for Life. They go to the food pantries; they go to the homeless shelter; they help at different youth programs. You name it; we have probably planned an event

around it. And, [the group] is constantly changing to meet the needs of the

students and the needs of the community. But there are multiple programs. Your

recycling and environmental awareness is huge. And, it's a small campus.

- service leaders

This sense of ownership had developed through involvement in the planning of numerous

community service events. Additionally, serving as a leader helped this particular student

to be more cognizant of students' needs and interest. The group sincerely desired student

participation, planning events to influence students' involvement.

Beyond volunteer activities, MWC offers students service-learning components in

their classroom experiences. Classroom experiences helped students to connect service

with its greater societal implications. The service-learning component provides yet

another opportunity for students to be exposed to community service:

A lot of our classes have a service-learning component to them. When you sign

up for one of the classes they have so many hours of a community service project

… having that service-learning component in the class is what separates us from

other schools. – faith-based service group

From this quote it was evident that these service-learning experiences were important to

focus group participants. It increased students' connection with the college, while making

them feel proud about themselves and their relationship with the institution.

To further explain the college's support of community service and involvement

within the surrounding community, a member of the faith-based service group said, "It's

hard not to be involved. You have to try not to be involved in things on campus."

Opportunities for service, both inside and outside of classroom, were so prevalent that

students viewed community service as the norm. Because the institution constantly provided opportunities, students were naturally involved in service, upholding one of the institution's core values.

The availability, advertisement, and support of community service opportunities were apparent through all three research methods. MWC included a service component within its institutional mission, stating, "The purpose of MWC is to educate, inspire, and prepare each student for a life of success and service." In addition to the mission statement, "Service and Civic Engagement," was listed as one of the MWC core values, encouraging students, "to serve others and to accept individual responsibility for being an effective citizen." An admissions pamphlet communicates to parents and incoming students that MWC, "faculty, staff, and students contribute to more than 20,000 volunteer hours annually," then listed opportunities for engagement.

MWC had a campus center for service and engagement that was staffed by a full-time administrator and 11 AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers. This large number of VISTAs was contracted for the coordination and support of the community gardening initiative. The center plans a multitude of events and initiatives throughout the academic year. Students were exposed to community service during their first days as MWC students by through involvement in orientation projects. Displays, banners, advertisements, and photographs about community service were posted in a majority of campus buildings. Observations also found that service initiatives were often displayed for the campus to see. The student center featured bulletin boards dedicated to events. Additionally, one lobby area featured sculptures created from canned goods that were collected for the local food bank.

Students were apt to participate in community service because of the availability of service activities on campus. This access, along with institutional emphasis, may have influenced students' decisions to be civically engaged and politically involved on campus.

Awareness of Local, National, and Global Issues

Focus group participants explained that awareness of national and global events, environmentalism, social justice, and other current issues were important to the college. MWC encouraged students to become global citizens and develop their own opinions on controversial matters. Open discussion was encouraged in a majority of classroom settings. Focus group participants described the institutional emphasis on current issues through the following explanations.

Students at MWC are required to take a global issues course during both their first and last quarters as students. A few course topics that focus group participants listed included politics, women's issues, population migration, war, international rights, and arts for peace and justice. By using global issues as capstone courses, the importance of awareness is communicated to MWC students, encouraging them to develop their own views and become involved:

You're expected to start participating in these things, because you're hit with it your first semester in. And, you're going to have this global issues class, and you start developing your own opinions about it. I think a lot of people come in scared about politics and even I don't completely understand them. But I've learned a ton from this campus … It's important to know how the world works. So I think that

it's slowly becoming part of my identity, understanding politics, and I do credit

that to MWC. – faith-based service group

This illustrates students' fulfillment from the global issues courses offered at MWC.

Students became more comfortable with politics and developed an awareness of issues

beyond their own experiences.

MWC also supported environmental initiatives on campus, encouraging students

to recycle by providing ample opportunities to do so. The following quote is yet another

example of how availability and accessibility can increase students levels of political

involvement and civic engagement:

Environmental issues is definitely something they have an emphasis with [sic].

We now have recycling bins in all the rooms on campus. And that's happened

within the last two years. We have, everybody takes their recycling out to these

big dumpsters. And, so many people participated that they had to put in another

dumpster because the one kept on overflowing. And they didn't come often

enough to empty the dumpster, so they had to get another one. And, then like

when you graduate there's like the eco-friendly, earth card that you sign a pledge

that you will try to in all you do, and whatever you're doing. – faith-based service

group

Once MWC provided the opportunity to recycle and practice environmentalism, students

participated in overwhelming numbers. Students not only utilized conveniently located

recycling centers in academic buildings, but also walked their recyclables outside to a

communal dumpster. MWC provided the opportunities to be involved, as well as an

educational component about environmentalism through global issues courses and

commencement activities. The combination of knowledge with opportunity provided students with a connection to their actions.

Students also commented on MWC's involvement in the 2008 presidential election. The college showed its support for national politics by adjusting policy to increase student expression:

> I remember we had this policy where you're not allowed to have political signs in your window or things like that. But, um, so many people had them up in their windows that they actually kind-of said it was OK. But as soon as the election was over we had to take them down. So they kind-of made special policies for this one time because everyone was so excited and involved in it. –service leaders

This simple act communicated that the college cared about the presidential election, and, more importantly, students' involvement in national issues. Students were aware of the college's support and appreciated that they were provided the opportunity to respectfully express their views and opinions on campus. Student-centered philosophies influences students' levels of involvement and increase their connection to the campus.

The MWC mission statement supported the theme of "awareness" by stating, "The college leads students to gain an awareness of the world, to acquire knowledge of career and vocation, and to seek truth and social justice." It continued to emphasize the ideas of "open inquiry, tolerance, and a desire for lifelong learning." Additionally, peace and social justice were listed among the college's core values, encouraging students, "to seek non-violent resolution of conflict and just treatment of the world's resources, both human and physical."

The theme of Awareness of Local, National, and Global Issues was observed on bulletin boards and thought announcements on campus. Students were encouraged to vote, attend lectures on social justice issues, and participate in peaceful protests. Posters and displays on AIDS awareness, GLBTQ educational programs, and alternative service-oriented spring break trips were present in multiple academic buildings and the student center. Additionally, recycle bins were present in every building on campus.

Awareness of national and global events, environmentalism, social justice, and other current issues were present in campus events, institutional policies, and the curriculum. This safe and open environment encouraged students to share their views and speak up for what they believed in, as well as challenged their personal political and ethical philosophies.

Foundational Quaker Values

A final pervasive theme was Foundational Quaker Values, as MWC was founded in the Quaker faith. The presence of the Quaker values was prevalent through focus groups, document analysis, and observations of campus. The following quotations help to illustrate that the Quaker values were present in the previous themes. Additionally, these values were the foundation for students' involvement and engagement.

Students expressed the ways in which they saw the Quaker values functioning on campus. The first quotation explains how Quaker traditions affected students' perceptions of faculty and staff. The Quaker values led students to feel respected, increasing their sense of connection to the institutional as a whole:

> I see it in how the professors treat the students. There's the first name basis thing, which is just a Quaker tradition. But, I feel that for most of the professors, they

don't look down on the students. They don't have this idea that they're better than

we are. They're just here to teach us and beyond that they don't care. They, we

[sic] have the open door policy that you can go up and talk to them at any point.

And I, I [sic] stop and talk to professors all the time. I have friends who stop and

talk to professors. We love bouncing ideas off each other and they always feel

like they can learn things from us and it's not a one-way street. – service leaders

Because students felt equal to professors, it increased their satisfaction with their

education and increased their sense of connection to the college. These elements helped

to develop the aforementioned family-like campus atmosphere.

Additionally, one focus group explained how the institution integrated the Quaker

values into students' awareness of local, national, and global issues. By including the

Quaker values into discussion and current events, students were able to develop their own

views while considering those of the Quaker faith:

They'll have forums and stuff like that. But all of those are holding true to the

Quaker values and challenging students' mindset. This is what the world's doing;

this is what the Quaker's think about it. I think there's an underlying Quaker

heritage on campus. – faith-based service group

Communicating the university's take on recent events challenged students' mindsets

regarding global issues and helped them to develop educated opinions. This

communication also helped students to understand the foundational nature of the Quaker

values on campus.

Because of the successful implementation of the Quaker values into events and campus life, focus group participants were able to name specific values and understand how they were functioning on campus.

> Our school has a set of values that are probably hung up everywhere … in almost every building. Uh, and I know a lot this year and the past few years we're been really trying to install those in every activity and every activity that our school is participating in. That's what we're trying to do. So, equality and family and civic learning and civic engagement and everything. It's all in our values. – service leaders

The implementation of the Quaker values into policies was bolstered by a physical presence on the MWC campus. Because the values were implemented through a variety of methods, students were aware of specific values and could identify them in campus events.

The final focus group excerpt connected the Quaker values to the presence of community service on campus. Even though the population of Quaker students on campus was small, the institution was able to sustain its core values by providing students ample opportunities to become involved and consider how the Quaker values were functioning in their education:

> It still is amazing. Even though there is still a small population of the Quaker faith, of how much of an impact it has on the campus. They talked about service and peace. The one thing that stands out is service. I just transferred in last semester. There were service opportunities at my last school but here you can really, you don't have to, but it's so easy to get involved that you want to. You see

what everybody's doing and you see the opportunities that present itself. – faith-

based service group

Focus group participants often commented about the presence of service on campus. The

previous quotation showed that students connected this presence with the core

institutional and Quaker values. Because the college implemented its values into policies,

activities, and the campus experience, students were able to understand the importance of

their political involvement and civic engagement, influencing them to be involved.

The college handbook further explained the presence of the Quaker faith at

MWC. The MWC handbook explains each core value, as inherited from the Quaker

religion. The seven core values were listed as (1) Community, (2) Diversity, (3)

Excellence, (4) Integrity, (5) Peace and Social Justice, (6) Respect for All Persons, and

(7) Service and Engagement. Students were encouraged to respect these values and

commit to something larger than themselves through "service to a troubled planet" and

"active concern for a world of peace and freedom." Additionally, the MWC booklet of

core values explained what it meant to be a Quaker college. It began by stating that the

institutional mission and vision were rooted in the Quaker faith. The following excerpt

continued to explain the importance of the Quaker faith to the document and the college's

mission:

Throughout this document the Quaker concept of the "Light" is used. Other

descriptions of this concept are "The Light of God Within," "The Spirit Within,"

"The Inward Teacher," and "God's Voice Within." The "Light" can lead to the

inner spirit of truth. Seeking truth is a personal, spiritual, and academic quest that

can enrich a community … Following Quaker practice, queries are used as means for self or group examination and inward reflection.

Observations indicated the importance of Quaker traditions and values by the on campus presence of a Quaker meetinghouse, a Quaker statue, and a Quaker heritage center. To further explain the on-campus Quaker meetinghouse was built in conjunction with the heritage center, providing visitors and students with a glimpse into one of the Friend's core practices, silent meetings. The Quaker statue featured a historical local Quaker couple who traveled to Washington D.C. in order to speak with President Abraham Lincoln regarding the emancipation of enslaved persons. The Quaker heritage center took visitors through time, depicting the history of the Quaker religion through words, pictures, and artifacts. Additionally, the Quaker values were posted both indoors and outdoors in various buildings on campus.

Students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement were influenced by the institution's emphasis on the core Quaker values. Because the institution was founded in these ideals, they have been implemented into all aspects of MWC, inside and outside of the classroom.

Summary

Through triangulation of focus group data, document analysis data, and observation data, the aforementioned themes were identified as influences on Millennial students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement on a small campus: (a) Campus Connection with the Community, (b) Family-like Campus Atmosphere, (c) Emphasis on Community Service, (d) Awareness of Local, National and Global Issues, and (e) Foundational Quaker Values. The five major themes were chiefly identified

through focus group discussion. Although other themes were present throughout the focus groups, those chosen were validated through pervasiveness in both document and observation findings.

The college's relationship with the surrounding community influenced students to become more engaged, as they were able to see the impact of their involvement first hand and understand its importance. The campus atmosphere was an influence on students' levels of involvement, as it encouraged community service and civic engagement, as well as open discourse and accountability among its members. The institution's provided ample opportunities for students to be involved in community service activities. Although a majority of students would participate, focus groups indicated that a student's level of involvement was dependant on the point of their academic career in which they became involved and their friends' levels of involvement. MWC effectively communicated its values and ideals, as well as encouraged awareness of political and civic issues. Similarly, to their connection with the community, students' levels of involvement were influenced by their knowledge of local, national, and global issues. Lastly, students were influenced by MWC's core Quaker values. The values were pervasive throughout campus life and were the foundation for the other generated themes. The college implemented Quaker values and traditions into programming and curriculum, encouraging students to be socially minded, respectful of all persons, and civically engaged.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUMMARY

In this final chapter, the following will be discussed: 1) Discussion of results, 2)

Relationship to theory, 3) Implications for further research, 4) Implications for the

profession, and 5) Limitations. The purpose of this study was to assess whether one

private, residential campus created an atmosphere and culture that encouraged political

involvement and civic engagement. Results were found through focus groups, document

analysis, and observations of the campus. The themes of community, campus

atmosphere, community service, awareness, and Quaker values were established as

influences on students' levels of involvement and engagement through analysis of

collected data. These themes now will be examined and discussed independently and in

relation to relevant theories.

Discussion of Results

The present study focused the question of, "What fosters Millennial students'

participation in political engagement and civic involvement on a small campus?" Because

the institution created a supportive and inviting atmosphere for political activism,

cooperative and team-oriented Millennial students were involved civically and politically

from the campus to the national level. Campus influences on Millennial students' levels

of political involvement and civic engagement were identified as, (a) Campus Connection

with the Community, (b) Family-like Campus Atmosphere, (c) Emphasis on Community

Service, (d) Awareness of Local, National and Global Issues, and (e) Foundational Quaker Values.

The theme of Campus Connection with the Community emerged as an influence on students' levels of engagement. Focus group participants felt a connection to the surrounding community and were able to identify regional economic and social issues. Additionally, sections of numerous institutional documents featured the college's connection to the surrounding community, whether it was community service opportunities, faculty and staff involvement within the community, and campus initiatives to assist community members in need. Focus group members identified the community's economic need and commented on the closure of a local company that employed a majority of the community. In order to assist those affected by the closing, students volunteered at local soup kitchens and with the MWC community gardening initiative. Also, students donated items to food pantries and provided tutoring to local elementary students.

Often colleges and universities provide opportunities for students to become engaged within the community. MWC offers this component in conjunction with an informational component, providing students with a context for political involvement and civic engagement. This contextual foundation influences Millennial students' levels of activism, as it plays on their tendencies to be collaborative and develop a shared purpose with others.

The MWC Family-like Campus Atmosphere was a significant influence on students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement. Similarly to the institution's connection with the local community, the college has developed a sense of

connection among the campus community. Because of the implementation of the core Quaker values and Quaker practices, students sensed equality among all members of the campus community and considered the campus community to be family-like. Focus groups revealed that students are more likely to participate in activities if their friends are involved. More and more students are likely to become involved as their peers, professors, and administrators take initiative. Therefore, a ripple effect can begin on campus by creating an atmosphere that promotes involvement.

Furthermore, the campus administration and student organizations created an environment that encouraged service and civic engagement. From students' first days on campus, they were exposed to the Quaker values and service opportunities. MWC established the expectation that students would engage in service and civic activities. Because the campus atmosphere communicated that service was the norm, students were positively influenced to become involved in activism on some level.

Emphasis on Community Service was identified as a theme because of its pervasiveness in the MWC culture. Institutional administrators communicate the importance of community service curriculum, programming, institutional values, print materials, and campus displays. As the focus group participants stated, community service opportunities are available from students' first day on campus. To continue students' involvement, service has been integrated into the classroom experience with both required service hours and volunteer opportunities. Students were influenced to participate in community service because of the availability of service activities on campus.

Building upon the two previous themes of community and campus atmosphere, students were apt to participate in community service opportunities because the college provided personal connections with the community and also helped to create accountability between members of the campus community. Students were provided with amble opportunities serve, which were effectively advertized by the administration and groups on campus. High levels of availably, coupled with high levels of accountability, positively influenced students' levels of civic engagement. However, focus groups provided insufficient evidence as to whether community service influenced students' political involvement, as students did not express an understanding or awareness of the connection between the two.

Awareness of Local, National, and Global Issues was the fourth identified theme. Awareness of national and global events, environmentalism, social justice, and other current issues were present in campus events, institutional policies, and the curriculum. Students felt comfortable in sharing their views, speaking up for what they believed, and challenging one another's opinions. The topics of environmentalism, social justice, and the peace were commonly mentioned in focus group discussions and examined documents. Additionally, students discussed the campus climate in relation to the 2008 presidential election, indicating that the institution emphasized involvement and allowed students to openly discuss their views on campus. By exposing students to current issues and political events, MWC has created an environment that supports students on their journey to becoming global citizens. Institutional support and dedication to social justice, peace, and environmentalism positively influenced students' levels of knowledge of issues surrounding politics and civic engagement.

Although the amount of local, national, and global awareness on campus was high, students generally held unfavorable perceptions of politics, stating that they were not interested in matters that did not directly affect their lives. Unless the student was directly involved in politics, such as student government or political science courses, political involvement was not a priority in their lives. Therefore, considering the aforementioned themes, the institution may not have provided enough personal connection between Millennial students and political involvement. Students were more apt to be involved if they saw a direct connection to their own lives or the lives of those around them—friends, family, and the community.

The final identified theme was the institution's Foundational Quaker Values. Quaker values and traditions were apparent to students in their everyday interactions with faculty and staff, as well as their interactions with the campus atmosphere. When students enrolled at MWC, they signed a document stating that they would uphold the Quaker values, providing an awareness of the institution's priorities during students' initial interactions with campus and its administrators. Students recognized the presence of community service, group discussions and consensus as Quaker traditions that were present on campus. Students were physically and mentally surrounded by the Quaker values.

The seven institutional values, which were created in accordance Quaker faith, were at the foundation of the other four themes. Community, Diversity, Excellence, Integrity, Peace and Social Justice, Respect for All Persons, and Service and Engagement all affected the MWC campus climate, as well as students' levels of engagement. These values were integrated into all aspects of campus life throughout the years of the

institution's existence. Each was communicated to students so effectively that a students considered these ideals to be the norm. Therefore, the core Quaker values were the foundation for students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement.

Researcher's Reflections

The themes of this study became evident rather quickly through document analysis, observations and focus groups. However, the importance of each was revealed as the results were analyzed and discussed. Because I had no association with the college and no knowledge of its history, the Quaker presence was virtually unknown until a guided tour of the campus was provided. After I gained this knowledge, the Quaker presence was evident. The Quaker heritage center, Quaker meeting house, and the Quaker monument were the first indications that the religion was alive on campus. However, even with these indicators, it was not expected that the Quaker religion would be the study's foundational theme.

I first noticed the pervasiveness of Quakerism during the document analysis portion of the study. Quaker values were implemented into a majority of the university's printed materials. During the focus group portion of my research, the importance of the Quaker values became undeniably clear. Each of the three groups was able to identify Quaker influences on campus and name Quaker values. During triangulation and the writing of Chapter 4, each of the other four themes were examined and discussed before writing the Quaker values section. The reasoning for this order was initially alphabetical. While writing each assertion and warrant, the Quaker values continuously surfaced as foundational elements for the themes' presences on campus. Finally, when the final theme of Quaker values was explored, it was undeniable that it was the most important of

the entire study, because the values continuously connected to each of the previous themes.

Identifying the Quaker values theme was pivotal for the study, providing an exciting result and an opportunity for further research. It would be interesting to see whether this phenomenon occurs at other Quaker institutions, as well as those with other religious affiliations. Having completed my undergraduate coursework at a religiously affiliated college, this researcher cannot help but wonder if the Brethren faith influenced the campus climate to the degree that Quakerism influenced MWC's climate.

Relationship of Results to Theory

As was stated in the literature review, Astin and Astin (2000) found that students were unlikely to commit to activism unless their institution exhibited a similar commitment. They continued to explain that institutions should be involved in the work of the community and demonstrate how to accomplish change for the common good. MWC was committed to activism, community, and social change, as Astin and Astin indicated. This commitment influenced students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement.

Howe and Strauss (2007) stated that Millennial students were a team-oriented generation that enjoyed group work, cooperative activities, and involvement in something larger than themselves. MWC provided these opportunities for students on campus. Additionally, Howe and Straus (2007) explained that activism was the norm for the Millennial generation because it was integrated into their high school curriculum and was expected in a collegiate experience. MWC continued the trend of service as normalcy

through its seemingly continuous stream of community service events and its seamless implementation of the core Quaker values into every day campus life.

Lastly Quaye (2007) found that activism helped students to see beyond themselves. It helped them to connect with other students on campus, as well as people in the community and around the world. The current study's results indicated that a meaningful connection to students on campus and the surrounding community may have influenced students' levels of involvement and engagement. This is further solidified by students' views of politics—since they did not feel a direct connection to politics, most students were disinterested and uninvolved. Hollander and Longo's (2008) research concurs with these findings, as they found that Millennial students tended to reject the language of politics because of the negative political and economic climate. Similar to MWC focus group participants, students in Hollander and Longo's study did not care to be politically involved, but did prefer being a part of social change. In both cases, these perceptions led students to be engaged in service politics, community service and service politics, which is the combination of community service and conventional politics.

Implications for Further Research

The current study provides a basic groundwork and structure for further research on campus climate's influence on Millennial students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement. If further research were to be conducted on this topic, this researcher would suggest increasing the number of focus groups conducted and documents reviewed in order to provide an even greater understanding of both student and administrative perspectives. Furthermore, future researchers should consider a greater variation of focus group participants in order to represent the entire campus population. Additionally,

including administrator interviews would enhance the credibility of the administrative perspective by adding personal knowledge and experience to that which is listed in campus documents. Lastly, because the Quaker values were so instrumental in creating the MWC campus climate, this researcher recommends a study based solely on Millennial students levels of civic engagement and political involvement on religiously affiliated campuses. Further research on this topic would provide insight as to whether these findings occur on other religiously affiliated campuses of the Quaker faith and other religions.

Implications for the Profession

The current study has described aspects of campus climate that may have had an impact on students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement. At MWC this was achieved through the pervasiveness of institutional core values and community service, as well as the institution's ability connect students with the local and campus community. In order to increase students' levels of activism, student affairs professionals on small private campuses should first support and communicate the institution's core values and mission to students. With consideration to the institution's values, student affairs professionals should develop partnerships between the university and the community. Once an institution has created partnerships with community organizations and community members, developing personal and emotional connections with this network will be easier and more meaningful for both administrators and students. Additionally, student affairs professionals should provide ample opportunities for students to become involved. Events should be well planned and advertised with the help of student leaders and student organizations. Both past and present research indicated that

levels of involvement increased when students were able to work and collaborate with their peers.

Limitations

While this study presented some substantial findings, there were several limitations. One limitation was the varying number of participants in each focus group, which were 15, 7, and 6. Participants in the smaller focus groups seemed to be more comfortable and were more apt to share their experiences. This researcher was aware of the limitations of a large group, but did not want to turn away participants who were eligible for the study and may have provided meaningful information. A second limitation was the amount of time spent completing on-campus observations. Although this researcher visited MWC to collect observational data on multiple occasions, it would have been beneficial to attend events planned by both students and campus administrators to provide clarity on both groups' priorities. A final limitation was participants' levels of involvement. All participants were involved in at least one activity or organization on campus. To provide a more accurate representation of the entire campus population, including students who did not participate in any campus activities would have been beneficial.

Summary

A universal goal of American institutions is to prepare students for their futures, empowering them to develop the skills, knowledge, and values to lead a fulfilling life and make contributions to society. Through their education, students should become informed citizens who contribute to society and act as leaders in their communities. Millennial students possess the characteristics to make positive societal changes. This researcher

believes that if institutions create supportive and inviting atmospheres for political activism, cooperative and team-oriented Millennial students will become more involved civically and politically. The purpose of this study was to assess whether one private, residential campus has created an atmosphere and culture that encouraged political involvement and civic engagement.

There were several identified influences on Millennial students' levels of political involvement and civic engagement on a small campus. The most prevalent themes were: (a) Campus Connection with the Community, (b) Family-like Campus Atmosphere, (c) Emphasis on Community Service, (d) Awareness of Local, National and Global Issues, and (e) Foundational Quaker Values. These themes were integrated into aspects of campus life, developing a campus climate that positively influenced students' levels of civic engagement and political awareness.

Millennial students like being involved in something greater than themselves. This researcher believes that sustaining, communicating, and implementing core institutional values inside and outside of the classroom may influence students' feelings of connection to the institution and therefore their levels of engagement. By providing students with a sense of connection to the campus community, the surrounding community, and the global community encourage them to become involved civically and politically. Additionally, these personal connections will lead students to strive for positive change from campus to global levels.

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Focus Group #_____　　　　　Date: _____　　　　No. Male: _____
Sophomore / Junior / Senior　　Start time: _____　　　　No. Female: _____
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　End Time: _____

1. Describe your campus experience.

2. Describe the atmosphere of your campus?

    a. How would you describe the students on your campus?
    b. How would you describe the administration of your campus?

3. In what themes/issues does your college administration show the most
   interest/support?

4. What are the most important issues that you, as a college student, face today?

    a. How are these issues apparent in your life?

5. What do you think of when you hear the word "Politics"/"Civic Engagement?"

6. What do you think should be done to achieve a better political climate in the
   USA?

7. Who or what has influenced your political views and opinions?

    a. How important is family when determining political beliefs?

8. How did you determine the civic causes in which you are involved?

    a. Why are you not involved in civic causes?

9. What does your campus do to encourage political involvement and civic
   engagement on campus and support the issues students' care about?

10. How could your college improve promotion and encouragement of students to
    participate in political involvement?

11. Do you have anything to add?

Prepared Follow-up Questions (if needed):
-Do you feel that you could easily speak up about injustices and issues on campus?
-How would your educational experience be different if you could discuss politics in class?
-Did you become more knowledgeable and or interested in national and global issues during the 2008 presidential election?
-What are ways that you see politics in your every day life?
-What national and/or global issues or causes are you most interested in?
-What campus issues are you most interested in and why?

Additional follow-up questions may be necessary to expand on the issues presented in the interviews and to elaborate on items presented in the initial questions.

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION WORKSHEET

Page ___ of __

Observer: _____

Observation Date: _____

Start Time: _____
End Time: _____
Elapsed Time: _____

Observation Location: _____

_____

Subjects/Objects	Observational Notes	Possible Implications

APPENDIX C

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

___/___/_____

1.	**Document Title:**
2.	**Document location/web address:**
3.	**Type of document:**
4.	**Physical qualities of document (color, size, typed/handwritten):**
5.	**Date of document or advertised event:**
6.	**Author/Contact:** **Position:**
7.	**Audience:**
8.	**Purpose of document:**
9.	**Document Information:** a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____ e. _____ f. _____
10.	**Themes/Patterns:**
11.	**Significance of the document for the study:**
12.	**Questions generated:** a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
13.	**How consistent/inconsistent with other information in the setting?**