NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

POSTMODERNITY AMONG YOUTH IN NAIROBI CHAPEL

BY
EDA MUTHEU ESILABA

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Educational Studies

JULY 2006

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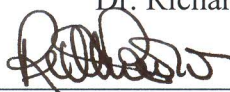

Approved:
Supervisor:
_____
Dr. Suraja Raman

Second Reader:
_____
Dr. Richard Starcher

External Reader:
_____
Prof. Ruthie C. Rono

July, 2006

Student's Declaration

POSTMODERNITY AMONG YOUTH IN NAIROBI CHAPEL

I declare that this is my original work and has not been
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical
Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners

(Signed)_____
Eda Mutheu Esilaba

July, 2006

ABSTRACT

Postmodernity is a phenomenon that has been explored extensively in Western Countries and perhaps in South Africa, but the rest of Africa remains largely ignorant of this philosophical movement and its impact on people's thinking. This study explored postmodernity's impact on teens at Nairobi Chapel with a view to enhance effectiveness in reaching these young people.

The six respondents were between twelve and twenty years of age and were selected on the basis that they displayed tendencies of postmodernity as highlighted in the literature. Data were collected through face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Eleven interviews were held with the respondents. While the intention was to hold two interviews per interviewee, this was impossible for one of the respondent. Data were analyzed using qualitative methods of open, axial, and selective coding.

The study revealed that postmodernity was a major influence in the lives and minds of urban young people. It suggested teens held truth to be relative and embraced, at least partially, religious pluralism. The data also exhibited an obvious struggle with Christianity's exclusivity claims. Further, youth leader's authority over young people had to be "earned," with an emphasis on rational instruction. However, the value of community proved strong for these young people thus opening up an avenue to reach them with the love of Christ and build relationships that will impact who these young people will grow up to be.

In reviewing the data, recommendations were made to youth department at Nairobi Chapel and Christian educators who are creating curriculum and materials to assist in ministering to young people. Postmodernity may be looming threateningly above us but rather than be afraid we need to take advantage of the values in this new philosophy that may actually enhance Christianity among our youth.

DEDICATION

To my dearest Albo

who could ask for a better friend and husband?

To the youth at Nairobi Chapel who I pray will become "Jesus Freaks" in the looming

postmodern era

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Gacheri (not her real name) is a sixteen-year-old girl who regularly attends youth meetings at the Nairobi Chapel. When I first met her, I was drawn by her ability to speak her mind. Sometimes her outspokenness seemed to distract other group members, but by their responses, she appeared to represent them. She seemed to say the things they lacked the courage to say. As a teacher, I was not satisfied with learners simply grasping the material I presented; my desire was to see a change in how they thought and lived because of these newfound truths. I wanted to get past their facades and hear what they truly thought and felt about life and the issues we were talking about because then and only then would we begin to deal with real life issues and achieve learning. Gacheri represented the hidden thoughts of some of the other teens in the class. I had work to do in seeking to understand her and others like her. The truths I taught did not hold for her, and therefore did not set her free. I concluded that Gacheri's worldview was the chief obstacle. I needed to better understand her "filters" in order to teach her the eternal Word of God effectively. Habermas and Issler explain that we all have quests and filters; whereas the quests tend to be universal, filters vary greatly according to our worldview. These filters dictate what information an individual receives in accord with their

perceptions and circumstances.[1]

Gacheri has been attending Nairobi Chapel since she was born. She actually remembers being in the crèche as a toddler, yet in the 16 years she has heard biblical teaching at our church, there has been little transformation or a distinct commitment to Jesus Christ. I believe in our Sunday school ministry. Its leaders have been responsible in their use of curriculum that is in line with principles of educational psychology. I also am aware that the teachers are carefully selected and trained. My conclusion, then, is that the fault lies not with what the church has taught or how diligent its leaders were, rather that we have not managed to penetrate Gacheri's filters. Gacheri's way of thinking intrigued me as I began to hear in her speech and logic, characteristics of postmodernity. For example, she views evangelism as an unnecessary nuisance because she assumes all religions eventually lead to God. Pluralism is seen as one of the central tenets of postmodernity as we shall discuss in detail later.

Youth ministry is dynamic because young people are dynamic; their culture changes constantly.[2] Perceiving youth as a mission field, it is important to establish what youth culture is and how best to penetrate it with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed culture is in transition, and Gacheri proved to be from a different culture than mine.

The chur ch is often intimidated by the nature of youth ministry, but this fear is driven by ignorance. A lack of knowledge of how the youth think and what motivates them is often what leads to the struggle to be relevant in youth ministry. Relevance is

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[1] Ronald Habermas and Issler Klauss, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practices of Christian Educational Ministry*, (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 64-67.

[2] Dean Borgman, *When Kumbaya is not Enough,* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1997), 3.

attained when the leaders answer questions a generation is asking. Yet too often, youth leaders focus on answering a prior generation's questions.

Some characteristics of young people, such as the physical and emotional transitions, change little through the ages. However, some features change with each philosophical age. Postmodernity is a wind of philosophy that may have blown further into urban Africa than we think. As the different winds have come and gone, Africa has had to deal with different philosophical trends because of the continuous Western influence especially in the urban centers. Youth workers and pastors tend to reach out to young people in the same ways they were reached when they were teenagers. This may not always be the most appropriate approach, as the philosophies that were at work when they were teenagers have considerably changed with time.

Problem Statement

Africa experienced a radical change from traditional to "modern" society in a very short span of time. As modernity crumbles in the West, postmodern ideals are dominating people's thinking. The youth are the first to embrace this new philosophy. The influence of the West has often been felt in urban Africa as the philosophies and lifestyles seep into the culture through different media. However, postmodernity's influence on the thinking and lifestyle of Christian youth in Nairobi is yet to be explored. In particular, it is unclear how postmodern thought patterns are affecting youth at Nairobi Chapel.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the impact of postmodernity on the thinking and lifestyle of youth at Nairobi Chapel. In particular, I conducted eleven qualitative interviews with six Nairobi Chapel teens that appeared, based on their attitudes and behavior, to have been most influenced by postmodernity.

Significance of the Study

Urban African youth ministry is forming and finding its place in the structure of the Church all over the continent. The constant challenge for youth ministers is to stay relevant. If the youth ministries in urban churches in Africa do not confront the rising philosophies that drive the youth, they are at risk of becoming irrelevant and ineffective with time. The long-term consequence of irrelevance is a loss of faith and interest within subsequent generations. To remain relevant, one must seek to understand those being ministered to and their context.[3] Youth culture and its subcultures are shaped by a particular set of values, beliefs, trends, and worldviews.[4] The church cannot bury its head in the sand much longer; youth ministries in African churches need to be abreast with youth culture.

The young people in urban Africa seem headed in a direction that is unfamiliar to those who teach and lead them. This study sought to understand postmodernity as an influence on youth in Nairobi Chapel. The findings of this study aid curriculum development and provide a better understanding of the teaching–learning process. This study also informs strategies for outreach to youth in urban Africa. In order that African church leaders and youth workers may reach out to the youth in a language they understand with a much-needed life-transforming gospel.

Research Questions

Do the study participants' beliefs, attitudes, and actions manifest the influence of postmodernity?

➢   What is the teens' view of religion?

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[3] Wesley Black, *An Introduction to Youth Ministry*, (Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1991), 81.

[4] Harley Atkinson, *Teaching Youth with Confidence,* (Wheaton, Illinois: Evangelical Training Association, 2001), 54.

➤   What is the teens' view of truth?

➤   What is the teens' view of authority and law?

➤   What do the teens perceive as important influences in their lives (e.g., radio, television, books, magazines, parents, peers, youth pastor, and the internet)?

Delimitations

Despite a desire to do a conclusive study of urban African youth, I limited my study to six members of the Nairobi Chapel youth group. This was due to time constraints imposed by qualitative research; considering that, the data are voluminous and analysis is time consuming. Other reasons for limiting the study to six participants included the high cost of research and the desire to do an in depth study with few participants.

Limitations

My discoveries are not generalizable because I studied a small sample that was not necessarily representative of a specific population. Nevertheless, the results may be transferable if other youth workers see similar patterns in the youth they minister to.

There is no uniformly agreed upon definition of postmodernity. The fluidity of postmodernity limited the study in that defining this phenomenon was difficult enough let alone describing it as observed in people.

Definition of Terms

Postmodernity

Postmodernity is a difficult word to define. As Vanhoozer says, "Those who attempt to define or analyze the concept of postmodernity do so at their own peril."[5]

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[5] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

The term postmodernity may have been coined in the 1930s to reflect a major historical transition already underway and to describe developments in the arts. The term became widespread in the 1970s when it started to be felt initially in architecture, then in academic circles around the English and philosophy departments. Eventually postmodernity broadened to describe an entire cultural phenomenon. The term describes a reaction to modernity; a moving past modernity.[6]

Scholars, however, disagree on what postmodernity means, which is ironical considering that one of its foundational tenets dictates that truth is whatever each reader perceives it to be.[7] I shall discuss this phenomenon further under the literature review as I try to establish the central philosophies I am looking for among my participants.

Deconstruction

> Deconstruction is a philosophical movement and theory of literary criticism that questions traditional assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth, asserts that words can only refer to other words, and attempts to demonstrate how statements about any text subvert their own meanings.[8]

Youth

Despite the designation of individuals up to the age of forty as "youth" in many African societies,[9] for the purposes of this study the term youth was used in reference to individuals aged between fifteen and nineteen years.

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[6] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 2.

[7] Ibid., 11-12.

[8] Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Cultivating Authentic Community, Creating Holistic Connections,* (Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 2001), 20.

[9] Iain H. Clyne, Light on Innovative Approaches to Youthwork in Nairobi, (Nairobi: NEGST Thesis, 1997), 7.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will discuss postmodernity and some of the debates it has sparked in recent years. I also will address youth culture and the influence postmodernity has had on it, considering that youth culture is usually the first to be influenced by any new philosophy. Different media play key roles in voicing the philosophies of any given age. In discussing postmodernity, I also will look at media's role in ushering in this new philosophical era.

The philosophical eras in the West have developed from the enlightenment era into the modern age and now into postmodernity. The question remains whether Africa has undergone a similar sequence in terms of philosophical transition. The suspicion of the supernatural that accompanied the enlightenment was prevalent in the West and spilled into modernity, but has not seemed to affect "modern" Africa. Africans remain very aware of the spiritual realm and generally believe in witchcraft and spiritual warfare. Many educated Christians consult witches and witch doctors to perform various tasks relevant to their day-to-day lives, such as finding out who stole their livestock or who should marry their daughter. Perhaps as Christianity came in modern attire, because some of it did not meet the real needs of the people, they resorted to non-Christian/non-modern

ways of dealing with certain dilemmas that "Christianity" did not address and modernity fell short of resolving. Another question that accompanies this discussion is whether the concept of postmodernity is relevant to Africa. This question has been raised by some who argue that the concept of postmodernity is irrelevant to the African context because it does not exist. Yet in the urban centers of Africa, there is a conglomeration of different levels of pre-modernism, modernism, and even postmodernity.[1] Postmodernity may be a new concept to Africa but there is little doubt regarding its existence. Postmodernity in urban Africa may appear slightly different than it does in the West because the urban African context is unique. In urban Africa, the worldviews held by a 70-year-old grandmother, her 48-year-old daughter and her 17-year-old granddaughter are worlds apart. While the 70-year-old grandma may have built her life on traditional values, her 48-year-old daughter is probably a city resident who has built her dynasty on modern values. Concurrently, the teenager may be trying to understand life from her postmodern perspective. What is commonly called "the generation gap" may be much wider between the African generations than it is in the West. We shall therefore also look at youth ministry in Africa.

<center>Postmodernity</center>

Scholars are in great debate over postmodernity and disagree on what the word means. Many scholars are not sure how to trace its beginning and what events mark the new postmodern era. They do however agree on one point: this phenomenon marks the end of a single, universal world-view.[2]

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[1] Rich Starcher, review of *A Primer on Postmodernism,* by Stanley Grenz, (January 1998).

[2] Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, (Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 11-12.

The Evolution of Postmodernity

Three epochs have been observed in Western civilization through the ages: the pre-modern era, the modern era, and the postmodern era. The pre-modern era was a traditional world-view communicated through myths before science came along asking for proof. Enlightenment sought to unlock the secrets of the universe, to master nature for human benefit and create a better world. During the enlightenment period, the mind awoke to rediscover "classical thought and art in the Renaissance."[3] There was an attempt to prove that though God existed and perhaps was even active; human beings were somewhat independent of him.[4] This ushered in the modern era, which sought to improve human existence through technology.[5] Nevertheless, as Douglas Groothuis put it, "[t]he ideology of progress did not make good on its promises."[6] In modernism, empiricism became the primary authority for truth. With time, empiricism proved unsuccessful as a primary authority for truth.[7] Modernity had the audacity to claim to understand creation so well that the need for God was discarded. Friedrick Nietzche (1884-1900) actually declared that God was dead; giving rise to "deconstruction," a movement that is central to postmodern thought.[8]

There was a major shift from modernity to postmodernity starting as early as the late nineteenth century. While Friedrich Nietzsche was among the first to launch

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[3] Jones, 17.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Grenz, 3.

[6] Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 26.

[7] Chris Altrock, *Preaching to Pluralists: How to Proclaim Christ in a Postmodern age*, (St. Louis, Mo: Chalice Press, 2004), 7.

[8] Jones, 19-20.

an attack against the major tenets of modernity other attacks followed, until by the 1970s [9] the solid ground on which modernity had stood for about two hundred years was thoroughly shaken.[10] Suddenly all the things that were taken for granted as foundational in the modern era were put under scrutiny as it became clear that the human mind may not solve every problem, and, indeed, science did not have all the answers. Skepticism, then, is at the helm of postmodernity. All premises are being questioned as the postmodernist attempts to prove that all is relative.[11]

Central Tenets of Postmodernity

Due to the nature of postmodernity, it is almost impossible to compile a complete list of its tenets. The following is an attempt to capture the foundational constructs of postmodernity, especially as it pertains to our discussion about youth ministry.

Two of the core elements of modernity that were challenged were absolute truth and objectivity. Whereas the modern person was convinced that truth was the same in all places, for all peoples and at all times, the postmodernist views truth as relative, dependent on one's culture and circumstances. Postmodernity operates a community-based understanding of truth so that whatever the community decides is true, becomes truth for that community. As a result, truth becomes relative to the community in which one participates.[12]

The modernist believed he could stand "outside the system" and, hence, attain objectivity. The postmodernist sees truth as subjective, acknowledging that no one

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[9] Grenz, 5.

[10] Robert C. Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism,* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.

[11] Jones, 22.

[12] Grenz, 7-8.

person is free from the influence of circumstances and community. Truth becomes a result of interpretation; "one person's truth is another person's theory."[13] Hence, pluralism and relativism are central values of postmodernity. Pluralism, for example, suggests that there is no single way to get to heaven; rather each religion will lead to God as long as its adherents are sincere. Considering that in postmodernity one dare not talk about objective truth, one's religion is merely seen as a matter of personal interpretation that should not be imposed on others.[14] Relativism walks hand in hand with pluralism. The reasoning behind relativism is that Christianity, for example, which may "work" for one person is not guaranteed to "work" for another, or if homosexuality is wrong for one individual, it is not necessarily wrong for others who wish to engage in the practice.[15] The postmodern argues that everybody's life and circumstances are relative. If one does not know what the other's story is, they should not criticize and judge anyone. This worldview creates a non-judgmental and permissive society where all is justifiable and no one way of life is necessarily wrong.

Narrative is a common way to communicate in the postmodern world. Brian McLaren refers to this as "abductive" reasoning. Because propositions are unappealing to this generation, through a story, the communicator abducts his listeners to another world.[16] In this other world, is a subtle and non-confrontational medium through which a person is confronted with the truths communicated. Postmoderns have moved away from the inclination to make lists, for example to-do-lists. Making lists is deemed to be of no use because everything will eventually

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[13] Jones, 26.

[14] D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 20.

[15] Altrock, 8.

[16] Jones, 27.

happen since nothing is quantifiable and one cannot objectively predict how or where things will happen. All one can do is predict that they will happen and nothing else.[17] "To do lists" then would be considered unnecessary because the activities lined up for a particular day will be done; if per chance some are not done, forgetting some of the activities is a part of life.

Other factors that have accompanied postmodern thought and expression include the value of community, moving away from the individualism that characterized modernity. A sense of belonging is sought; though sometimes in non-traditional ways such as the reality TV shows, where perfect strangers co-habit.[18] Creativity also has taken over the functionality of the modern age. This trend is illustrated in architecture and in the way that art and beauty are highly esteemed.[19] An awareness of the environment has led away from the industrial era's greed for nature's resources. Protecting the environment and a concern for the consequences of doing otherwise are close to the hearts of many postmodern young people.[20]

Postmodernity and Youth

"Students find Christianity's claim of exclusivity the most difficult" aspect of our faith to take in.[21] Truth is now relative, dictated by the community and by one's situation meaning that to declare another community wrong is abusive and obnoxious. A young person would much rather acknowledge that all faiths and religions have

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., 34-35.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 33.

some truth in them and are justifiable ways to "express [one's] spirituality."[22] Michel Foucault explains that the very assertion of knowledge is an act of power so that anyone who asserts his or her knowledge on others is in essence performing an act of violence.[23] One is left to wonder where this sort of thinking leaves evangelism, as we have traditionally known it. I speak of the sort of evangelism that involved an eloquent speaker who could capture an audience and convince them that their lives were worthless without God. Would this evangelist now be termed an offender?

With the breakdown of scientific positivism, young people are aware that science cannot answer their questions, yet religion puts them off, as it is sometimes rigid and condemning.[24] Wrapped in this challenge is an opportunity to reach out to the postmodern generation since postmodernity creates an appeal to spiritual things. Spirituality is the trend among postmodern young people.[25] Scripture takes on new meaning as the struggle shifts from proving the Bible true to arguing that the Bible is exclusive. While the postmodern young person will readily embrace a supernatural Jesus, and the miracles and stories that modernity labeled myth, their struggle will be to believe that this Bible is exclusively true.[26] They tend to accommodate other routes to God and other truth claims.

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[22] Ibid, 33.

[23] Grenz, 6.

[24] Dean Borgman, *Hear My Story: Understanding the cries of troubled Youth,* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 4.

[25] Jones, 31.

[26] Ibid., 195-198.

Young people are in the period of their lives where they are in search of their identity.[27] Life is unraveling for them and they are trying to ascertain who they are. Every juncture in the journey of life gives them an opportunity to make a choice, which involves risks and could yield either positive or negative results. They often have a sense of invincibility and often make impulsive decisions. Young people need support, love, and direction as they seek to write their stories.[28] Yet postmodernity avoids giving direction, claiming that there is no right or wrong way. The media tells stories of gay people "coming out of the closet," pressuring the audience to "accept them as they are."

Media of Postmodernity

The global village has engulfed what was known as geography such that the internet, music, video games and other vehicles of philosophy know no borders and are experienced as much in the third world as the first.[29] An example of the pervasiveness of globalization is the movie industry. When I was growing up, the movies at the cinema halls were old releases, yet now movies are launched at the same time all over the world regardless of whether it is a G8 country or Kenya.

Globalization has benefited greatly from the information explosion of our time, penetrating diverse countries, and socioeconomic classes. Young people consider themselves citizens of the world. Loyalties go beyond a country to the entire human race.[30] Globalization's effect is enhanced through the media such that a

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[27] Setri Nyomi, ed. *Ecumenical Youth in Africa: A Handbook, AACC Youth Desk*, (Accra: Assemblies of God Literature Center Ltd., 1993), 27.

[28] Borgman, *Hear My Story*, 10.

[29] Sharlene Swartz, "A Couple of Jumps Later," *The Edge: The future* (October 2005) : Internet Resource: http://www.youth.co.za/theedge/the_future/the-future07.asp. Accessed on 12th October 2005.

[30] Jones, 37.

teenager in Italy is dressed very much like a teenager in Kenya or Iraq. I remember

visiting a small town in Kenya called Oloitoktok while I was in my undergraduate

studies. I was surprised to find that a small, cheap, seemingly insignificant coffee

shop had a satellite dish and was showing cable television. The concepts that were

only familiar to the first world are now at the fingertips of the two-thirds world, if

only vicariously through television.

<div align="center">Youth Ministry in Urban Africa</div>

Kenya boasts an overwhelming 16,898,000 under the age of 18 out of

33,467,000 of the total population.[31] With over 50 percent of Kenya's population

under the age of 18, the demographics appear to mandate a realignment of church

structures and budgetary allocations in favor of youth ministry. There appears to be an

increasing awareness of the importance of structured youth ministries and youth

pastorates in urban and rural churches in Africa. However, these ministries appear to

reflect Western Christian Education models, materials, and practices. This

dependence began with the missionary initiatives, which were inherited by the local

people even after many of the missionaries had left.[32]

The wealth of our traditional values is slowly being lost as modernity and

postmodernity present alternative lifestyles. The current generation is unique in its

character and challenges and fresh approaches need to be embarked on to reach

them.[33] The influences shaping the young people today have evolved with the times

and are more and more postmodern by the day. A challenge to this sort of reasoning,

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[31] Kenya Statistics, Demographics, Internet resource:
http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/kenya_statistics.html#0, Accessed 26th April 2006.

[32] Clyne, 9.

[33] Tatah H. Mbuy, "The Need for Pastoral Care of Youth in Africa," *AFER 38* No 1,
(February, 1996), 2.

as alluded to above is whether Africa's philosophical transitions have been as linear as those of the West have. Perhaps she has jumped some stages or not embraced them fully because of the strength of her traditional culture. Perhaps even our urban centers are a mix of the different stages of pre-modernization, modernization, and postmodernization. There are representations of all the levels of modernization in the urban centers making for an interesting phenomenon that should be studied.

This study seeks to understand the degree to which postmodernity has infiltrated youth in urban Africa, and in particular Nairobi Chapel. If it has, it is important to understand what aspects of postmodernity are evident in our youth and which have been balanced off by modern or traditional values that are availed by different forces of influence. The answers to these questions will help us reach out to the youth in urban centers more effectively, capturing this generation for Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Research is "defined as a diligent search for new knowledge."[1] This chapter will explain the research design and methods I utilized in this study. The two modes of inquiry commonly used in social science research are quantitative and qualitative approaches. Qualitative research is more interested with the process than the product. The qualitative researcher is intrigued by how people make sense of their lives.[2] The differences between these two modes of inquiry are found between the process and the finished product.

> Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.[3]

In qualitative research, one studies few cases in depth rather than many cases as in quantitative studies.[4]

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[1] Olive M Mugenda and Abel G Mugenda, *Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (Nairobi: ACTS Press, 2003), 197.

[2] John Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among the five traditions,* (California: SAGE Productions, Inc, 1998), 145.

[3] Ibid.,15.

[4] Ibid., 16.

Studying few cases with many variables allows the researcher the liberty to engage the participants and follow the leads that arise during data collection. Considering the nature of postmodernity, the qualitative approach seemed best suited to my study because postmodernity is a fluid and controversial phenomenon. Qualitative studies ask "how and what" rather than "why," as in a quantitative study.[5] I was most interested in how young people acquired their values and culture. Further, I wanted to discover what this culture entails.

Another interesting thing about qualitative research is the liberty to write in a literary style; the personal pronoun "I" can be used.[6] This topic was close to my heart as qualitative study topics often are. I have encountered certain filters and quests in my experience teaching young people and desired to get past them.[7] As pointed out in Habermas and Issler, as they quoted Kraft, we "see reality not as it is but always from inside our heads."[8] Understanding the filters of the young people in our youth group was important for me because I desired to be effective in teaching for transformation.

Basic Research Design

This study used qualitative research methods to explore postmodernity among the six individuals chosen from the Nairobi Chapel youth group. I gathered data from the respondents using qualitative interviews. I sought to conduct the first interview with participants in their natural setting in order to get a more complete picture of the

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[5] Ibid., 17.

[6] Ibid., 18.

[7] Ibid., 19.

[8] Ronald Habermas, and Issler Klaus, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and practice of Christian educational ministry*, (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1992), 66-67.

influences surrounding a participant's belief and value system.[9] Considering my participants were teenagers, a high level of influence upon them was observed from the home. Establishing what this natural environment is was challenging because teenagers are often in the identity crisis stage and may behave very differently in different settings such as home, school, or church.

Entry

Having worked at Nairobi Chapel for three years, I anticipated few problems gaining entry to the sites of study, especially since the youth department of Nairobi Chapel stood to benefit greatly from the findings of this research. A letter was however presented to the church asking permission to carry out the study among the members of the youth group. The letter to Nairobi Chapel contained a brief description of the study and how the church stood to benefit.[10]

Instrument to be Used

In keeping with the interpretative nature of qualitative research, the researcher was the primary data collector. Whereas closed-form questions require pre-specified responses, open-form questions give respondents the liberty to answer as they wish.[11] I used the semi-structured interviews or guided conversations to draw out teens' views on spirituality, truth, and authority. Interviews were loosely structured with open-

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[9] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, Second ed.*, (California: Sage Productions, 2003), 180.

[10] Creswell, *Research Design 2ⁿᵈ ed*, 148.

[11] Meredith D Gall, Walter R. Borg and Joyce P. Gall, *Education Research: An Introduction*, (New York: Longman Publishers, 1996), 295.

ended questions to allow the discussion to pursue important issues[12] as they emerged.[13]

Building credibility and having a rapport with the participants was crucial to the process of data collection, as this determined how free participants were to answer the questions asked.[14] I, therefore, selected teens from the group with whom I had already built a relationship before the study.

Seidman suggests three interviews per participant. The purpose of the first interview is to set up the life story in order to establish a context. The second interview is designed to give room for zeroing in on the phenomenon being studied. The questions in this interview are geared more towards establishing the environment around which certain beliefs and opinions are built rather than asking for opinions.[15] In the third and final interview, an attempt is made to make sense of the interviewee's experience urging them to reflect and find meaning to their past and present. An idea of the future is helpful to guide the third interview. For example, a helpful question in the interview protocol asked the respondents to reflect on where they see themselves five years from now with respect to their views on religion, authority, and truth.[16] I followed Seidman's format and structure for setting up the questions, but it proved difficult to hold three interviews with each participant because of the constraints on the participants' time. Instead, I interviewed all but one of the participants twice. I

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[12] Borg and Gall, 397.

[13] Creswell, *Research Design 2nd ed.,* 182.

[14] Ibid., 181.

[15] Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences,* Second Edition, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998), 11-12.

[16] Ibid., 13.

conducted only one interview with the remaining participant due to his limited availability.

I carried out the interviews myself, having earlier developed a rapport with the teens such that they were free to answer the questions asked openly. The first interviews were carried out in the participants' homes. Alternative settings were sought for the second interview, for those whose houses were difficult to reach but most of the second interviews took place in the participants' homes as well.

Data Collection and Recording Procedure

I prepared in advance an interview protocol containing guidelines for how the interviews were to proceed.[17] During the interviews, I noted participants' responses and my comments in a journal purchased for this purpose. Note-taking and audio tapes were the primary means of recording data, though it was not possible to audiotape all the interviews.[18] One respondent who was uncomfortable refused to allow her interview to be tape-recorded.

Since this was a qualitative study, data was collected and analyzed simultaneously such that they hardly formed two independent stages of the process.[19] The protocol was informed by each subsequent interview such that relevant questions that were not in the original protocol were added as the research proceeded.

Data Analysis

As Mugenda and Mugenda say, "data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of information collected."[20] I employed grounded

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[17] See Appendix II

[18] Creswell, *Research Design 2nd ed*, 152.

[19] Mugenda and Mugenda, 203.

[20] Ibid., 203.

theory procedures to analyze the data in order to allow a "theory" to emerge from the data. Theory as defined by Starcher quoting Rudestam and Newton is "the language that allows us to move from observation and make sense of similarities and differences."[21] Theorizing is about conceiving an idea then "formulating [it] into a logical, systematic, and explanatory scheme."[22] A theory takes the findings to another level where I began to explain the whole phenomena. Throughout the study, it was crucial for me to remain sensitive to the situations in the field. As data were collected, analysis took place followed by more data collection that was informed by the analysis, such that "analysis... [drove] data collection."[23] I, then, organized the data as patterns began to form. The relationships and interrelationships that arose as the data were analyzed resulted in the theory presented in the next chapter.[24]

Since data analysis and data collection occurred concurrently, each case informed the subsequent cases, such that one case alerted me to certain issues in postmodernity that were helpful to explore, compare, and contrast in the other cases. For example, the youth implied in the first few interviews that they struggled with Christianity's claim to be exclusive. Hence, I explored more deeply the concept of exclusivity in subsequent interviews. The cases were thus dependent on each other, analyzed alongside each other leading to recognition of similarities and variations that added to theorization.[25]

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[21] Richard L. Starcher, *Africans in Pursuit of a Theological Doctorate: A grounded theory study of theological doctoral program design in a non Western context*, (PhD Dissertation: Graduate College at the University of Nebraska, 2003), 60-62.

[22] Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, (California: SAGE Publication, 1998),21.

[23] Ibid.,42.

[24] Ibid., 22.

[25] Strauss and Corbin, 88-89.

Data Coding

A code is described as "a word, abbreviation, or phrase, which represents a link between raw data (field notes or interview transcribed) and the researcher's theoretical concept."[26] Codes facilitate for the formation of themes and categories. The categories and codes are what the eventual story of my research were based on as illustrated in the following chapter.[27]

Open Coding

Open coding allowed me to categorize information by placing it in the segments representing the different traits of postmodernity and the influences found around the young person's life.[28] Categories are defined by Strauss and Corbin as, "concepts that stand for phenomena," while phenomena "are important analytic ideas that emerge from [the] data."[29] Categories were helpful in this study especially when concepts begun to accumulate, in which case they were grouped for easier handling and explanation as the research progressed. As categories formed, they were named appropriately, with names that were "graphic enough to remember."[30] Subcategories came into play to further expound on the categories, giving information such as "when, where, why and how a phenomenon [was] likely to [have] occurred."[31]

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[26] Mugenda and Mugenda, 205.

[27] Creswell, *Research Design 2ⁿᵈ ed*, 154.

[28] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 57.

[29] Strauss and Corbin, 114.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid., 119.

Axial Coding

Axial coding allowed me to rearrange the data after the initial open coding and begin identifying a central phenomenon, exploring its causes, strategies, and consequences.[32] This process was about "relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions."[33] At this stage, I began to link categories together, looking for any information in the data that uncovered these links.[34] During axial coding, I asked questions that were geared towards establishing relationships between categories such that I could relate structure with process. Structure issues are answered by asking "why" questions, while process issues are uncovered by asking "how" questions. To fully understand a phenomenon I needed to understand the relationship between structure and process.[35]

Selective Coding

"Selective coding is the process of integrating and refining categories."[36] The importance of this stage was in resolving the research findings, such that they were presented in the form of "interrelated concepts" rather than a "[list] of themes."[37]

The crucial thing at this stage was to identify the central category, which represents the main theme. This central category came from the collection of the other categories. If none of the categories on the list represented a category that depicted the

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[32] Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 57.

[33] Strauss and Corbin, 124.

[34] Ibid., 126.

[35] Ibid., 127.

[36] Ibid., 143.

[37] Ibid., 145.

main theme, another category was created that absorbed the others into it.[38] According to Strauss and Corbin, the criteria for choosing the central category consist of the following: 1) The central category must be central to the other categories

2) The central category must appear frequently

3) The name or phrase used to describe needs to be abstract enough to allow for the development of a more general theory

4) The central category needs to be able to explain divergent or contradictory cases.[39]

Validation

After I gathered and recorded the data, I sought to have it validated through various means, even though validation occurred at some level at each step of data collection.[40] Validity in qualitative research is quite different from validity in quantitative research because it does not confirm reliability or generalizability. Validity in qualitative research "is used to suggest determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account."[41]

I used triangulation "to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint aim[ed]

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[38] Ibid., 146.

[39] Ibid., 147.

[40] Creswell, *Research Design 2nd ed*, 195.

[41] Ibid., 196.

at enhancing the credibility and validity of the results."[42] This method examines the different sources of data and builds from it a "justification of themes."[43]

I conducted member checks to give participants the opportunity to assess the accuracy of the final report.[44] The participants were asked to read the theory and comment on how well it fit their cases, seeking to hear descriptions of themselves as the story unfolded.[45]

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[42] Esa-Matti Järvinen, *Education About and Through Technology: In search of more appropriate pedagogical approaches to technology education*, http://herkules.oulu.fi/isbn9514264878/html/x628.html, internet resource: accessed 4th January 2006.

[43] Creswell, *Research Design 2nd ed*, l96.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Strauss and Corbin, 159.

CHAPTER FOUR
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter contains the findings and analysis of the data produced by this study. I sought to integrate the relevant literature and my research findings. I used open, axial, and selective coding to analyze data obtained through interviews with six participants. I selected three male and three female participants between the ages of 12 and 20 years of age from the Nairobi Chapel youth group. The criterion for choosing the participants was my observation of postmodernity tendencies as outlined in the literature. All the participants were from high socioeconomic classes in high cost schools or had just completed their O-levels in high cost schools. This correlation probably was due to the fact that postmodern media is more accessible to the higher socioeconomic classes.

Theory Explanation

The following theory emerged from my analysis of the data: Postmodernity is a major influence in the lives and minds of affluent urban youth in Nairobi Chapel. They embraced key postmodern values, including religious pluralism, relativism, anti-authoritarianism, and community. In the section that follows, I will discuss the manifestation of each of these postmodern values.

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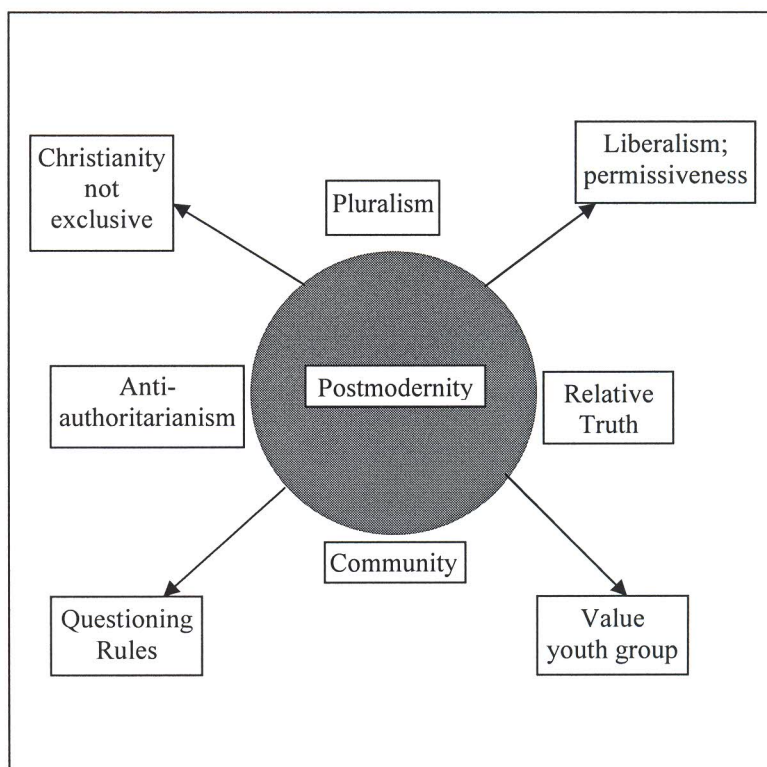
Fig 4.1: Postmodern Tenets observed among youth at Nairobi Chapel

The above diagram illustrates the interplay among pluralism, relative truth, community, and anti-authoritarianism, the central tenets of postmodernity as observed among Nairobi Chapel youth. The interplay of relative truth and pluralism gives way to an environment where all forms of "truth" are accepted and all interpretations of the same are accommodated. Thus, I observed liberalism and permissiveness among the youth. Between relative truth and community, the need to belong to a youth group flourishes. A youth group provides the environment where one feels understood since in this community there are people to identify with. Situational truth implies that one has a community that forms the basis for truth for that individual, as discussed in chapter two. Anti-authoritarianism leads to the questioning of rules and authority, in general, a value unanimously held by the respondents, meaning that the community (peers) reinforces this value. Finally, the skepticism behind authoritarianism

collaborates with pluralism to question the exclusivity of Christianity. The respondents struggled to accept that Christianity is the only valid route to God.

<div align="center">Religious Pluralism</div>

I addressed religion in an attempt to establish whether or not the respondents were pluralistic in their perception of faith. All the respondents professed Christianity and claimed to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Owning their Faith

One of the factors to consider in analyzing their perception of religion is that adolescents are in the developmental period where they are beginning to own their faith. The data revealed that all the respondents attributed their religion to their upbringing. Some implied that, as they became of age, the process of owning their faith had begun. As one respondent reflected, "my parents are both Christians... And I guess they've rubbed some of that off on me – well started to anyways." The implication here is that her faith is in transition, becoming more personal as opposed to being her parents' faith. As the same respondent mentions, "[God] is more personal," implying that her relationship with God is blossoming. She described the situation as one where she is now doing something about her faith rather than just talking about how she would like to grow. Psychologists affirm the teen years as a time to integrate one's faith. The two primary ways adolescents develop a sense of who they are is by imitation and integration. Imitation involves adapting to their surroundings by mimicking the behavior and beliefs of others around them. Integration, on the other hand, involves testing, separating and discriminating between various beliefs until one finds the one that rings genuine and true.[1] In this case, the

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[1] O. Gangel, *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, (Michigan: Baker Book House Co., 1997), 252.

respondent seemed to have been undergoing an experiential validation of what her parents had taught her during her formative years. As a postmodern young person, she needed to experience Jesus before she was convinced he existed and gave up her life to Him completely.[2]

Factors Influencing Faith

Three of the respondents attributed their Christian faith to the input of their mothers. As one of the respondents explained, "I owe 99% to my mum. She's the one who pushed for Bible study at home." A factor to note in these three cases is that the fathers were either not born again Christians or had a weak stance regarding their faith. Generally, the data appeared to indicate mothers had a more intimate relationship with the teenagers. Only one female respondent reported of having a strained relationship with her mother. Her father traveled frequently yet she preferred to talk to him about life issues.

Faith emerged from the data as a product of one's upbringing and culture. One female respondent doubted she would be a Christian if she had not been raised in a Christian home. The corollary of this kind of thinking is that if one's religion is wholly the result of one's upbringing, judging and condemning other religions becomes illogical. In putting himself in the shoes of a Muslim teenager, one respondent empathized with him, because it well could have been him in this "wrong" religion. As one respondent pointed out, "it would be unfair to say that they [Muslims] are not going to heaven just because of their upbringing." Thus, the struggle with Christianity's claim to be exclusive surfaced in the data.

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[2] Ravi Zacharias, "The Touch of Truth," ed. D. A. Carson, *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing postmoderns,* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 24-25.

Faith as Personal

Christianity was expressed as a private phenomenon not to be discussed with others. As one respondent explained, "I don't talk about religion with people my age. My relationship with God is my business – don't like discussing it." She explained she kept her faith to herself to avoid conflicts and disagreements, particular with Muslims. The other respondents did not express as strongly their desire to conceal their relationship with God but did describe it as "private" or "personal." In postmodernity, one's religion is merely seen as a matter of personal interpretation that should not be imposed on others.[3] This belief may help us understand youth's inclination to keep religion to themselves.

This "personal" outlook on their faith led me to ask if they would share the gospel with others. Most were skeptical to the idea of evangelism. One respondent explained that though she was sure that Christianity is the true faith, she would not know how to defend it to a Muslim, for example, who challenged her faith. Another felt she was not strong enough in her faith to share it with anyone, while yet another shyly said she would redirect any interested parties to the Christian union chairman in her school as she would not know what to do with a willing convert. The only respondent who said he would share his faith was speaking in the context of Muslims and said, "I think I'd try just because God says try, and then I'd, then I'd leave them alone... you see I know this would be very hard, coz if a Muslim came to evangelize to me, they would just be wasting their time." His motivation would be to fulfill all righteousness but in putting himself in the Muslim's shoes, he reasons that it would be a waste of time, as he would not budge in his faith. Tied in his attitude is a caution not

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[3] D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity confronts pluralism*, (Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 20.

to judge other religions and Islam seemed to be the religion he had in mind perhaps because his exposure is limited to Islam and he may not know people of other faiths. In his caution not to judge other faiths, he seemed rather permissive of them, reasoning that if they were sincere enough they would get to heaven anyway. Postmodernity affords a certain comfort with diversity that modernity did not. Pluralism is seen as a celebration of "the richness of the human situation" ruling out absolute and objective truth as a platform to perceive and judge other religions.[4] This thinking allows this young man to embrace other faiths regarding that his cannot possibly be the only valid route to God.

In line with this perception of religion, one respondent claimed that religion is an empty title. He reasoned, "if you know God, shed the titles. If you can live by what he says and follow his Word then that is all that's required." With the death of absolute truth, postmoderns are "skeptical to the church's claim to have an absolute authority in spiritual matters."[5] One respondent proved to be struggling with this issue yet had resolved that Jesus is the only way to heaven. She mused, "I wish I could say that...just loving God is all you need but then like you know John 14:6 says...Jesus is the only way and that sucks for those people who really love God but don't know his Son." One proposed solution to this problem was the suggestion by two of the respondents that God should use different criteria for judging those who proved sincere, devout followers of other religions but never acknowledged Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior. As one male respondent decisively declared, "we'll all have stages of being judged – or if I was God that's what I'd do."

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[4] Trevor Hart, *Regarding Karl Barth: Towards a reading of his theology,* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 119.

[5] Altrock, 22.

Summary of Factors Enhancing Pluralism

The following factors enhancing pluralism emerged from the data:

1. Faith as a personal phenomenon

2. Faith stemming from one's of environment – thus dependent on the culture one is raised in.

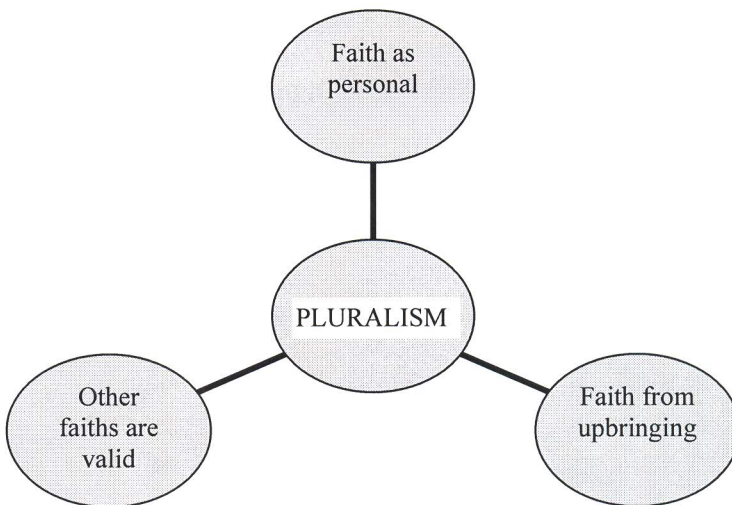3. Skepticism about the falsity of other religions

Fig 4.2: Perceptions enhancing pluralism among the youth

Relativism

When asked to describe truth, the respondents came up with various answers; they depicted truth as "not false [or] fake," "lack of secrecy," and "being real." A male respondent described truth as relative. On further explanation of his understanding of relative, the respondent explained that he viewed relativity as something you can "manipulate." He explained, "I think sometimes the truth is rightfully broken down." In his perception, truth in bits is helpful when one is in a situation where the whole truth could be hurtful or destructive. As discussed in chapter two, the postmodern sees truth as subjective and dependent on the situation.

When asked whether truth is the same in all places at all times most respondents' answers veered towards relative truth though not explicitly. They argued for situations where one needed to lie or withhold some truth for the greater good. Answering by means of illustrations or stories is a postmodern phenomenon. As Jones explains, narratives are "the primary means of communicating one's beliefs," adding a positional perspective to the situation.[6] One respondent after conforming to the answer that portrayed truth as relative added that one would only lie or withhold the truth if they did not have enough faith. Faith, for this respondent seemed like the ingredient lacking in anyone who would struggle to speak the whole truth. Only one respondent was adamant about truth being the same at all times in all situations, "Yes! [Truth] is the same for all circumstances. It doesn't matter if it can be justified. Truth is truth."

<div align="center">Anti-Authoritarianism</div>

Emerging for the data was the idea that people in authority needed to be "good," where "good" was described by one female respondent as selfless and wise. She reasoned that a leader could be selfless but still make foolish decisions that hurt those who are under his or her leadership. Hence, she added wisdom as a crucial element of leadership. Other respondents defined the criteria for leadership as allowing for dialogue in the decision-making process and competence in performing the task. Earning the respect and the right to give instruction emerged strongly from the data as an important component of authority and leadership.

Where rules were concerned, respondents highly valued knowing the rationale behind a certain instruction or rule. They all stated that it was important for them to understand why they were required or requested to perform a certain duty or adhere to

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[6] Jones, 27.

a particular rule. Postmodern youth do not passively submit to rules but challenge the basis or foundation for which things are done.[7] Thus, the sort of leadership that does not bother to explain why they take certain courses of action will not be tolerated by these young people. As a male respondent expressed, "it's different if you are good in authority... I respect you whole heartedly but if you're one of those who 'do because I said so,' um if I can stand against you I will."

One female respondent stated that though she would not be overtly rebellious she would not adhere to rules that she did not perceive to make sense. Another male respondent after confessing his initial reaction was to break rules, explained that he did not perceive his life as run by rules. He explained that in High School, they were presented with rules at the beginning of their time there but he states, "never again do you go back and see, 'I need to do this, let's check the rule book and go by... it.'" He explained that he just lived his life and operated on any general, internalized principles he may have acquired from Scripture or his upbringing.

One respondent stated that though she would struggle to obey rules that were illogical in her perception, she still would follow them as long as they were not wrong. She said, "I think stupid rules I'd follow as long as they are not wrong. But if it's a wrong rule like 'kill all white people' I would never do that." In her view, obedience to authority appeared subject to one's perception of right and wrong.

Two respondents brought in the element of their relationship to the system introducing these rules. They expressed that if they were new to a system, then they would honor the rules they found there, but if they had been there for a while and new rules were introduced then they would react strongly against them. As one of them stated, "if I've been there then you bring new stuff [rules] – I don't appreciate that."

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[7] Ibid., 22.

The importance of rules being communicated in a respectful manner to the subordinates also arose quite strongly in the data. Some respondents felt that there should be room for dialogue rather than an authority imposing a rule on the subordinates without an explanation. One male respondent expressed, "you don't just impose them [rules], you tell people why, what's going wrong and why you think you should do this so that we can help change this."

The general response on authority and instruction echoed the phenomenon of skepticism. Relative truth makes rules difficult to enforce because everyone may have valid reasons for not adhering to the rules since truth is situational.

Community

Community appeared to be a high value for all the respondents except one who said, "I don't like people." She went on to explain that she did not appreciate crowds and preferred one-on-one interaction. This then did not eliminate her need for community but clarified that community for her was not defined by masses but rather by relationships with individuals. (I suspected that she had had a bad day at school on the day of the interview, which seemed to affect her answers regarding community.) The other respondents communicated explicitly that community was crucial for them, considering they would not know how to survive without it. The older respondents who were anticipating college and perhaps moving far from home, expressed some anxiety at being far away from the people they loved and perhaps being in a culture that did not nurture community as strongly as it is nurtured in Kenya. One female respondent reflected, "You know if you need sugar you go downstairs or whatever. I'll miss doing that when I first go to the states coz its just weird." She expressed fear concerning the practice of community in the West as opposed to its practice in urban Africa to which she is accustomed.

The Role of the Church

The respondents considered Church important, though one mentioned that it was important that the speaker be interesting and passionate to hold her attention. Another female respondent felt that large congregations were not effective in accomplishing God's purpose for church, "I think it's very important that you find a good church. A place where you can really like interact and grow I guess. Like I don't like big churches... you can't really grow. You just like hammered or something then you go home. I believe what God had in mind was like a small body where you help each other not just like one way kind of thing." I felt this was a profound grasp on the function of church. She saw the value of not being a backbencher in church but participating in a fellowship where ministry is reciprocal.

The Role of the Youth Group

Respondents also emphasized the importance of a youth separate from the adult ministries. The youth group was described as a place where the youth could meet people who think like them. As one male respondent explained, "but I wouldn't... tap a big guy [adult] in the sanctuary and tell him, '*We!*, it's how?'[8]...So I think youth group is important coz you do the same things you're kinda in the same boat." Study participants greatly appreciated the opportunity to express themselves freely during the learning process. They affirmed the opportunity for an interactive environment where dialogue and feedback are encouraged during learning, which does not take place in the adult service.

Accountability was expressed as a critical element of the youth group. One respondent explained that it provides a forum to find out what fellow young people are struggling with and to encourage each other in their resolve to stand. This

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[8] A slang greeting.

accountability was described as an informal by-product of the youth group and not part of the structured program. These young people often meet outside church, in school and interschool activities. Therefore, relationships established during youth group are reinforced during the week, providing a platform for accountability in these other forums.

A female respondent felt the youth group was a good forum for some of the discussions that took place in it but also felt that sometimes the issues discussed were not issues she was struggling with. The importance of relevance was echoed by another female respondent as one of the factors that affected the youth groups' impact on her during the week. When a topic was addressed that intrigued her, perhaps because it affected her life closely, it was easier to remember and apply during the following week.

Additional Issues

Other issues arose outside of those mentioned in the Research questions. As pertains postmodernity the following issues were discussed with interesting results.

Influences

The role of one's influences in a philosophical era is significant. Yet the teenager's perceptions of what influenced them did not conform to what I expected. All but one respondent acknowledged either one or both parents as one of the top three influences in their lives. The one respondent, who did not acknowledge his parents as a major influence, was rather open minded as far as the possible influences in his life were concerned. His explanation is as follows, "I've reached a point in my life where I sift out irrespective of who you are I'll always sift out what you say." He sees that "even kids can influence you; it's not necessarily people older than you." Other influences mentioned included friends, boyfriend, a brother, and school.

Another respondent explained the way the different influences played in her life by saying, "Well, like my friends or like how I act around them is kind of proof of who I am I guess. And my parents are kind of like the voice in my head and school is like where I'm tested." The data validated what psychologists hold in terms of peer versus parental influence among teens. Though peers play a significant role in the lives of teenagers, their parents are still a strong influence.[9] Youths' acknowledgment of the centrality of parental influence struck me as significant.

Youth perceived the influence of media as relatively insignificant. Five out of the six respondents did not acknowledge media as a significant influence in their lives. Two respondents felt that their exposure to media is limited and selective as far as music is concerned. Therefore, they concluded music had little influence on them. Watching television was limited to comedies and those, they claimed, were for pure enjoyment and entertainment and did not influence their decisions or lifestyles in any way. Another respondent admitted to being influenced as far as fashion and other minor issues were concerned but did not perceive media as influencing him on bigger life decisions. One respondent expressed, "Media's influence on me can't be 5% of the real story." He went ahead to narrate that it was pertinent to have boundaries in reference to music. He gave an illustration of a song he liked but on listening closely, discovered that the lyrics were destructive. The respondent then purposed not to listen to that song anymore.

Only one male respondent admitted that the influence of the media on him was, "large it's not even funny. Not just me but every young person. Dress, talk – even parents." He proceeded to illustrate how his mother succumbed to a commercial and bought a commodity she would not normally have bought because she liked the

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[9] Black, 94.

advertisement. Study participants perceived the strongest influences on them to be parents, peers, and school.

To do Lists

Based on Jones describing that postmoderns "never make lists,"[10] I asked the respondents whether they made to do lists. One of the two respondents who said they would not explained, "No! *Coz* life isn't planned out. I don't believe in planning. You do stuff as you feel." This affirms the experiential element of postmodernity where one feels through life. Gautheir describes this as "subjective experience versus objective reasoning."[11] The other respondent said, "I don't actually not believe in them but I've never made one. If I have many things to do, I just do them." As Jones explains, the rationale behind this is that "everything will eventually happen."[12] Two respondents said if they were overwhelmed with work, they would write to do lists but it is not a common practice. Only one respondent said, "Yes. I write to do lists... I go down the list and tick as each task gets done." She was unique in this regard.

A Mix of Philosophies

Evident in some respondents' answers is a hint of a remnant of traditional or modern philosophy in their thinking. One respondent seemed well aware of postmodernity's influences but had a different approach to the issues that were raised. Whereas in most cases she would conform to postmodern thinking, occasionally she displayed an alternative approach to life. This respondent came from a traditional background in that though her parents enjoyed modern appliances and technology;

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[10] Jones, 27.

[11] Mark Gauthier, "Church/Campus Connections, Model 1," ed. D. A. Carson, *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing postmoderns,* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 207.

[12] Jones, 27.

their lifestyles were still very much like that of their traditional people. I felt her traditional foundation gave her a unique edge in processing postmodern values. She was unique in her ideas on relative truth. In her answer, she seemed to conform to the need to lie or twist the truth a little if it was a good cause but she later reflectively brought out the role of faith. If one had enough faith that God could solve the problem without them needing to lie then it would be unnecessary to twist the truth. She also was the only respondent who brought up John 14:6 in response to the struggle with Christianity's exclusivity. This showed that her biblical foundation was internalized and was a part of how she perceived life.

Summary of Findings

The data analyzed and presented in this chapter provided the necessary information to answer the research questions presented in chapter one. The following discussion deals with each question in turn. The implications for youth ministry in Nairobi Chapel will be addressed in the next chapter.

What is the Teens' View of Religion?

The teens illustrated the understanding that one's religion is primarily the product of their upbringing. Hence, judgmental attitudes about non-Christian religions are inappropriate. Teens perceived sincerity and devotion, rather than faith in Christ, as the criterion for going to heaven. Only one respondent referred to John 14:6.[13] While acknowledging she would have desired devotion to God to be enough, the Bible clearly taught there was only one way to God and that was through Jesus Christ. Religion also was perceived as a private or personal matter. The data revealed that peers hardly ever talked about God. They may talk about their struggles and perhaps

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[13] John 14:6 – Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." NIV

advise each other but only in the Church setting. The only reason that surfaced for their desire to keep their faith private was to avoid conflict with people of other religions.

What is the Teens' View of Truth?

The data revealed teens' understanding of truth to be, that which was not false, even though it may need to be manipulated sometimes for the greater good. They illustrated the justification for situational truth using of scenarios displaying the necessity to lie or withhold part of the truth but only for noble reasons, such as protecting a loved one. Only one respondent said truth is the same all the time regardless of the circumstances. However, the same respondent also believed that other religions should be undisturbed, implying that he embraced pluralism.

What is the Teens' View of Authority and Law?

Respect as an authority figure must be earned by being competent and respectful of one's subordinates. Authoritarian leadership was strongly rejected, while a democratic style of leadership was highly recommended. The teens appreciated involvement in the decision making process. They demanded respectful communication even from those in positions of authority. All respondents insisted on knowing the rationale behind rules and instructions. Rules and regulations are to be challenged and if they are found wanting, they will not be adhered to. Only one respondent said she would adhere to rules she felt were illogical as long as they were not wrong.

What do the Teens Perceive as the Important Influences in their Lives?

Parents, followed by friends, emerged as the most important influences in teens' lives. One respondent mentioned that her boyfriend had been a significant influence on her character and the way she treated people. Another respondent

mentioned her older brother as influential in her decision making as far as her future was concerned.

CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter contains conclusions and recommendations drawn from my data analysis and theorization processes. They apply most specifically to Nairobi Chapel but include information potentially helpful to other youth ministries in similar contexts.

The Postmodern Profile of Nairobi Chapel Youth

The aim of this study was to ascertain whether postmodernity is a reality among youth in urban Africa and, in particular, Nairobi Chapel. To establish this, interviews were held with six youth from Nairobi Chapel with the following research questions in mind.

➤ What is the teens' view of religion?

➤ What is the teens' view of truth?

➤ What is the teens' view of authority and law?

➤ What do the teens perceive as important influences in their lives (e.g., radio, television, books, magazines, parents, peers, youth pastor, and the internet)?

Refer to Appendix for the interview protocol. Postmodern young people have trouble grasping the exclusivity of Christianity. In their quest to respect others, they are cautious about labeling other religions "wrong" or "false," because they appreciate how sincere some of them are. Absolute truth appears to be losing its hold on urban

youth in Africa today. This may be desirable because the church's articulation of absolute truth may be flawed. As youth adopt a more permissive attitude towards those who are "different," Scripture can be an anchor to keep them from drifting away from God's will. The condescending modernist, who regards with disgust "ungodly" alternative lifestyles, is of little use to the wandering postmodern. However, a Christian postmodern, who wholeheartedly embraces diversity, will perhaps be more helpful in leading the sinful one to Christ. Both extremes of total permissiveness and judgmental attitudes are shunned by Scripture because, while our holy God does not tolerate sin, he unconditionally loves the sinner. He displayed this great love by sending his son to die on a cross. If non-judgmental postmoderns grasped the truth of God's holy yet loving nature, they could be a powerful tool for evangelizing their generation.

Because the postmodern urbanite appreciates a system of leadership that allows for mutual respect and dialogue regardless of ranks and titles, leaders' positions are no guarantee of their perceived authority. Youth leaders must earn rather than command respect. God views humanity as created in his image with the ability to reason and love and with a will of their own. Leaders who do not interact with their subordinates disrespect God's image by mistreating his children. However, the postmodern extreme of a laissez-faire environment, where all do as they please, also shows contempt for God who has placed people in authority over us. Thus, mutual respect is an underlying value behind authority with postmodern youth.

Postmodern youth value community. Hence, the opportunity for mentoring relationships is great. Youth group provided a place where teens could meet others with whom they could and to whom they could be accountable. They valued mutual

encouragement and growth from the structured programs as well as from relationships formed outside of class.

Recommendations for Youth Ministry in Nairobi Chapel

Below are some recommendations for ministry to youth at Nairobi Chapel. Youth ministers in other congregations might find them applicable.

Teaching Postmodern Youth

Teaching for transformation requires teachers to meet students where they are in order to walk with them toward Christlikeness. Os Guinness gives us four stages of communication as cited by Ravi Zacharias. The first step is to identify with the recipient of the communication, which would be the youth for the purposes of this study. Following identification is translation, such that biblical context is wrapped in youths' "language" and thus transmitted. The ideas being transmitted must carry with them a certain amount of persuasion. The final step is justification, which gives the one listening a reason to accept what he has been told.[1] Once the transforming gospel that the youth worker so desperately seeks to communicate is translated into language that transcends the filters mentioned in chapter one, the youth workers has made significant progress toward learning and transformation.

Perhaps Africa can for once be ahead of herself and address the issues raised by postmodernity before they take hold. One of the female respondents proved to be the ideal of what a youth worker would desire to see in a youth group. She seemed to have grasped the values of Scripture and internalized them such that the flaws in postmodernity were more evident to her than to the other respondents. She struggled with the relativity of truth but concluded that with faith then she will not succumb to

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[1] Ravi Zacharias, *Telling the Truth,* 33.

twisting the truth in whatever way it suits her. She also seemed to struggle with Christianity's claim to be exclusive but concluded that John 14:6 cannot be compromised however harsh the implications of this verse may appear. She appeared as one who, after struggling with postmodern issues, had gone back to Scripture and resolved what was true and what was not.

Critical thinking

The aim of teaching should be to develop critical thinking rather than merely to transmit content. Youth workers must go beyond intellectual understanding of content, to the internalization of biblical values. Critical thinking allows the teens to critically analyze the media they are exposed to. The youth pastor will not always be available to interpret the varied situations youth face. Rather than create obedient subjects, the call is now to develop critical thinking among the youth such that they have their own minds in mapping a way forward when a new situation presents itself. Rather than protect them from everything, youth leaders and parents need to equip youth to protect themselves.

Whereas previously, boundaries for music had been placed around the musician such that a gospel artist was acceptable and a secular artist was not, one respondent's boundary was based on what the song's message was. "At the end of the day you have to decide whether a song is good or not from what its saying." This is probably more helpful for this generation than a blanket rule such as "no secular music." In this example from the data, critical thinking replaces mindless conformity to a particular rule such that even gospel artists are tested on the strength of the content in their songs.

Internalized values are more effective in the postmodern generation than a list of rules. Internalization comes with hands-on learning, which is whole-heartedly

embraced by the experiential postmodern. Forums to practice what the youth are learning and participate in the life of the church are crucial to the learning process. Teachers should engage youth in a two-way learning environment. They should favor discussions, role-plays, debates and other creative teaching methods over lectures.

Use of narratives

Narratives are a powerful teaching tool among postmodern youth. An illustration of using narrative for teaching in Scripture is found in 2 Samuel 12 where Prophet Nathan told David a story about a seemingly distant character. In his reaction to the details of the story, David was forced to confront values he had disregarded and in seeing for himself what the cost was, he was compelled to repentance. Stories, either real life or fictitious, can be very powerful in communicating biblical truth. This feature of postmodernity also resonates with traditional African culture and may be a bridging factor for some of the older youth workers.

Turning questions around

Through the questions and the skepticism, we must still speak God's truth and give clear direction. The questions the youth ask should not threaten youth workers but rather be turned around as teaching tools and opportunities for learning. The questions that accompany teaching postmodern youth may not always be designed to test the teacher but may at times arise from a genuinely curious mind that seeks to understand the material presented. Even those questions that are designed to test youth workers may be turned into teaching tools. Jesus was often tested by Pharisees with questions they knew the answers to, yet his answers became some of the parables that still teach us profound life lessons from the Gospels today.

Relationship Based Youth Ministry

One value that has carried through pre-modern and postmodern societies is relationships. Young people of whatever era respond well to youth pastors and youth workers who genuinely care about them. Authenticity is valuable to postmodern young people.[2] Authentic relationships then need to take center stage in our journey towards understanding postmodern youth. As youth workers develop relationships with urban youth, they will realize that there is no better place to learn about youth culture than from the youth. The real needs will arise as open conversations take place between the youth and perceptive youth leaders. The youth will express explicitly when youth workers create the safe environment in which to do so. Mentorship then arises as a central tool for impact in the life of young people because it provides a place for young people to observe that Christianity "works."

Authority/Leadership

Earning the right to exercise authority takes time and mutual respect, which may be difficult to attain if the youth leadership is constantly changing. Church leaders must see youth ministry as more than an avenue of adult leadership development. They should encourage youth workers' longevity. Youth leaders should aim at being in youth ministry at least five years before moving on. Rapid turnover in youth leadership has adversely affected the youth programs because each subsequent youth leader comes with a different philosophy of ministry and changes the programs accordingly. The youth also become weary of starting over to build relationships. Longevity in youth ministry aids the youth minister, the youth, and the caregivers of the youth. Church leadership must understand that building relationships takes time and encourage longevity among youth workers.

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[2] Jones, 37.

Parent – Youth Worker Partnership

Considering that parents are a major influence in the lives of teenagers, youth workers should establish parent ministries where parents have opportunities to dialogue about the joys and challenges of parenting teens. Perhaps the youth leaders may feel intimidated about advising parents on how to raise their teens and rightly so, in which case the youth ministry should partner with the adult ministry. The adult ministry can give the resource of older parents who have grown up children or professionals in the congregation such as youth psychologists to speak in these parent forums. Youth are in a context that cannot be disregarded when doing reaching out to them. Parents should be part of the youth ministry.

Conclusion

When new philosophies arise, one is often tempted to run and hide in the past. We must however contextualize the arising philosophies and embrace what pushes us forward while discarding what is unhelpful. As we do this, Africa must hold close the elements of the traditional culture that are valuable. Critical analysis will aid in establishing which elements of a new philosophy are hurtful and which are indeed helpful. The church needs to raise a crop of young people who have internalized biblical values enough to guide their decisions so they can stand up against what is wrong and be free to embrace what will take them forward.

For ministry to remain relevant there must be continual contextualization, which calls for the missionary to plant a seed rather than a tree, allowing the seed to grow into a plant that is relevant to that environment. There are values that Africa holds dear that can and should be carried forward to the next generation. The packaging might be different, but the values must be passed on because they are crucial.

Areas for Further Research

Material on postmodernity in urban Africa with the exception of South Africa is scarce. Further research should be done one what African postmodernity looks like in urban Africa and how far reaching its effects are. It would be interesting to establish what elements of postmodernity Africa largely remained resistant to.

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APPENDIX I

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

P.O. Box 24686 - 00502 Karen, NAIROBI, KENYA

Tel: 254 (020) / 882104/5, 882336
Fax: 254 (020) 882306
Mobile: 0722-362104/ 2734-125123
E-mail: info@negst.edu
Website: www. negst.edu

22nd March, 2006

The Pastor
Nairobi Chapel
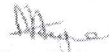P.O. Box 53635
Nairobi

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir,

RE: RESEARCH WORK

The bearer of this letter, Mrs. Eda Mutheu Esilaba is a student at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) and is doing research towards the completion of the Master of Arts in Christian Education Degree. The research is on **"Post-modernity among Youth in Nairobi Chapel"** Her research requires that she conducts interviews, make observations and collect documents that may be relevant to her topic.

Any assistance that you can give to Mrs. Esilaba will be much appreciated.

Sincerely,

for Dwight Jessup, PhD
Ag. Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE SELECTED PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

INTERVIEW ONE

1. What is your earliest childhood memory?

2. How would you describe your upbringing?

3. What is your relationship with your parents and siblings?

4. Who would you identify as a significant influence in your life outside of your family through your formative years?

5. How would you say your family and upbringing contributed to how you feel about God and religion?

6. Where would you place the church youth group in terms of the amount of influence they have on your decisions?

7. Where would you place television, music, and internet in terms of their influence on how you think and act?

INTERVIEW TWO

1. Describe your relationship with God.

2. How do you feel about church in general and especially your youth group?

3. How would you define truth?

4. Would you say that truth applies all the times regardless of the circumstances?

5. How do you feel about people in authority?

6. What is your initial response to a set of rules

7. What or who would you state as the three primary influences in your life?

8. Where do you see yourself five years from now in terms of your faith and the key influences in your life?

VITA

Personal Data

Name: Eda Mutheu Esilaba

Postal Address: P. O. Box 21067, Code 00505, Nairobi, Kenya.

Date of Birth: 29th November 1979

Gender: Female

Marital Status: Married

Nationality: Kenyan

Educational Background

N.E.G.S.T. (Candidate)	Master of Arts (C.E.) Candidate	2004-2006
J.K.U.A.T.	Bachelor of Science (Botany)	1999-2002
Strathmore College	ACCA – Level 1	2000
Word of Life	Short Term Bible School	1998
Loreto Convent Valley Road	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education	1994-1997
Consolata Primary School	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education	1986-1993

Professional Experience

Youth Worker	Nairobi Chapel	2003-To date
Social Worker	Nairobi Baptist Church	2000
Dance Workshop Coordinator	JKUAT	2000-2002
Youth Worker	Word of Life Kenya	1998