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## Committed Seventh-Day Adventist Students at Secular Institutions of Higher Education

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COMMITTED SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST STUDENTS AT SECULAR  
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

LaShonda R. Anthony

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology  
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June 2013

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# COMMITTED SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST STUDENTS AT SECULAR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

LaShonda R. Anthony, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2013

The experiences of Seventh-day Adventist students at secular universities was examined. Seven women and two men attending universities in Michigan and New York were interviewed. The researcher employed a heuristically guided phenomenological method to get rich descriptions of the participants' experiences in the secular university setting. Open-ended interviews were used to gather data regarding the student experience.

From an analysis of the data six themes arose detailing the experiences of Seventh-day Adventist students in secular environments. The themes were (a) challenges encountered in the secular environment led to a need for self-advocacy in the academic and work environment regarding maintaining faith beliefs, (b) students found themselves serving as a representative of God in academic settings, (c) the Adventist student group and church membership served as a critical source of friendship and support during the college experience, (d) personal relationships and social group membership were viewed as a form of ministry, (e) a sense of divine placement or guidance was a persistence factor, and (f) the secular college experience was an opportunity for continued spiritual growth.

The students in this study experienced their religious identity as most salient in their college experience. Their experiences inspired them to study their faith deeper and connect to the college environment in ways that helped them grow in their faith while successfully matriculating at the institution. They view their presence as part of the mission of their faith.

The students had positive views of their secular campus experiences in spite of matriculating in an environment that was not inclusive and could be perceived as hostile. The study shed light on the fact that secular college environments continue to be less than welcoming to students who do not worship according to mainstream Christian faith beliefs. Secular institutions, in the interest of retention and student development, will need to strengthen policies and training for staff around issues of inclusion for students who do not worship according to mainstream Christian beliefs.

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LaShonda R. Anthony

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

Over the course of the past 300 years, public institutions of higher education, many of which were founded as religious training grounds for clergymen (Geiger, 2005), have shifted philosophically to more secularized institutions in a desire to adopt principles central to the scientific method of inquiry (Speck, 2007). Studies and articles have been written on the impact of spirituality and religion on student engagement (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006), curriculum delivery (Astin, 2004; Kaplan, 2006), and attrition (Cash & Bissell, 1985; Tinto, 1993). Concerns regarding the legality of engaging in such discussions in the academic arena led to educators and administrators making erroneous decisions that restricted the expression and discussion of spirituality and religion in higher education (Clark, 2001). Examples of these decisions included denying students the right to establish campus groups that were religiously based, refusing access to student programming funds, avoiding public prayer on campus during ceremonies, and denying the use of campus facilities by religiously affiliated groups (Clark, 2001).

Although many of the misconceptions regarding what is allowed on a public campus have been cleared up through the courts, the integration of spirituality and religion into the academic realm has been a slow process. Many faculty and staff members view issues of spirituality and religion as a personal matter and are reluctant to discuss it in the college environment (VanZanten Gallagher, 2007). There are also concerns of threats to academic freedom if religious and spiritual discussions are allowed to take place (Kaplan, 2006). Although this shift to secularism began in the academic

realm, it quickly followed suit in student affairs, where there is often fear and misunderstanding regarding the role of spirituality and religion in student development (Clark, 2001; Laurence, 1999).

In spite of the hesitancy of administrators to take on the subject of spirituality and religion in higher education, students are showing increased interest in the discussion of spiritual matters (Astin & Astin, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Zajonc, 2003). Students are practicing their religious beliefs openly at institutions of higher education in increasing numbers (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006). While there is evidence regarding the importance students place on spirituality and religion in the collegiate environment, there continues to be a reluctance on the part of administrators to address the issue of spirituality from the view of those who adhere to the tenets of a particular religious faith. There is an unspoken fear that engaging in the discussion regarding specific religious beliefs will cross the line between separation of church and state (Clark, 2001).

Studies focusing on specific religious sects and the impact of those religious beliefs on the college student experience tend to use faith identity development as a theoretical framework (Small, 2008), and speak to some of the difficulties and challenges faced in matriculating while worshipping in adherence with a specific dogma (Johnson, 2003; Jones, 2008; Lee, 2000; Lulofs, 1994; Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Schlosser & Sedlacek, 2001; Small, 2009; Small, 2008; Speck, 1997; Wrobel & Stogner, 1988). Faith identity development fails to address how the development of faith translates into practice, particularly in the unique case of college students. The aforementioned studies do not necessarily address how students who

choose to hold on to their specific religious beliefs succeed at walking the path between their secular campus lives and their spiritual leanings.

There is an assumption in higher education that, unless students are willing to let go of their traditional beliefs for a more evolved sense of spirituality, they are not developing holistically as individuals (Allen & Kellom, 2001; Astin, 2004; Kuh & Gonyea, 2006; Laurence, 1999; Stockton, 2001). This assumption does not take into account the fact that many students who have professed and held to a specific religious dogma see their religious behaviors as an outward expression of their spiritual selves (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Lee, 2002; Love, 2002; Moran & Curtis, 2004; Small, 2009). There has been research regarding the interplay of spirituality and higher education from a general standpoint. There has not been much research that gives us a sense of the current college student and how a student who holds a specific religious dogma, specifically Seventh-day Adventism, matriculates successfully through the higher education arena, particularly in publicly or secularly chartered institutions.

My interest in the Seventh-day Adventist student experience at secular universities comes from my membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church. I joined the church the year prior to starting my doctoral studies at a public university. A major challenge I faced in reconciling my new faith practices with the university culture was the timing of classes as well as views regarding topics of inclusion and equity that appeared to fly in the face of church doctrine and biblical teachings.

I have also served as a student affairs administrator for over 16 years. During this time, I have observed the reluctance of student affairs and higher education professionals to address issues of spirituality. Although avenues are provided for expressions of

traditional Christianity, the venues are typically restricted to specific areas of campus. One location where expressions are not always welcomed appears to be residence life and housing. Students seeking space to have meetings for prayer and fellowship are typically turned away for fear of making students who are not Christian uncomfortable.

I have also spent time at a public university where I advised an Adventist Student group. During the time I spent advising, I noticed that the students involved in the student group developed a sub-culture, separate and distinct from other college students. While they sought official recognition from the university in order to secure funding for their activities, they spent the majority of the time on evangelistic activities and outreach to other Adventist students and the larger off campus community. The combination of my personal experiences with faith reconciliation, coupled with my observations of students in the undergraduate setting who adhered to their faith, motivated me to discover and describe the essence of these experiences.

### **Definition of Terms**

It is important to have a list of defined terms that will be used throughout this research. In providing the definitions early in the document, my goal is to clear up any confusion in the subsequent discussion of the topics to be studied in this dissertation.

*Spirituality* will be defined as the search for meaning or purpose in life (Daloz-Parks as cited in Love, 2001). In the research provided, spirituality is a broad umbrella under which religion, atheism, and agnosticism fall.

*Religion* will be defined as “ a shared system of beliefs, principles, or doctrines related to a belief in and worship of a supernatural power or powers regarded as creator(s) and governor(s) of the universe” (Love, 2001, pg. 8). Religion as such is an



outward manifestation of spiritual expression in the search for meaning and purpose in life.

*Faith* will be defined as those beliefs that give meaning to life (Fowler, 2004).

*Seventh-day Adventist* will be defined as a Christian religion in the Protestant reformed tradition in which the followers observe the Sabbath day described in the Old Testament of the King James Bible and adhere to the Ten Commandments found in the book of Exodus, chapter 20 (Bible, 1994; British Broadcasting Company, 2010; Bull & Lockhart, 1989; Ministerial Association, 1988).

*Committed Seventh-day Adventist student* will be defined as a student currently matriculating at a public or secular institution who is still actively involved in religious behaviors associated with the Seventh-day Adventist church and intends to graduate from the same institution. The religious behaviors that the student is involved in include, but are not limited to, involvement in an Adventist Student Fellowship group on their college campus, active involvement in evangelism, mission work, or other activities associated with carrying out the mission of their faith. The committed Seventh-day Adventist student will be in good standing in their home church, with good standing defined as not currently under censorship by the church or disfellowshipped by the church for violating their baptismal vows.

*Sabbath day* will be defined as a worship period from sunset Friday evening to sunset Saturday evening (Bull & Lockhart, 1989; Ministerial Association, 1988).

*Spiritual experience* will refer to a student's manifestation of religious faith within the university setting. This can include, but is not limited to, regular worship,

participation in bible study, involvement with campus religious organizations, and evangelistic outreach efforts.

*Secular institutions* will refer to colleges or universities that are public in nature and private non-religiously affiliated institutions.

### **Rationale**

Spirituality is a component of student development that has not been addressed in depth in the execution of theory in student affairs (Astin, 2004). Spirituality has been distinguished from religion in higher education, with spirituality seen as a broad umbrella under which religion falls. The study of spirituality among college students performed by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) indicated students have a strong interest in spiritual matters (Astin & Astin, 2003). According to the HERI report, 58% place high value on integrating spirituality into their lives, more than 66% report having had a spiritual experience, 65% question their religious or spiritual beliefs occasionally, and 68% feel unsettled about religious matters. Approximately 76% of respondents struggle to understand evil, suffering, and death, 50% felt angry with God, and 38% felt disillusioned with their religious upbringing. Even though students are reporting these spiritual interests, student affairs administrators rarely discuss spiritual or religious issues, or the impact or importance of religion in students' lives.

Higher education administrators struggle to understand religiously committed students at public institutions because years of public and institutional policy regarding the separation of church and state have resulted in secular institutions that do not address issues of spirituality or religion (Astin, 2004; Speck, 2007). Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Erikson have posited theories of moral development that are usually studied by student

affairs administrators (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1988). From these theories, Fowler and Parks developed faith development theories, but these theories are rarely put into professional practice in higher education due to their failure to address the unique experiences of college students (Fowler, 2004; Small, 2008). Administrators view issues of spirituality and religion as the personal domain of the student, not to be broached in academia (Speck, 2007); however, the student affairs profession is grounded in the personal development of students. As such, it cannot claim to be committed to the holistic development of the student and fail to address the spiritual dimension of student development.

The spiritual dimension is seen as the part of the person that connects all the other developmental pieces (Astin, 2004). When religiously affiliated students are examined, they are either categorized as oppressed in their experiences (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006) or stunted in their developmental growth, causing them to miss out on crucial developmental opportunities (Small, 2009). Faith development theory, as posited by Fowler and Parks, classifies students who still hold to their religious beliefs in the fashion of most organized religions as being in an adolescent stage of development, whereby the questioning of the doctrine of their beliefs is not investigated (Fowler, 1981; 2004; Small, 2009).

Students who identify themselves as religious minorities, such as Evangelical Christians, Muslims, and Jewish students, experience a wide variety of challenges and issues, especially certain religious affiliations (e.g. Muslim and Jewish students) where their religious affiliation is linked to their cultural background (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Resnick, 1996; Small, 2009). Some students, depending on their religious orientation and

commitment, experience disillusionment and let go of their religious beliefs. Other students hold on to their religious beliefs, which can lead to a sense of isolation. Even though students who claim a religious faith can experience this sense of isolation, there are students who are successful at holding to their religious faiths and succeeding at the college level.

Seventh-day Adventist students tend to go to school in higher numbers due to the desire to get jobs that allow them to adhere to Sabbath-keeping guidelines. According to Sahlin and Richardson (2008), 61% of Adventist church members are college graduates. Seventh-day Adventist students, by virtue of their faith and doctrine, enter the higher education arena prepared to be potentially isolated, or seen as “peculiar” due to their faith and the mission of their church (Ministerial Association, 1988). Many of these students are choosing to attend school at public or secular institutions, as seen by the development of the Center for Adventist Ministry to Public University Students (C.A.M.P.U.S.), which provides outreach services to students matriculating at secular campuses (C.A.M.P.U.S. web site, 2010).

Seventh-day Adventist parents typically raise their children in their faith, preparing them for what their faith considers the coming times of trouble and the advent of Jesus Christ as prophesied in the books of Daniel and Revelation in the Bible (Bible, 1994; Bull & Lockhart, 1989). The church is called to be a mission, evangelizing and spreading the message of the Bible according to the commission given by Jesus prior to his ascension to heaven (Bible, 1994; Ministerial Association, 1988). One of the distinctive features of the Adventist faith is an insistence that adherents be knowledgeable

about the world they live in and the faith they profess to ensure that they can carry out Christ's commission in the book of Matthew:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost; Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, Amen. (1994, p. 1353)

One of the church founders, Ellen G. White, encouraged youth to attain education so that they could use their education to further the mission of the church:

If the influence of our college is what it should be, the youth who are educated there will be enabled to discern God and glorify Him in all His work; and while engaged in cultivating the faculties which God has given them, they will be preparing to render Him more efficient service. (1887, p. 418)

Traditionally, Seventh-day Adventists have developed their own educational K-16 institutions to educate their constituents and ward off what they perceive as the potentially harmful influences of secular education (White, 1908). Many Seventh-day Adventist students choose to matriculate at public or secular institutions of higher education for various reasons, including financial access, location, and preferred course of study (Rowe, 2004).

Adventists live their lives and their faith under the premise of sola scriptura, a concept heralded during the Protestant Reformation, which holds the writings of the Bible as the source of doctrine, truth, and the standard of living (Ministerial Association, 1988; White, 1911). All doctrine, theory, and values are to be measured against the Bible. If confirmation of their veracity cannot be found there, they are to be discarded as

error. The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and particularly the North American Division of the church, struggles internally with the execution of this founding doctrine of faith. Dr. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Director of Public Campus Ministries, devoted a book to the influence of “worldly issues,” which appear to be a source of division to the church (2001). In the book, *Must We Be Silent: Issues Dividing Our Church* (2001), Dr. Pipim discusses the impact that racially segregated conferences, issues of sexual orientation, the acceptance of homosexuality in the church, women in roles of leadership at the church, and other concerns that parallel efforts at increasing interculturalism at the university level have on the Seventh-day Adventist church body.

Over 50% of individuals who are members of the world church have, at minimum, bachelors degrees if not more advanced college degrees (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). With so many of them earning degrees from secular and/or public institutions, those interested in student persistence and degree completion would benefit from knowing committed Seventh-day Adventist students experience secular institutions. It is not currently known how committed Seventh-day Adventist students succeed at graduating from colleges at over a 50% rate. It is also not known how Seventh-day Adventist students succeed at completing college while holding on to their faith, especially in the secular higher education environment.

### **Research Problem Statement**

Research has shown that college students value spirituality, and shape, refine, and rebuild their spiritual beliefs through their college experiences (Lee, 2000; Laurence, 1999). In previous studies, students have indicated that, although they are introduced to a variety of different philosophical ideas, their commitment to their religious beliefs

remains. Additionally, they report feeling somewhat alienated from the larger campus community because of their beliefs (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007). Catholicism and evangelical Christianity have been explored in these studies (Lulofs, 1994; Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007; Small, 2009), but few studies focus on or include Seventh-day Adventist Christians and their experiences in secular institutions. Seventh-day Adventists attend secular universities in increasing numbers (Rowe, 2004), and many receive support through campus ministry groups to assist in their transition and matriculation (C.A.M.P.U.S. website, 2010). What is not known is if they experience the same alienation as other students from the larger campus community as a result of adhering to their beliefs. There is no research examining if they are limited in their participation in what many described as a full campus experience, and if they do experience this what effect it has on their adjustment to the college experience. Further, there is no description or research available about how Seventh-day Adventist students successfully navigate the secular university environment through to graduation while maintaining their distinct spiritual identities.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this heuristically grounded phenomenological study was to discover, describe, and understand the experiences of nine committed Seventh-day Adventist students at secular institutions of higher education in the Midwest and northeast regions of the United States. In particular, this study will examine how their religious lives intersect with their campus experiences. There is little to no research in this area, and the research that does exist is outdated. With the recent change in culture

regarding multicultural and intercultural issues, the experiences of these students would shed light on how they negotiate their religion and the secular university environment.

This study was designed to help researchers and administrators understand more about how distinctive groups of students who adhere to a specific religious faith navigate the public university environment while maintaining their spiritual beliefs. By studying Seventh-day Adventist students, I hoped to add to a body of knowledge that explains how students who adhere to a non-traditional religious faith in higher education manage to successfully persist and graduate, opening the door to discussions that allow theorists and administrators to reevaluate the way holistic student development is defined.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were explored:

1. What is the essence of the Seventh-day Adventist student experience:
  - a. ...In relation to campus life at a secular university?
  - b. ...In relation to academic life at a secular university?
2. How do Seventh-day Adventist students negotiate the higher education environment while maintaining their distinct spiritual beliefs and practices?

### **Significance of Study**

Laurence (1999), in his review of the 1996 Education as Transformation Project, determined that issues of religion and spirituality need to be addressed due to the large number of students who reported that they participate in organized religion. College chaplains surveyed in this study reported a 74% increase in religious diversity among their students (1999). The issues surrounding student spirituality are systemic and to address religious diversity requires a systemic response (Laurence, 1999). A systemic



response requires a knowledge base regarding the experiences of religiously committed students that is lacking in the literature. Higher education deals with students during a crucial point in their spiritual and personal development. The college years are a time where students are beginning to critically examine their personal beliefs with a lens separate from that of their family upbringing. As such, an understanding of the ways that these religious experiences manifest themselves on college campuses as it relates to adhering to a specific religious dogma is crucial to serving our student populations.

Lee (2000) indicates that “religious beliefs or lack thereof offer insight into human drives, hopes, and reasoning as well as perceptions of the self in relation to others and the physical world” (p. 4). According to her research, college can be a very secularizing experience for many students; however, Seventh-day Adventist students appear to be matriculating with their religious identities intact. According to Dr. Pipim, “a substantial number of Adventist students are currently studying in public colleges and universities” (Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists web site). Their presence presents what he sees as opportunities and challenges. One of those challenges is maintaining their faith while in a “secular” environment (Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists web site). One of the ways the Adventist church addresses these challenges is by providing support through the C.A.M.P.U.S. outreach program (C.A.M.P.U.S. web site, 2010). The program provides training and guidance for Adventist students who wish to develop fellowship and support groups on their campuses. Vastly different levels of support are provided by institutions, usually in the form of student initiated and run groups that receive support from community

organizations. While some campuses can be very supportive of students in their desire to adhere to their faith, other campuses may not provide as much support for their students.

Kuh and Gonyea (2006) conducted a study that showed students who engage in spiritual development are more involved in a variety of life activities. They tend to commit more hours to volunteering and student organizations. The study also showed that students who felt the mission of the institution was inclusive of their pursuit of a spiritually developed and balanced life reported greater outcomes on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey, including a deepened sense of spirituality (Kuh & Gonyea, 2006). It would appear that Adventist students do not participate in the college environment on this level. Instead, it appears that they carve out their own identities with the support of local churches and the C.A.M.P.U.S. outreach program as evidenced by their participation in evangelistic efforts (C.A.M.P.U.S. web site, 2010).

Because spiritual development is inextricably linked to human development (Love & Talbot, 1999), it cannot be ignored or separated from the work of helping students become whole and well-rounded individuals. While we recognize students will not be fully developed before they graduate, professionals in higher education are positioned to allow students to begin work on their development that can last a lifetime. Research is needed to create a firm knowledge base from which student affairs professionals can draw information and shape their practices to meet the needs of students who use religion as a way of exploring their spirituality. This research is designed to open up avenues of discussion with students who experience faith in a way that is often considered non-traditional. These discussions can lead to greater understanding of the faith experiences of students who choose to adhere to their faith and

guide administrators in creating supportive environments that foster the growth and matriculation experiences of these students. The research can inform practitioners as they work towards creating educational initiatives and an inclusive environment where religiously committed students can navigate higher education without potentially feeling pressured to choose between their faith and their education, or without feeling isolated in the educational environment. This is particularly important since spirituality in a holistic form is not included in the search for student development programming models or educational interventions.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Many variables influence the student experience in the university environment. While this study proposes to examine the experience of non-traditional religious affiliation, additional factors such as age, racial and ethnic background, and gender play a role in how an individual experiences a college environment. Many of the original student development theories examined the experiences of White American men. Most student development theories tend to be one-dimensional. In other words, they examine one aspect of identity and attempt to control for the presence of other aspects of identity. Examples of such theories include racial identity development, queer theory, and moral development theories. Other theories are re-written to include groups that were not traditionally studied during the formation of these theories while still examining spirituality from a one-dimensional framework.

Additional variables that influence the student experience for the purposes of this study include the method of entry into the church as well as the student experience of commitment to their faith. More and more individuals are joining the Seventh-day

Adventist church through friendship evangelism and are not necessarily born into the church (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). Given some of the challenges the world church is facing regarding issues of inclusion and equity for traditionally underrepresented groups such as women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals, one committed individual may have a very different way of expressing their faith in the college environment compared to another. A committed Seventh-day Adventist may be engaged in the religious activities associated with the church and be in what the church calls “good standing”, but also hold different views regarding the doctrines the church finds itself struggling with. Faith development theory discusses the development of faith across a wide spectrum in a way that addresses these issues, but does not look at the unique experiences of college students. The presence of all these variables as potential influences on the college experience leads me to believe that the framework of intersectionality will help us to understand which identity is most relevant in the experience of the Seventh-day Adventist college student.

Intersectionality, or the model of multiple dimensions of identity, was born out of feminist and queer theory and is defined as “relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations” (McCall, 2005, p. 1777). According to Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007), the concept of intersectionality provides a way of understanding the relationships between and among social identities that are both culturally and personally created by the individual. The underlying rationale for this framework is the fact that identity is a social construct associated with an individual by society. Other models of student development exist in a vacuum of individual constructs, such as critical race theory. Post-modernism helps us to better understand that identity,

cultural norms, and shared experiences do not exist as dichotomies, but as an interweaving or intersection of these identities based on experiences and context (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

Intersectionality looks at the importance of an identity being more or less “salient” or powerful in an experience based on the context in which a person is experiencing a situation (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The ability to develop an identity that is integrated in a healthy way is linked to the ability to filter out social norms and peer influences that override the core sense of self (Abes & Jones, 2004).

The Seventh-day Adventist church has a diverse demographic of people (Seventh-day Adventist church website, 2010). The doctrine of the church includes a belief that the members of the church are “the Remnant,” the people who remain loyal to God in spite of Satan’s attack on the church (Ministerial Association, 1988). It is the responsibility of this remaining group of people to spread the doctrine of the church and the Bible throughout the world. This loyalty to God and to the church, in addition to seeing the loyal followers as a persecuted people, may create an identity and a group culture as church members that are more salient than racial identity, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. While these other aspects of their identity may play a part in how they view their experiences, the concept of intersectionality helps us understand which of their identities is most salient in their experiences in the college environment and why that particular aspect of their identity rises to prominence.

### **Methodology Overview**

The researcher engaged in a phenomenological study in order to examine student experiences as Seventh-day Adventists at public universities and colleges.

Phenomenology was most useful for this study because the experiences of several students regarding the phenomenon of being a Seventh-day Adventist at a public university will give a clearer picture of the experience and produce themes for further study. The approach of Moustakas' heuristic research helped provide a rich description of the students studied and assisted the researcher in developing themes that relate to the students' experience (Creswell, 2007). Heuristic research is designed to take individual descriptions of experiences and develop universal meanings from them (Moustakas, 1994). The "self" of the researcher is present during the process of research, which allows a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Heuristic research is often classified as phenomenology, but Moustakas believed heuristic research design to be distinct from traditional phenomenological methods. Traditional phenomenology requires a pure objective, almost detached view of the experience being studied (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic research, by contrast, encourages connection and the development of a relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1990). My membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church, my experiences as a student, and my work as a student affairs administrator will be used as an asset to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences traditional students live at public universities.

The students interviewed were recruited from public universities and colleges in New York and Michigan. In a Pew Forum study (2009) examining the importance of religion and rate of attendance at worship, New York ranked 39<sup>th</sup> out of 46 states in terms of the percentage of individuals indicating that they attended worship services on a regular basis. Compared to a national average of 56% of individuals indicating that

religion was important to them, 46% of New York residents agreed that religion was important to them. In an environment that may be considered to be less religious than the national average and in the bottom 10 in terms of state rankings, a conclusion could be drawn that New York universities may be more secular than universities in other areas of the country. Michigan was chosen due to its setting as the birthplace of the Adventist church movement (Bull & Lockhart, 1989; Mitchell, 1958). In addition, a 1990 study conducted showed Michigan was in the top 10 of states with number of Adventist adherents, and in the top 25 of counties with largest percentage of Adventist adherents (Church Growth Research Center, 1990). As such, it provides a more likely place to find committed Adventist students. Studying students who observe the doctrines of the church will assist the researcher in getting a clearer picture of the experiences and adaptation strategies developed by those who choose to follow this faith.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Overview**

There continues to be a lack of research on the experiences of religiously committed students in higher education. As more and more students express interest in exploring matters of spirituality and religious faith, higher education administrators need to act to ensure that our campus environments are a welcoming environment for students who are pursuing this aspect of their identity. Student development theory has declared that the spiritual dimension of the student is a part of holistic development. However, higher education has been reluctant to address that aspect of student development in our practices and programming.

There is a gap in the research regarding the experiences of religious students in educational institutions. This literature review will critically examine issues linked to religious identity and the subject of spirituality in higher education. I will begin by discussing spirituality as it relates to the college experience. I will then discuss student engagement and student involvement. It is important to have a basic understanding of these concepts when talking about the student experience in public university settings as much of the work in higher education focuses on retention measures that utilize the concept of student engagement in the campus community.

I will then examine student development theory as it relates to the faith development in the college, specifically focusing on Kohlberg's theory of moral development. It is important to understand prior attempts to categorize faith issues into separate distinct categories, and many theories that examine faith use Kohlberg's theory



as a foundational basis for their theory. Next, I will examine faith identity development, specifically the benefits and shortcomings of this theory as it relates to faith development in the college student experience. I will then discuss intersectionality as a conceptual framework, which may lend the most accurate explanation as to the nature of the religious student's experience. The religious experiences of students from three religious frames, Islam, Judaism, and Evangelical Christianity will be reviewed. Finally, a review of the Seventh-day Adventists will be explored, including a demographic profile, philosophy of religious faith, and educational doctrine.

## **Spirituality in Higher Education**

### **Definitions**

Spirituality has been given many definitions by researchers in seeking to understand the student experience in higher education. Zajonc (2003) defines spirituality as “those immaterial dimensions that give life its meaning and purpose” (p. 50). Clark (2001) defines it as the part of the person that is distinct from the mind. Love (2001) uses Sharon Daloz Parks' definition of spirituality, explaining it as “a search for meaning, transcendence, wholeness, and purpose” (p. 8). Allen and Kellom (2001) define it as “soul work”, discovering what gives our lives meaning (p. 48). Often the terms holistic and whole are used when referring to spirituality (Laurence, 1999). Astin (2004) sees spirituality as having two elements. The first is the “interior” or “subjective life” of the individual as it relates to their consciousness (p. 34). The second element of spirituality involves

the values that we hold most dear, our sense of who we are and where we come from, our beliefs about why we are here-the meaning and purpose that we see in

our work and our life-and our sense of connectedness to each other and to the world around us. (p. 34)

Laurence (1999) describes spirituality as a way of “transcending the limitations of traditional religion” (p. 12). Spirituality is viewed as a more holistic experience than religion can provide. Allen and Kellom (2001) look at a separation between what they call religiosity, or institutionalized religion, and spiritual dimensions. Spirituality is seen as key to further growth, and is tied to physical, emotional, psychological, social, environmental, and intellectual progress. Astin (2004), and Allen and Kellom (2001) indicate that spirituality flows from the belief that all human beings are connected to one another. Due to the fragmentation of daily life, human beings have no time to create significant connections with others in order to do the spiritual work necessary to create a healthy and balanced individual.

Most researchers agree that at the heart of spiritual development is connection and relationship with other individuals. Although spirituality and religion are used interchangeably, for those on the front line of student development theory religion is a separate issue from spirituality.

Anderson (1995) defined religion as “a set of beliefs that answers the question of the ultimate nature of the universe” (p. 12). Religion also involves a community of like minded believers, which is critical as the adherents search for meaning (Anderson, 1995). Yasuno, Choi, and Bryant (2003) indicate that religious adherence is characterized by attendance at services, discussions, prayer and/or meditation, and participation in religious clubs or groups. Love (2002) defines religion as having three elements. They include the quest for the “ultimate in experience” (p. 358), a symbolic representation of

the ultimate experience, and a reflection on the experience in the form of faith and doctrine. Faith is seen as the substance of the relationships between people and how they find each other in those relationships (Love, 2002). Rogers and Dantly (2001) define religion as an outward public process of an internal spirituality. As such, religion is a behavioral expression of spirituality.

Ultimately spirituality, according to Love, is not separate from religion, nor is religion a lower subset of spirituality (2002). “Spirituality is at the core of religion” (Love, 2002 p. 358). Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003) indicate that although many researchers attempt to do so, it is important not to dichotomize religion from spirituality, or paint religion as a negative with spirituality being the positive polar opposite.

### **Spirituality and Higher Education**

According to Lee (2002), religion has been neglected in higher education research, even though most agree that “religion is a powerful force for many in shaping individual values, providing an overall sense of purpose, forming connections with others, and building a sense of community” (p. 369). Despite the faith-based origins of most collegiate institutions in the United States (Geiger, 2005; Speck, 2007), most public institutions of higher education have attempted to secularize their campuses, effectively choosing to ignore or avoid discussions of spirituality in the academic environment (Allen & Kellom, 2001; Rogers & Dantly, 2001; VanZanten Gallagher, 2007). Although faculty and staff members report high levels of personal spiritual and religious involvement (Moran & Curtis, 2004; VanZanten Gallagher, 2007), very few agree or deliberately engage students in discussions of spirituality. The reasons for this reluctance vary, but include fear of personal persecution for expressing an opinion contrary to the

culture of the institution (Moran & Curtis, 2004), a desire to keep separate matters of spirituality and academia (VanZanten Gallagher, 2007), a preference for science over spirituality (Rogers & Dantly, 2001; Speck, 2007), perceived challenges to academic freedom in the classroom (Kaplan, 2006), or an outright intolerance of overt displays of religious behaviors (Moran & Curtis, 2004; Stockton, 2001).

Allen and Kellom (2001) found that organizational and individual support from faculty and staff in higher education environments is crucial to students being able to develop the spiritual aspect of their lives. The bifurcated lives of college administrators lead them to ignore the spiritual development of the students (Rogers & Dantly, 2001; VanZanten Gallagher, 2007). Faculty and staff reluctance to discuss spirituality or religion in their own lives can lead to a religious decline in students and creates an environment where faculty and staff, unable to address the issues in their personal lives, are incapable of helping students address them in their lives (Bryant, Choi, & Yasuno, 2003; Rogers and Dantly, 2001). The college environment introduces students to contradictory beliefs, which creates a dissonance that can help a student move from one developmental stage to another (Lee, 2000). An environment where dialogue is encouraged, openness is valued, and individuals feel free to express themselves without fear of reprisal contributes to the spiritual development of students and helps resolve the dissonance they experience (Allen & Kellom, 2001; Lee, 2000).

Rogers and Dantly (2001) observed that in higher education we avoid discussions of spirituality as a holistic concept. Instead, we break spirituality down into a discussion of various concepts that constitute the spiritual journey. These concepts include community building, civic engagement, citizenship, character education, and service

learning. The insistence of academia on valuing intellect over spirituality impacts our treatment of spirituality in the educational arena (Rogers & Dantly, 2001). For some students who adhere to certain religious beliefs, spirituality and religion are inextricably linked to each other (Love & Talbot, 1999; Lulofs, 1994; White, 1923). The individual concepts that higher education has broken into separate issues constitute a cohesive and interrelated whole for students seeking a spiritual experience. As such, student affairs may make distinctions between religion and spirituality but must also recognize that for some students organized religion is a valid way of discovering their spirituality (Love & Talbot, 1999).

Small's (2009) engaged in a qualitative study of 21 undergraduates regarding spiritual growth and religious diversity. Small's study used interfaith dialogues to examine how religious and non-religious ideas interact with spiritual growth, student perceptions of the religious beliefs of their peers, and how religious privilege and marginalization intersect with identity. She found that the "religious and nonreligious frames through which the students view the world also affected which issues they found contentious, the connections they forged with each other, and their self-understanding" (p. 13). Religion can be a way of developing a stronger sense of spiritual self (Small, 2009). For students who hold to a specific religious doctrine, social acceptance of the religion is an indicator of how much the person feels they can grow spiritually (Small, 2009). Students who find their religious groups marginalized on campus may develop what Small (2009) calls an "ambiguous identity", or develop stress due to the need to resolve the conflict between their religious identity and the social mores of the society in which they live (p.13).

Astin (2004) explains that spirituality points to how we experience our lives. Spirituality involves the quality of our experiences, the values that are most important to us, and the meaning and purpose we have in our lives. Currently, student values are focused on exterior and materialistic gains, as opposed to the work of making meaning of life (Astin, 2004). This change follows the shift in focus of most educational institutions, which increasingly look at measurable outcomes and overlook affective gains (Astin, 2004). The focus has shifted to student retention and focuses less on the quality of life of the students being retained. Programs are created to entertain them instead of examining the culture of the campus and the relationships among people that might be a significant factor in retention efforts (Astin, 2004).

Institutional missions indicate a need to help students develop to their fullest potential. As such, colleges and universities must be willing to help students identify skills and abilities that help them with their spiritual development (VanZanten Gallagher, 2007). Faculty and staff members need to be open to the spiritual dimensions of themselves so they may begin to assist students in developing as holistic human beings (Allen & Kellom 2001). Love and Talbot (1999) indicate that failing to address the spiritual development of students is to ignore a critical area of their development, which fails to help students grow and develop during the college years. Failing to address this area may lead to a “general narrowness of perspective and an inability or unwillingness to think critically, explore value-related issues, and question authorities” (p. 363).

According to Rogers and Dantly (2001), campus communities should be purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebratory. However, in our attempts to embrace difference often some segments of the population are asked to cast away their

personal beliefs because their personal beliefs do not necessarily affirm the choices of others. “Just as we in student affairs emphasize the whole student, we need to attend to our whole person in the way we structure student affairs organizations, collaborate with our colleagues, and educate students” (Rogers & Dantly, 2001 p. 595). While we recognize students will not be fully developed before they graduate, professionals in this area are positioned to allow students to begin work on their development that can last a lifetime.

### **Student Engagement and Student Involvement Theory in Higher Education**

Student engagement has been a part of student affairs and higher educational literature for over seventy years in various forms (Kuh, 2009). The definition of student engagement has evolved from Tyler’s concept of time on task in the 1930’s through the current concepts specifically labeled as student engagement as postulated by Kuh, Schuh, and others (Kuh, 2009). Student engagement is a modern take on student involvement theory. It is a term that refers to “the quality of effort and involvement in productive learning activities” (Kuh, 2009, p. 6). Education officials have attempted many ways of measuring student engagement and involvement over the years, with the most current and widely used measure being the National Survey of Student Engagement, also referred to as NSSE (Kuh, 2003; Kuh, 2009). Astin’s theory of involvement appears to be the most relied upon theory when discussing issues of student engagement and student persistence in higher education.

Astin (1999) defines student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). This definition includes time spent in study, involvement in campus activities, and interaction

with faculty, staff, and other students. Involvement is measured by behavior, not just by attitudes or opinions. The theory of involvement has five premises. The first is that involvement is indicated by how much time the student puts into various activities or “objects” (Astin, 1999, p. 519). This time can be psychological or physical and the object can be generalized to an experience or specific to a task. The second is that involvement is measured on a continuum. As such, it is specific to the individual student and may look differently for each individual.

Third, there are qualitative and quantitative features to student involvement. Astin gives an example of student time as a quantitative feature, and a type of study as qualitative feature. Essentially, we can measure student involvement from different angles. Fourth, the amount of learning that takes place is proportionate to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program” (p. 519). Fifth, the ability of a program to be effective depends on the capacity of the program to engage students.

The theory of student involvement considers student learning to be an active process. Simple exposure to material or experiences is not enough (Astin, 1999). Many theories of student development appear to focus on what educators are doing. Astin postulates that the focus should be shifted on what the student is doing and what is motivating them to take part in specific activities (1999). Policies, procedures, and programs at the institutional level will directly affect how a student gets involved in the campus environment and where their focus is while at the institution. If the policies of an institution pave the way for a student to engage in purposeful activities that promote student learning, they are more likely to persist beyond their first year of school (Kuh, Cruce, & Shoup, 2008). The challenge is to identify and connect with activities that the



student finds meaningful and that open up their minds to the learning process. Student Life and Student Activities' departments at universities tend to offer a variety of clubs and programs for students to connect to, including faith-based organizations. Examples of such organizations include Intervarsity Christian Fellowship and Campus Crusade for Christ at Grand Valley State University, Jewish Student Union (Hillel) at State University of New York at Oswego, Latter Day Saint Student Organization at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay, and the Muslim Student Association at Western Washington University.

### **Student Development Theory**

Student development theory has evolved from several psychosocial, cognitive, and behavioral theories in psychology and sociology. Practitioners tend to pull from several different theories to explain, predict, and develop interventions for students. Usually these theories include moral development theories, racial identity development theories, queer theory, and social justice frameworks. While these theories help explain certain demographics and how they impact the student experience in higher education, they fail to take into account the impact of faith development and its impact on the student experience. One theory used to understand student development on a spiritual level is Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Kohlberg's theory has inspired additional re-workings of his theory based on groups not originally studied in the original sample. Fowler used Kohlberg's theory as one of many in his work on faith identity development. A review of Kohlberg shows that he broke down components of what many believe constitute faith into separate concepts, examining student development along those lines.

Kohlberg, drawing upon the work of Piaget, focused on the cognitive aspect of developing moral reasoning. Kohlberg was interested in the reasoning that leads to moral decision-making (Evans, Forney, Guido-DiBrito, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Kohlberg believed that social interaction and environment impacted the development of cognitive structures that impact moral development (Bruess & Pearson, 2000; Kohlberg, 1971; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1979). Kohlberg performed a 20-year longitudinal designed to validate the findings in his theory (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Liberman, 1983; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). In Kohlberg's study, he interviewed 58 adolescent boys from 1956 to 1968. The boys were divided by age, socioeconomic status, and social class and interviewed six times in three to four year intervals. The boys were asked to judge nine hypothetical moral dilemmas. He subsequently interviewed the same boys from 1968 to 1976.

Kohlberg's theory consists of three levels with two stages in each level. The first level is the Pre-conventional level. The stages under the Pre-conventional Level are gradual, beginning with a person responding to cultural rules and responding to those rules out of fear of physical punishment or reprisal, or reward for obedience (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977; Kohlberg, 1971). The second stage of the Pre-conventional level consists of right action inspired by a market-based relationship (Kohlberg, 1971).

The second level in Kohlberg's theory is the Conventional Level. The earliest stage of the Conventional Level consists of the individual maintaining the expectations of the group, the family, or other community. The maintenance of these expectations carry their own value, and the individual expresses a devout loyalty to supporting and justifying the sense of order developed by the group (Kohlberg, 1971). The second stage

of the Conventional level involves the individual judging the moral correctness of behavior by the intentions of the person expressing the behavior. Approval is earned by being nice. The general premise of this stage is characterized by an orientation towards authority and social order within a group.

The third level of Kohlberg's theory is the Post-Conventional Level. Kohlberg described these stages as an individual moving into a more mature level of faith, defined by a clear effort to separate personal values from the mandate of authority figures. Individual rights are agreed upon by society, who helps to determine correct action. Laws are changeable based upon the needs and common agreement of the members of the group or society.

As a whole, Kohlberg considered moral judgment a purely cognitive process based on justice, care for others, responsibility, and self-respect (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Kohlberg was driven to examine and further develop his theory based on deficits he saw in the educational system (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). In his opinion, an assumption existed in compulsory education that schools should be value neutral. This value neutral state was assumed based on the separation of the church and state. However, Kohlberg believed that the teaching process was full of value issues, and that the socialization that takes place in the educational environment was a roundabout way of touching on moral issues (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). He believed that education should advance not only intellectual development but moral development as well. Kohlberg believed the school environment, with norms of acceptable behavior and conflict among developing individuals, was a breeding ground for the development of moral judgment.

Kohlberg felt that ultimately, the cognitive process that helps with moral judgment leads individuals to understand the concepts of justice that are at the heart of moral judgment and moral reasoning. Kohlberg's (1977) definition of justice was three fold. First, justice "guarantees freedom of belief" (pg. 56). Second, justice "employs a philosophically justifiable concept of morality" (pg 56). Third, moral judgment is based on psychological factors influencing human development. The absence of justice in a person's moral reasoning strategy is an indicator of their developmental stage.

While Kohlberg's theory provides a clear definition of the stages traveled to reach a level of mature moral reasoning, the theory is not without flaws. Although Kohlberg claimed that his findings could be generalized to different cultures, his initial sample consisted of adolescent boys (Evans, Forney, & Guido Di-Brito, 1998). He took the research developed from the study of these children and attempted to validate it to other cultures as opposed to creating clean studies of the cultures themselves as a way of cross-referencing his findings from his original sample with the other cultural samples. The Defining Issues Test, which was developed as a way of validating Kohlberg's theory, was proven to be flawed due to validity threats (Kay, 1982). Kohlberg himself stated that the capacity to make moral judgments did not always translate into moral behaviors or actions (1977). Kohlberg's theory is grounded in the concept of justice being a concept that varies from person to person but that finds universality among groups of people. In Christian communities in general and in the Seventh-day Adventist community specifically, justice is a concept that is divinely defined and that is to be tested against the tenets of the Bible (Bible, 1994; Ministerial Association, 1988). The goal of Seventh-day Adventist Christian doctrine is to bring the adherents into a maturity of faith and

development that resembles that of Christ (Ministerial Association, 1988; White, 1898; 1911). Kohlberg's theory would indicate that Seventh-day Adventist Christians are split between the Pre-Conventional Level Stage 1 and the Conventional Level Stage 4 areas. Given that Kohlberg's stages are gradual and progressive, this theory would not provide us with the necessary understanding of moral development necessary to explain their faith expression, specifically in the college environment. A theory that provides some insight regarding student experience as it relates to spirituality is Fowler's Faith Development.

### **Faith Development Theory**

Faith development theory, created by James Fowler, was grounded in Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Erickson's theory of psychosocial development. Fowler's Methodist upbringing shaped his interest and development of the theory (Fowler, 2004). The goal of the theory is not to assist in stage advancement, but to help shape the interaction of higher education professionals in their involvement and interaction with members of religious faiths. Fowler's interest in faith development stems from his assumption that faith is a necessity for the human experience (Fowler, 1981). The formation of faith, regardless of a connection to a specific religion, guides our relationships with others (Fowler, 1981). Similar to Love's definition (1999), Fowler determined that faith, much like spirituality, provides meaning to our lives and our relationships to others.

In respect to faith development theory, Fowler (1981) defines faith as "a dynamic pattern of personal trust in and loyalty to a center or centers of value" (p. 32) and our loyalty to that center of value. The center of value is described as something that attracts

our devotion and loyalty, which further impacts how we form relationships and connections with others (Fowler, 1981). Most attempts at understanding faith and spirituality focus on the cognitive aspects of this dimension, but the purpose of faith development theory is to understand the essence of faith and faith development at a deeper level (Fowler, 2004). Additional dimensions of faith development theory look at the interweaving of emotion, discernment, response to authority, social awareness, world coherence, and the function of symbols in the religious life (Fowler, 2004).

The development of the theory involved interviews with over 500 individuals ranging in ages from four to 84. The participants included representatives from the Protestant denomination, Catholicism, and Judaism. The sample was primarily White. From these interviews Fowler postulates six stages of theory development (1981). Stage one is called Intuitive/Projective faith. This stage is primarily fantasy based and found in younger individuals between the ages of three and seven.

Stage two is called Mythic/Literal faith. During this stage individuals take on beliefs, stories, and symbols that reflect their membership in a community of faith. The beliefs are typically connected to moral attitudes and the stories are usually one-dimensional, but they give unity to the believers of shared experiences. The world is seen as being based on reciprocity, fairness, and justice. Individuals at this stage exhibit their faith by working for righteousness in a literal sense. They have a sense of needing justice to be perfect.

Stage three is called Synthetic/Conventional faith. This stage typically appears during early adolescence, and is characterized by a worldview that extends beyond the immediate family to include school, peer relationships, media, and societal influences.

For some individuals, this stage becomes permanent stop on the continuum of faith development. The individual has developed an ideology in which their beliefs and values are formed but is not necessarily consciously aware that this ideology exists. As a result of this lack of awareness, differences contrary to the individual's ideology are seen as personal differences as opposed to ideological differences.

Stage four is called Individuative/Reflective faith. During this stage individuals begin to take responsibility for their own commitments, lifestyles, beliefs, and behaviors. Instead of viewing the world in absolutes in relation to authority, individuals in this stage begin to critically examine the tensions between being individuals and being part of a group, subjective realities versus the absolute nature of faith, and self-actualization versus service for others. The transition to this stage can be triggered by the process of leaving home for college, but some do not begin this transition until they are in their 30s or 40s. Some individuals may not reach this stage at all.

Stage five is called Conjunctive faith. Very few individuals reach this level of what Fowler describes as actualization (Fowler, 1981). This stage involves opening yourself to a deeper faith experience and developing the ability to be pluralistic in your beliefs when interacting with others that have different faith ideologies.

The final stage is called Universalization. This stage is exceedingly rare as it involves using the integrated self to transform the world by effecting large scale change. Some individuals who have been identified as reaching this stage have given their lives to effect the change they believe will make the world better.

According to Small (2008), most college students begin college in the midst of stage 3. Some college students are able to transition into stage 4 or are transformed by

their collegiate experiences enough to begin moving towards stage 4. Love (2001) describes Sharon Daloz Parks' redefinition of Fowler's faith stages, adding a distinct stage specifically focused on the development of college students. Parks theorizes that most college students experience faith in a manner that is very dependent on authority and dualistic in focus. The collegiate experiences begin to break down these absolute forms of knowing, allowing students to engage in their own critical thinking and reasoning skills surrounding issues of faith and spirituality (Love, 2001). The complexity of the world becomes more real to the students, opening the door for students to begin constructing their own meaning of faith, spirituality, and how religion plays a role in that construction.

Fowler (2004), Streib (2003), and other researchers agree that one of the drawbacks of faith development theory is its inherently mainstream Christian bias. The sample population explored was primarily Christian, and not very ethnically diverse. There is no distinction as to whether or not the participants in the study were experiencing or had experience in the college environment. Streib (2003) indicates that there is question over the ability for the theory to truly be generalized to women. While some researchers like Small (2008) attempted to draw parallels and examine faith trajectory of non-Christian groups from Fowler's faith development theory lens, difficulties arose when trying to explain or control for the intersection of faith, culture, minority status, and societal influences on faith development and expression.

Piper (2002) challenged the theory's stages. According to his analysis, most individuals appear to experience stages three, four, and five simultaneously as opposed to hierarchically (Piper, 2002). Piper indicated that the lack of empirical support that would



be provided by longitudinal follow-ups that have not been published calls into question the validity of the model (2002). The theory also lacks a critical examination of the unique experiences of college students, which often differ drastically than their non-collegiate peers. As such, it may provide limited insight into the faith development experiences of college students.

The challenge with discovering a theory that helps explain the experiences of religiously affiliated students in the college setting is the presence of multiple identities for each student. While there is a group identity by virtue of a shared faith, gender, race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and sexual orientation have an impact on the student experience in the college setting as well as in the execution of faith. As such, the framework of intersectionality may help us to better understand how religiously affiliated students experience college environments.

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is not a theory, but a conceptual framework that helps researchers to understand the unique experiences of diverse individuals who have multiple group identities. The concept of intersectionality was born out of legal studies and the scholarship of women of color in an attempt to make sense of impact of societal oppression on individuals with multiple subordinate group identities (Syed, 2010; Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). Women studies literature, specifically Black feminist studies, used intersectionality to better understand how multiple identities were experienced for women of color (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The scholarship of intersectionality and the examination of identities helped researchers understand that identities tend to be

experienced simultaneously, not hierarchically as many stage theories tend to posit (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

Intersectional work is about identity (Dill, in Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). The central tenet is that identity exists within a web of socially defined statuses. Which identity is salient depends on specific situations or specific historical moments (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Salience is defined as the aspect of identity that receives the most thought and most influences behavior within a certain context (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Identity can be defined as a set of social categories a person claims membership in and the meaning associated with those categories (Deaux, 1993). Identity is commonly understood as personally held beliefs about self in relation to social groups (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). While many believe that identity is mostly self-defined as one grows and interacts with their environment, Deaux (1993) theorizes that identity is more complex than self-definition. There are two types of identity (Deaux, 1993). The first type is personal identity, defined as a feeling of being different from others. This is defined in part by group membership. Traits and behaviors that are linked to an identity category are descriptive according to some people. The second type is social identity, which are shared group characteristics fueled by personal meaning. A person's social identity is linked to the group membership a person claims to represent.

According to Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007), identity is socially constructed, having both an individual and an institutional meaning that has social, historical, political, and cultural relevance. The construction of identity is usually developed through interactions with the broader social environment where the values of those considered to have power dictate the norms and expectations of society (Torres, Jones, &

Renn, 2009). The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) was developed from a grounded theory study of female college students and shows that identity cannot be explored as an isolated variable. A person's sense of self is influenced by the context of an experience (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). The core of the self, the valued personal attributes and characteristics that make a person who they are, is surrounded by the context in which a person experiences life. That context includes family, experiences, social, and cultural conditions (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). In order to understand the experiences of marginalized groups and how their social status influences identity development, researchers must examine the role of oppression in the development of identity (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). The reason for focusing on marginalized groups is that despite the existence of multiple identities, most people only react to the most visible and culturally salient set of these identities, even though those visible identities are not what solely define a person's experience (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Identity is never a question of self-authorship, because external influences will always have an impact on identity (Jones, 2009). An African American person may come into the world not knowing of his/her racial identity. However, there comes a time either in the early years where a parent explains this identity, a teacher introduces the concept via a lesson on slavery, or a bigot introduces the concept of difference through hateful remarks, that that person's concept of self and identity is impacted by an external, societal influence. According to Jones (2009), our identity is influenced by our location in the social construction of identity as well as our personal reflection from our core self on those constructions. One cannot separate oneself from the context in which one was raised because that context has an influence on the concept of personal and social

identity. Jones(2009) conducted an autoethnographic study of eight doctoral program students in the college of education. Jones analyzed autobiographical narratives and engaged in dialogues with the students over the course of twelve months. She found that students with highly visible identities experienced the concept of difference at an early age. This concept was persistent in their lived experiences, and the introduction to this concept of being different was usually negative. Ultimately, identity involves managing how we think others view us and we view ourselves (Jones, 2009).

It is with this understanding of identity that the framework of intersectionality comes into play. The framework was developed over the course of 30 years and influenced by the Civil Rights Movement (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Intersectional research allows researchers to focus on groups that have been largely ignored in the development of many of the theories that form the basis of student affairs work (Cole, 2009). It also allows the researcher to look at the impact of multiple identities as opposed to isolating and examining identities in a vacuum (McCall, 2005).

A person's perception, personality, cognition, attributes, and social interaction are directly influenced by the presence of multiple identities and the way those identities are socially constructed (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The influence of multiple aspects of identity may make the influence of a single identity characteristic difficult to detect in specific situations (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For example, White Christians may experience persecution by virtue of the religion. African-American Christians may experience racial and religious persecution simultaneously, but the motivator behind the persecution may be difficult to discern due to the presence of multiple identities.

Intersectional research is characterized by an emphasis on the lived experiences of individuals, the exploration of salience as influenced by systems of power and privilege, and the larger purpose and goal of contributing to a more socially just society (Jones, 2009). The challenge with this framework is the ability of participants to articulate their intersectional identities (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Because of this inability to articulate, the researcher is placed in a position of authority to interpret and identify when those intersecting identities are at play. Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) suggest using member checks as a way of validating research into multiple identities.

Spirituality for the sake of this study has been defined as an attempt to make meaning of one's world and an exploration of values that an individual holds in high regard. Seventh-day Adventists are a unique group in that Adventism can be both an individual identity as well as a group membership by virtue of the group culture the church doctrine creates. The intersection of faith with other aspects of identity such as gender, race, and orientation present a challenge in terms of discovering if Adventism is a salient identity during the college experience. Research into the religious experiences of students in higher education usually use Fowler as a theoretical framework, but they run into challenges accounting for the intersection of culture and other aspects of identity that frame the religious student experience. The next section of this literature review will examine this research.

### **Religious Experiences in Higher Education**

Religion in higher education presents a unique challenge, particularly when the religion falls outside of what could be considered mainstream Christianity. Increasing numbers of students who could be classified as religious minorities are attending public

colleges and universities. Schlosser and Sedlacek examined policies at the University of Maryland concerning the observance of religious holidays at their campus in 2001.

Although public institutions appear to strive for a secular environment, the culture of campus environments is decidedly Christian due to their origins and current operating practices (Geiger, 2005; Schlosser & Sedlacek, 2001). Currently most institutions operate on academic calendars that are designed around traditional Christian observances, which include worship on Sunday mornings and the observance of Christmas and Easter.

Faculty and staff tend not to require explanations from Christian students regarding the need for absences to observe religious rituals, and outward expressions of such rituals are not typically questioned or critically examined in such a way that students feel isolated or singled out (Schlosser & Sedlacek, 2001).

There is still a lack of research regarding the experiences of religious minorities in the educational environment. In this section of the literature review, I will examine the research surrounding Muslims, Jewish students, and Evangelical Christians. Muslim students were chosen based on their increasing numbers on college campuses as well as increased attention and scrutiny in the post-9/11 era. Jewish students were chosen due to their Sabbath observance and other religious behaviors that are similar to Seventh-day Adventist observances. Evangelical Christians were chosen due to their outreach efforts which mirror Seventh-day Adventist practices, as well as their self-identification as a special subpopulation distinguishable from mainstream Christianity.

### **Islam**

Islam has been on the forefront of American consciousness following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Increasing numbers of Muslims are matriculating at

college institutions in the United States, leading to an attempt by two men to establish America's first four-year accredited Muslim College (Masterson, 2009). Small (2009) explains that currently Islamic practice centers on living a religious life in a secular world. This involves distinguishing Muslim perceptions and concepts of spirituality from the beliefs of other groups as well as focusing on ritual practices that are fundamental to the faith.

There are several challenges inherent in being a Muslim on a college campus. Muslims would like to be able to practice their faith in a way that is private and meaningful to them, but their practices wind up being public by virtue of their requirements (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Speck, 1997). Muslim practice involves five daily prayers, fasting, strict punishment for crimes, distinctive dress, and, depending on the cultural background of the individual, polygamy (Speck, 1997). Additionally, being able to access halal meals and find accommodations for meals during the month of Ramadan present challenges on culturally Christian campuses (Small, 2008). Small conducted a study in 2008 of 21 students at a large public research university in the Midwest from four religious groups in focus group settings. Students also submitted reflection papers regarding their reactions to the study. From this group of 21 students, nine students were selected for individual interviews to discover their experiences of faith in the higher education environment (Small, 2008). As a result of this study, Small (2008) discovered that there is a duality to living as a Muslim in American society. Muslim students are aware that in the current politically charged climate it is important that they dialogue with non-Muslims to avoid misunderstandings and potential attacks

(Small 2009). Their awareness of their minority status allows them to think critically about their faith identity (Small, 2008).

Nasir and Al-Amin (2006) indicate that Muslim students attending American universities often feel at constant risk of being judged or misunderstood. The biggest reason for this fear is the amount of information and material being circulated via media, books, and other sources that focus primarily on the negative aspects of extreme forms of Islam. An additional challenge is the intersection of race and religion. African American students identified as Muslim have been accused of being Black racists and face hostilities in the classroom regarding Islam (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006). Female Muslim students who choose to wear hijab, while not always received in hostile ways, face tensions linked to Western cultural definitions of womanhood and the expression of that womanhood (Rangoonwala, 2009). The symbol of womanhood in the United States requires a form of dress that is in direct opposition to Islamic spiritual and cultural beliefs (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Rangoonwala, 2009).

Students have reported experiences where professors who do not have a true understanding of Islam misrepresent the faith in the classroom, using flawed media to explain the faith, leading to additional tensions among campus students (Speck, 1997). There have been instances where professors refuse to honor the needs of Muslim students to engage in prayer or to be excused for religious observances (Speck, 1997). Professors have also created hostile classroom environments where Islam as a faith is ridiculed by other students without correction (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Rangoonwala, 2009; Speck, 1997). Anxiety about perceptions and the ability to exercise their faith free of ridicule can adversely impact academic performance, cause intense psychosocial stress, and



unfairly burden Muslim students with the need to educate others and dispel stereotypes (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Small, 2008).

An additional challenge for Muslim students includes the intersection of religion and culture. Some issues that are culturally specific are mistakenly attributed to Islam. Factors that lead to a more positive experience for Muslim students include professors who recognize Islamic holy days and honor students wishes to observe them without challenge, a student community that accepts Islam, access to physical space for prayer free from ridicule and judgment, and access to halal meals during religious observances (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Schlosser & Sedlacek, 2001)

### **Judaism**

Studies about Judaism and the college experience have primarily focused on the interaction between Jewish individuals and Palestinian/Muslim interactions in the Middle East. Some studies have looked at faith trajectory paths of Jewish students in higher education (Small, 2008), and some historical background of Jewish students in American education is available at specific institutions (Johnson, 2003), but large scale examinations of the Jewish experience outside of international impact are difficult to find.

Students who identify culturally and religiously as Jewish face unique challenges in higher education. According to Johnson (2003), Judaism and those who practiced it were considered a threat prior to World War II. They were perceived to be holding onto money and power that belonged to “traditional citizens” (Johnson, 2003, p. 77). During this time, when solidarity was strong and the cultural expression of Judaism was easily identifiable, the power of the group gave them strength to advocate for colleges to

provide kosher foods and make allowances for observances of religious holidays (Johnson, 2003). This advocacy at one institution allowed Jewish students to carve out a campus identity that would provide support for decades to come.

Over time, the Jewish community became less and less coherent and identifiable as an ethnic minority (Resnick, 1996). Assimilation and intermarriage created a less coherent and identifiable ethnic community, making it easy for Jewish people to be identified as white (Resnick, 1996). As a result, the ability to relate to other ethnic minorities decreased (Resnick, 1996). Resnick (1996) believes that it is important for Jewish individuals to return to a distinct ethnic identity, but achieving that identity will be a challenge giving the openness to intermarriage and the emphasis that has been placed on fitting into society. Part of this distinct identity is the understanding of the Jewish religion, and how it differs from other religions. Small (2009) indicated that the lack of understanding about Judaism's place in the world at large creates an insecurity among those who identify as Jewish, and deviation from religious and cultural practices weakens group solidarity and strength.

This lack of solidarity is reflected in the choices faced by Jewish students entering the college environment. The studies available regarding their experiences did not focus on lack of access to equality in observing their religious practices. Instead, the studies painted a picture of the choice Jewish students make whether or not to live their faith during the collegiate years. According to Small (2009), there is a focus within the Jewish community on religious rituals and the choices people make about whether or not to practice them. With the increased intermarriage and assimilation, there is also the question of Judaism's place in the world in comparison to other religions (Small, 2009).

Jewish students tend to understand tradition and their status as minorities in this country when they choose to engage in this tradition, but some choose to break with the norm of Jewish behavior (Small, 2008). Many who choose to practice their faith and adhere to cultural norms feel some distance culturally and religiously from mainstream society. This distance empowers them to speak freely about the issues they face with non-Jewish individuals (Small, 2008). Most dissension comes from within the community, among those who choose to break with Jewish norms and attempt to assimilate into larger society despite their cultural upbringing (Small, 2008; Small, 2009).

### **Evangelical Christianity**

Evangelical Christianity is sometimes defined as though it is separate from other forms of Christianity. The studies cited in this literature review refer to Evangelical Christians in ways commonly associated with fundamentalist practices of Christianity. In these studies, they distinguish between Evangelical Christianity and modern Christianity by examining the execution of the faith. Lulofs (1994) indicated that evangelical Christians believe that “all people must be drawn into the Kingdom of God” (p. 4). In her study of 21 college students Small (2008) discovered that most mainstream Christian students see evangelical Christianity as outside of standard Christianity. Moran, Lang, and Oliver (2007) conducted a study of 25 evangelical Christian students at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Kansas. All but one of the students were white. The study consisted of interviews asking about campus culture, perceptions of how others view evangelical Christianity, and their personal experiences on campus. The researchers found that the students identified themselves as a “strange minority” (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007 p. 28). Findings from a study noted in the

Chronicle of Higher Education (2007) showed that more than 50% of surveyed faculty members have a negative view of evangelical Christians. Although Christianity carries a great deal of privilege, it is a target of continuing and overwhelming criticism, which can balance out its dominance on the spiritual hierarchy (Small, 2008). Some of the backlash towards Christianity in recent years seems to stem from its association with political conservatism.

According to evangelical Christians, true Christianity involves a commitment that most individuals who claim Christianity do not have (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007). This commitment is evidenced by lifestyle choices, which include refraining from alcohol or visits to places that serve alcohol, abstaining from sex and talk of a sexual nature, and avoiding the use of vulgar language (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007). Students who identified as evangelical Christians tend to have a greater homogeneity of beliefs (Lulofs, 1994; Wrobel & Stogner, 1988). Lulofs (1994) indicates that evangelical Christianity is ethnocentric by virtue of its nature, considering that when individuals fail to be converted by evangelistic efforts, believers retreat to their dogma for spiritual and psychological safety. In essence, they cling to their beliefs even if those around them do not agree with those beliefs. Alternative views are cast aside, and concerns are raised regarding the influences that those who do not share their faith have will have on young believers.

Moran, Lang, and Oliver (2007) indicate that students felt that despite the culturally Christian nature of most educational institutions, Christianity was mocked in the classroom setting, creating an atmosphere of intolerance. Administrators who adhere to Christianity have reported similar experiences, causing them to retreat into silence (Moran & Curtis, 2004). Students who adhere strongly to their faith can experience

isolation and sadness when entering the university environment (Lee, 2000). Some students feel that their beliefs are mocked in the classroom (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007) and that Eastern religions, new age beliefs, and paganism are more honored than Christianity on college campuses (Lee, 2000; Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007).

Fox (2008), in his study of Evangelical students at Texas public universities, discovered that the students experienced a sense of isolation and alienation in the college environment. The students tended to socialize more with fellow Christian students who shared their belief in the execution of their faith (Fox, 2008). The students in this study indicated there was a high social cost to be paid for self-identifying as Christians, from peers distancing themselves to the loss of significant relationships (Fox, 2008). Students' in Fox's study also indicated that there was a lack of moral character among the study body as a whole, and that they came to school anticipating a level of social isolation. While Fox indicated that the students found ways to assimilate into the student body, his subsequent explanation of that assimilation came in the form of the creation of Christian enclaves that they used as their primary social outlet and retreat from the day to day requirements of academia (Fox, 2008).

When some students encounter alternative belief systems they chose to either hide the spiritual part of themselves from the campus community (Moran, Lang, & Oliver, 2007) or walk away from their faith belief altogether (Lee, 2000). Students who chose to cling to their faith beliefs continued to participate in bible studies, participate in campus ministry groups, and attend worship services (Small, 2009; Wrobel & Stogner, 1988). Evangelical Christians appear to suffer from stereotypes that have linked cultural issues to their religious faith.

## **Seventh-day Adventists**

### **Overview**

Seventh-day Adventists have been in the United States for over a century (Bull & Lockhart, 1988; Mitchell, 1958). As a religious sect that practices a seventh-day Sabbath similar to Judaism, believes in the writings of a modern day prophet, proclaims the impending return of Jesus Christ, and practices health reform, Seventh-day Adventism is a growing religion on its way to being one of the major religious denominations worldwide (Bull & Lockhart, 1988). Even though they boast a world membership of close to 16 million (Seventh-day Adventist Church web site, 2008), very few Americans are familiar with Seventh-day Adventism or what they stand for (Bull & Lockhart, 1988). Most of what Americans tend to know of Adventism tends to be either related to their medical ministry (Mitchell, 1958; Bull & Lockhart, 1988) or extreme displays of religious behavior as carried out by splinter sects such as the early Millerites or the Branch Davidians (Bull & Lockhart, 1988). An understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist church, including its demographic information and philosophical beliefs, is important to shape and frame the experiences of students who adhere to this faith while attending public universities.

### **Demographics**

As of December 2008, the Seventh-day Adventist church had a world membership of 15,921,408 individuals on every continent in the world except Antarctica (Seventh-day Adventist web site, 2008). The educational program run by the church included 111 colleges and universities, 45 worker training schools, 1,678 secondary schools, and 5,763 primary schools with a total enrollment of 1,545,464 (Seventh-day

Adventist web site, 2008). The healthcare ministry of the church includes 171 hospitals and sanitariums, 129 nursing homes, 429 clinics, and, 33 orphanages, which serviced 14,997,107 individuals in 2008 (Seventh-day Adventist web site, 2008).

According to Sahlin and Richardson (2008), the North American division of the Seventh-day Adventist church, which includes the United States, Canada, and Bermuda, had a membership of 1,062,189 baptized members. When accounting for a rate of 14% of non-baptized children, church membership climbs to 1,211,204. The church is confident in its ability to track non-baptized children in the church due to their electronic membership tracking system. While most denominations allow for infant and child baptisms, the Adventist church requires anyone seeking to be baptized to reveal in their lives, faith, repentance, and the fruits of repentance, as well as an understanding of the meaning of baptism and the subsequent spiritual relationship (Ministerial Association, 1988). As a result, most children do not receive baptism before the age of 12.

Teens from ages 14 to 31 comprise 14% of the Adventist church's demographic profile (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). The North American Division of the church is 50% White, 27% Black, 12% Hispanic/Latino, 7% Asian, and 4% other or multiethnic (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). Young adults in the church are more likely to be full time students at colleges and universities. Fifty percent of the church members are not in the workforce (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). According to the church web site, these individuals tend to be homemakers or full time students (Seventh-day Adventist web site, 2008). Of those who are in the workforce, 26% tend to be professionals, managers, or proprietors of small businesses (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008).

Sixty-one percent of church members have a college education. Forty percent of these individuals have an undergraduate degree, 15% have a graduate degree, and 6% have an associate's degree from a two-year institution (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). Over the last 20 years the number of church members with college degrees has increased substantially. Church leaders believe that this increase is related to the desire to procure employment that allows the members to observe the Sabbath (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). The church has acknowledged that it is experiencing a dropout problem whereby members who grow up in the denomination and attain the highest levels of education are more likely to leave the church (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008). The majority of Adventist members grew up in an Adventist family, accounting for 51% of the church membership. Another 31% joined the church through what is called "friendship evangelism," whereby a relationship with someone they are close to led to them taking bible studies and joining the church (Sahlin & Richardson, 2008).

### **History and Philosophy of the Church**

Adventists identify with the Protestant reformation movement led by Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, seeing it as a return to the true purpose and aim of Christianity (White, 1911). As such, Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as the purest form of Protestant Christianity (Mitchell, 1958; White, 1911). The Seventh-day Adventist church of present was born as an offshoot from the Millerite movement of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Bull & Lockhart, 1988; Mitchell, 1958). William Miller, a Baptist layman, believed in the return of Jesus as prophesied in the Bible. This movement believed that based on the 2,300-day prophecy detailed in the book of Daniel (Holy Bible, 1994), Jesus would return on October 22, 1844 (Bull & Lockhart, 1988; Mitchell, 1958; White, 1911). When Jesus



did not return as predicted, some of the members of the movement returned to the bible to see where their predictions had gone wrong (Mitchell, 1958; White, 1882). Determining that the prophecy was not related to the return of Jesus to this world but to his “cleansing of the sanctuary” (p. 292) as part of the investigative judgment, they pioneered the Seventh-day Adventist church with James White, Ellen Gould White, and Joseph Bates as the primary leaders of the movement (Mitchell, 1958). A formal organization of the church was established in 1863 in Battle Creek, Michigan with a membership of 3,500. Starting at first in a home with their mission of spreading the gospel of Jesus’ imminent return, they expanded into global missionary work in 1874 (Mitchell, 1958).

Ellen Gould White was elevated as a modern day prophet for the church (Bull & Lockhart, 1988; Ministerial Association, 1988; Mitchell, 1958). The prophetic visions of Ellen White helped bolster the members who were shaken by the disappointment of 1844 (Bull & Lockhart, 1988). White would spend hours in vision, receiving what she claimed were messages from God regarding the Bible, the work that was to be carried out by the church, and a deeper understanding of the 2300-day prophecy (Bull & Lockhart, 1988; White, 1882). Her acceptance as the leading and last human prophet is a requirement for baptism (Ministerial Association, 1988). However, White stated on several occasions that her voice was not to be considered a replacement for the Bible, and when all else seemed unsure, to refer to the Bible for the answers (White, 1882; White, 1911).

To understand the doctrinal beliefs of the church one must understand the philosophy that drives them. According to the Holy Bible (1994), Jesus is the Son of God, who came to the earth to pay the price for the sins of mankind by allowing himself to be crucified, followed by his resurrection three days later. Seventh-day Adventists

consider him to be both human and divine in his earthly incarnation (White, 1898), having assumed human form but not letting go of the characteristics that made him the Son of God. He spent time among the people, preaching the word of God, which included statements on how to treat others and the importance of keeping God's law and commandments, as well as performing healing works among people as an example of how humanity should interact with one another (Holy Bible, 1994).

As the time drew near for his crucifixion, believed to be foretold in the book of Isaiah in the Bible (1994), Jesus spoke to his disciples about his return to heaven and what this would mean for their continued assurance of salvation. Jesus "also foretold that the followers of Christ must tread the same path of humiliation, reproach, and suffering that their master trod" (Mitchell, 1958 p. 248). During his life there were many who believed Jesus to be a false prophet and a heretic, and called for his death for violating what they believed to be true scriptural principles (Holy Bible, 1994). His crucifixion was considered to be more brutal than a typical Roman death sentence, preceded by his parade among the people in a state of humiliation (Holy Bible, 1994; White, 1898).

Seventh-day Adventists believe the persecution carried out by the Roman Church for centuries following the crucifixion of Jesus was a symbol of the foretelling of the persecution of the martyrs for the cause of Christ (Forbush, 1978; Mitchell, 1958; White, 1898). Beginning with the apostle Paul, many were killed for the claim of their Christian beliefs as devout followers of Jesus Christ and the church he established prior to his death (Forbush, 1978; Holy Bible, 1994; Mitchell, 1958; White, 1898). Adventists believe because this direct attack against Christ's followers failed to dissuade others from joining the church, their enemy, Satan, chose to attack the church from within by introducing

doctrine that ran contrary to Christ's teachings, merging so-called pagan doctrine with what is considered holy, and encouraging the compromise of basic biblical beliefs among Christian believers (Mitchell, 1958; White, 1882; White, 1898).

The doctrinal beliefs of the church are born from the original Protestant motto of "sola scriptura," translated as the scriptures only. Adventists believe "their biblical Christianity to be a return to the purer faith of apostolic times" (Mitchell, 1958 p. 245). The Bible is viewed as the inspired and written word of God, and considered to be the final authority on all matters (Ministerial Association, 1988). The reason for strict adherence to the Bible is twofold. First, Adventists believe that a sign of honoring and following God is following the word of God, which is viewed to be the Bible. Second, Adventists believe that an understanding of the Bible is critical to carrying out the mission of the church, which, according to the Seventh-day Adventist Church web site is to:

To proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three Angels' message of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return. (2010)

The challenge, according to the church, is the problem of sin (White, 1911). Douglas (2001) defines the sin problem as rebellion, "a product of doing in contradiction to the will of God; that sin is a cosmic problem, not simply a personal matter" (p. 259). It is seen as a wrong representation of God and the solution involves telling the truth about God and his views on mankind, through the use of Biblical text and scripture, specifically from the life of Jesus. The solution Jesus presents is not forced on anyone-it is an

invitation to see how “he plans to reverse the damage that sin has caused” (Douglas, 2001, p. 260). This is called the great controversy (Douglas, 2001; White, 1911). The great controversy theme weaves throughout the faith and the church, and is built on the premise that from the beginning a plan was set in place to rectify the sin that was wrought by the fall in Eden of Adam and Eve through the person of Jesus Christ (Douglas, 2001; White, 1898; White, 1911). The purpose of the plan of salvation is to restore man to his right relationship with his creator (Douglas, 2001; Ministerial Association, 1988; White, 1898). This controversy is seen to impact every part of the human experience.

Adventists believe that every act or decision made reveals one of two motives-motives that either serve Christ or serve Satan (White, 1898). Each choice we make decides on which side of the controversy we will land (Douglas, 2001).

White (1908) believed that students should learn the scriptures and see the relation of its parts to the plan God has in place for man. The great controversy is ultimately about God’s vindication, and by focusing on this mankind cannot focus on personal issues. Jesus is seen as a role model, not a berating parent. According to Douglas (2001), Satan began the controversy because of envy and selfishness with the goal of trying to show that God was a selfish, unloving, unrealistic being who expected too much from mankind. Disproving this image of God is the work of Christ and those who would carry on in his name (White, 1911).

Although White’s interpretation of the Bible indicates that Adventists should not focus on personal issues, those issues have had an impact on the makeup of and relationships within the church body. Adventism was a growing religion immediately following the abolition of slavery. Jim Crow laws played a major role in the evangelistic

work that Seventh-day Adventists wanted to perform in the south, specifically among African-American communities. The inability of White pastors to minister to African-American constituents during this time resulted in the Adventist church training and creating black churches and a separate system of governance for them (Koranteng-Pipim, 2001). Although many in the church would insist that the church has been open to issues of diversity, there have been many documented instances where Adventists fell prey to the same racial prejudices that seem to fly in the face of their faith (Koranteng-Pipim, 2001). As a result, conferences separated by race still persist, and often overlap with regional conferences, which tend to be predominantly white.

### **Educational Doctrine**

Rasi, Brantley, Akers, Fowler, Knight, Matthews, and Thayer (2001) developed a statement of Seventh-day Adventist educational philosophy. The goal of true education, according to the Bible and Ellen White, is “to restore human beings into the image of their Maker” (p. 348). Human motives, thinking, and behavior have fallen short of God’s ideal (Ministerial Association, 1988; White, 1908). Education restores them to the original Genesis based relationship with God. It is designed to prepare learners for “responsible citizenship in this world and in the world to come” (Rasi et. al, 2001 p. 348). Adventist education attempts to achieve a balance of development, including spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social dimensions (Rasi, Brantly, Akers, Fowler, Knight, Matthews, & Thayer, 2001). According to the statement, the Adventist view of education attempts to nurture thinkers, promote service, and ensure the maximum development of potential (2001).

The home is seen as the primary educational arena, followed by the church and then the school; the home and the church lay the spiritual and moral foundation, which is then built upon by the school, including the college (White, 1954). Although technical education is taught in school, Rasi et al. (2001) state “the greatest need of students is to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and commit to a life of Christian values and service” (p. 349). The world church has oversight over the three pieces that constitute the educational environment, and would like for all Adventist children to be able to attend an Adventist institution (Rasi, Brantly, Akers, Fowler, Knight, Matthews, & Thayer, 2001). Since not all are able to attend institutions for a variety of reasons, the world church seeks ways to achieve the goals of Adventist education through after school programs, church based instruction, and church sponsored entities on non-Adventist campuses (C.A.M.P.U.S web site, 2010; Rasi, Brantly, Akers, Fowler, Knight, Matthews, & Thayer, 2001).

Children at the secondary school level are expected to have the opportunity to commit their lives to God through baptism, having developed faith as evidenced by personal devotion, public worship, and service and witness to others (Rasi, Brantly, Akers, Fowler, Knight, Matthews, & Thayer, 2001). Adventists believe they should be able to communicate, think creatively, and develop the skills that will help them in the world of work or additional education (Rasi, Brantly, Akers, Fowler, Knight, Matthews, & Thayer, 2001). Children are also expected to demonstrate what is considered to be Christ-like sensitivity within the family circle, their choice of friendships, preparation for marriage, and participation in the church and community (White, 1908). Another goal of education is to teach adherents to be discriminating in their selection of music, media,

and other forms of entertainment while developing strong morals and ethics (Ministerial Association, 1988; Rasi, Brantly, Akers, Fowler, Knight, Matthews, & Thayer, 2001; White, 1908).

Dudley (1994) reviewed the Valuegenesis study, which examined the faith maturity of over 10,000 Adventist students enrolled in Adventist middle and high schools as well as 400 Adventist students matriculating at public schools regarding faith behaviors and attitudes. The scale from this study was used to examine the faith maturity of 887 college aged students to determine retention and dropout rates of Adventist youth from the church (Dudley, 1994). The definition of mature faith according to this scale was a “life-changing” relationship with what the believer sees as a loving God (the vertical scale) and the consistent desire to and practice of serving others (the horizontal scale). The results of the study of the college students showed that 93.7% were classified as having moderate faith maturity and 5.4% expressed high faith maturity. When they compared the students in public schools and Adventist schools, they discovered that students coming out of Adventist schools scored higher on the vertical scale, reporting a strong relationship with God, but lower on the horizontal scale, indicating that the students had less concerns for social and world peace. The mission of the church is to have members prepare for the return of Jesus and model his service. The execution of the mission, which appears to encourage isolation among the Adventist community, may impact the ability of the student to understand and empathize with social justice issues. If one is preparing for the return of Christ, who will make all things right, one may not feel the need to act on social justice issues.

Douglas (2001) reviewed what is referred to as the Spirit of Prophecy regarding educating youth. Spirit of Prophecy refers to the writings of Ellen White, the church's prophet (Ministerial Association, 1988). The Adventist church believes "human philosophy has taken the place of divine revelation, which causes truth, honor, integrity, confidence, and compassion" to "depart from the earth" (p. 266). The Christian idea of being strong in the face of weakness was cast aside and replaced with the search for power, wealth, a life of ease, and self-indulgence (Douglas, 2001; White, 1908). Adventists expect qualified teachers to have a strong relationship with Christ and understand the need of a person to be restored to the image of God (Douglas, 2001). Adventists believe this relationship leads to self-control, self-sacrifice, and a willingness to serve others to lead them to Christ and make sure they land on the right side of the great controversy (Douglas, 2001; White, 1911). Teachers, aside from imparting technical knowledge, should aspire to impart in students "principles of truth, obedience, honor, integrity, and purity-principles that will make them a positive force for the stability and uplifting of society" (White, 1908, p. 29).

In an educational environment where matters of moral education are separated from other aspects of education, Adventists may struggle with teaching methods in a public university setting, opposite points of view, the relative nature of challenging topics that may, from a biblical stand point, be considered right or wrong. Things considered sinful according to the Bible (1994) such as premarital sex, homosexuality, and feminist leanings, are seen as "evil growths that choke the good grain" and "must be uprooted" (White, 1908 p. 111).



## Summary

Intersectionality is a framework that is critical to understanding the experiences of students who practice religious faith in higher education. In practice administrators in higher education, particularly in public university settings, fall short in providing opportunities and safe spaces for students to explore spirituality as an aspect of their identity. Although many different theories focus on the impact of various demographic profiles on the student experience, the concept of intersectionality may be most helpful in understanding the emergence of Adventism as a primary identity for practicing adherents in an educational environment. Unlike faith development theory, which explains an overarching concept of religious development, intersectionality allows researchers to view each individual based on the aspect of their identity that they see as most salient in explaining their experiences and how multiple identities shape a person's experience in a given context.

Students who identify themselves as religious minorities experience a wide variety of challenges in expressing their religious beliefs in a campus environment (Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006; Resnick, 1996; Small, 2009). Some of these challenges cause students depending on their commitment level to abandon their beliefs due to disillusionment, isolation, and alienation. Others hold on to their beliefs because of their isolation, creating sub-communities from which they draw support and strength from one another.

The studies cited in this literature review indicate the biggest challenge for students who practice religious faith is how the salient identity related to their religious affiliation impacts their experiences in the classroom, in campus work settings, and in their student life experiences. At times, as in the case of African Americans who practice

Islam, the perception of two intersecting identities can compound the impact of the hostility they may face as well as deepen the feeling of isolation that is a theme across the experiences of religiously affiliated students. Seventh-day Adventists prepare their students for the likelihood that they will be seen as different and potentially isolated. A common theme among the students is a feeling of alienation and the creation of safe spaces with like-minded believers and an understanding that there is a social price to holding on to their faith beliefs.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Overview**

In chapter one, I laid out the rationale and purpose of this study. A study examining the experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students in secular universities is essential to help student affairs administrators and student development theorists understand the ways in which students who worship in non-traditional faiths maintain their spiritual distinctiveness and successfully matriculate in a secular environment. Spirituality has not been addressed in depth in the execution of theory in student affairs (Astin, 2004), in spite of a study performed in 2003 by the Higher Education Research Institute that indicated students are struggling with spiritual matters. Non-traditional religions have been studied to an even lesser extent. Seventh-day Adventism can be classified as a non-traditional religion due to its distinct practices and beliefs within the umbrella of Christianity.

In chapter two, a review of the literature focused on understanding spirituality in the higher educational environment, the framework of intersectionality, the experiences of non-traditional religious students at secular universities, and an overview of the Seventh-day Adventist church. The framework of intersectionality allows researchers to view each individual based on the aspect of their identity that they see as most salient in explaining their experiences and how multiple identities shape a person's experience in a given context. Studies of Muslim students, Jewish students, and evangelical Christian students in the higher education environment provide a sense of what they experience practicing religion in a university setting, but not a sense of what it is like primarily in a

secular university setting for non-mainstream Christian adherents, specifically Seventh-day Adventists. What follows is the research design for the study that was executed in order to give us a better sense of the Adventist experience in the public university setting.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to discover, describe, and understand the experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students at secular universities. The goal of this study was to help researchers and administrators understand how distinct groups of students who adhere to a specific religious faith, in this case a non-traditional faith, navigate the secular university environment and the impact of their faith on their experience. The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What is the essence of the Seventh-day Adventist student experience:
  - a. ...In relation to campus life at a secular university?
  - b. ...In relation to academic life at a secular university?
2. How do Seventh-day Adventist students negotiate the higher education environment while maintaining their distinct spiritual beliefs and practices?

I engaged in a qualitative approach to discovering the essence of the experience of Seventh-day Adventists students in secular university settings. The lack of research in this area required a holistic study that is not prefigured. The experiences of Adventists at institutions were not known, so an emergent study gave me a better sense of how the phenomenon I studied is experienced (Creswell, 2003).

In order to get a sense of the experiences of Seventh-day Adventist students in secular institutions of higher education, I embarked on a phenomenological study. This

paradigm was most suited for the type of research I conducted because according to Creswell (2007) phenomenological research accomplishes the following:

- Describes meaning for several individuals of lived experiences.
- Describes commonalities of phenomena to grab the essence of experience.
- Does not presuppose an outcome; the essence of the experience and what is discovered comes from the participants and is not placed there by the researcher.
- Assists in the development of practices and policies that are important to understand group experiences.

In addition to describing the experience, the phenomenological paradigm provides the ability to interpret the experiences and create meaning for the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological research “attempts to get beneath how people describe their experiences to the structures that underlie consciousness, that is, to the essential nature of ideas” (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 38).

I employed Moustakas’ heuristic research paradigm for this study. This approach is inductive in nature, beginning with “a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer which is personally meaningful in terms of understanding the relationship between oneself and the world and has social significance” (Rudestam & Newton, 2001, p. 38). Moustakas’ heuristic research design is centered on the researcher connecting with the phenomenon being studied in order to create a rich and comprehensive description and draw universal meanings from the experience (Moustakas, 1990). This approach allowed me to get a deeper sense of individual experiences of the students being interviewed for the study.

### **Setting**

The sites used for this study included two public universities in New York, one private, non-religiously affiliated university in New York, and two public universities in Michigan. During the course of recruiting participants, I received a large response from students who interpreted the term public university as any secular, non-religiously affiliated institution. In the perspective of these Adventist students, if a school was not directly linked to a religious institution, it was, by definition, a public, secular institution. For this reason, I expanded the study to include both public universities and private secular institutions.

In a Pew Forum study (2009) examining the importance of religion and rate of attendance at worship, New York ranked 39<sup>th</sup> out of 46 in terms of the percentage of individuals indicating that they attended worship services on a regular basis. Compared to a national average of 56% of individuals indicating that religion was important to them, 46% of New York residents agreed that religion was important to them. In an environment that may be considered to be less religious than the national average and in the bottom 10 in terms of state rankings, a conclusion could be drawn that New York universities may be more secular than universities in other areas of the country. Michigan was chosen due to its setting as the birthplace of the Adventist church movement (Bull & Lockhart, 1989; Mitchell, 1958). In a 1990 study, Michigan ranked in the top 10 of states with largest number of Adventist adherents (Church Growth Research Center, 1990). In addition, Michigan had several counties that ranked in the top 25 with the largest percentage of Adventist adherents (Church Growth Research Center, 1990). As such, it provided a more likely place to find committed Adventist students. Studying students who observe the doctrines of the church assisted me in

getting a clearer picture of the experiences and adaptation strategies developed by those who choose to follow this faith.

### **Sampling and Participants**

I used criterion sampling to gain a good understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Criterion sampling ensured that the students sought for the study could give a clear picture of the experience of practicing Seventh-day Adventist students at public institutions. Criterion sampling was most useful for this study because it allowed me to get a sense of the collective experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students at public universities. In order to get a solid picture of the experiences, it was important that all the participants being interviewed represented those who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Criterion sampling according to the parameters set out in this study most effectively assured this. According to Creswell (2007), criterion sampling is useful for “quality assurance,” which will be essential for getting a clear and accurate picture of the experiences being studied.

The criterion for the purpose of this study included students who identified as Seventh-day Adventists. I screened each volunteer to ensure they fit the definition of a committed Seventh-day Adventist student as defined in chapter one. The students ranged in age from 19 to 24. I focused on this population of students for a few reasons. First, the 18-24 year old student is the population studied the most when looking at student development. Current student development theory is created based on studies of this demographic population, and it is where we have the largest body of information regarding student developmental stages in college. Studying the impact of their faith on students’ college experiences will help add to a body of growing and changing

knowledge. Second, students who are retained beyond their freshman year are more likely to persist to graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A student who is a sophomore in college, according to Pascarella and Terenzini, is more likely to finish school at the current institution than to transfer or to withdraw from school (2005). Using a demographic survey, I gathered data on racial and ethnic background, age, gender, school status and time at a secular institution to assist me during data analysis in understanding other aspects of participants' identity that may be salient in their college experience. I included transfer students who had experience prior to their transfer or at the time of their interview at a secular university setting. Having worked in both Michigan and New York at public universities, I made a deliberate effort not to recruit students who attended the institutions I worked for previously in order to prevent a conflict of interest.

### **Access, Data Collection Methods, Procedures, and Instrumentation**

I obtained approval from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) at Western Michigan University (Appendix A). Following this approval, I contacted the institutions in New York and Michigan where I wanted to recruit participants to see if it was necessary to apply for external researcher status. Following approval from the sites to recruit student participants from their institutions, I forwarded recruitment flyers to the Adventist student fellowship groups at the institutions and to the churches in the areas adjacent to the institutions in both states. The recruitment flyer contained information about the study along with my contact information. I also contacted the listed advisors for the fellowship groups at the campuses (Appendix C), asking permission to visit one of their meetings to recruit students to participate in the



study. Finally, I forwarded the flyers to the regional Adventist campus ministries groups in the Northeast and Midwest regions of the United States to get additional assistance in finding volunteers for the study.

Once the participants were identified, I sent them a copy of the Consent Letter (Appendix D) with a self-addressed stamped envelope for return, as well as a fax number in case they wanted to fax or email the document back, detailing the research and explaining their role and time commitments. Following the receipt of the signed consent document, I sent the participants a demographic survey (Appendix E) via email and asked it be returned within three days. Following the return of the demographic survey, I sent participants who did not fit the criteria a letter explaining why they were not invited to participate in the study (Appendix F). I did not receive more participants who fit the criteria than the number needed for interviews. In fact, it was challenging to get the number of participants needed for the interviews. Students who were invited to participate in the study received an email asking them to schedule an interview time with me (Appendix H).

Once scheduled, I traveled to the sites in New York where possible to begin the interviews. For the sites in Michigan and for the students in New York who had scheduling conflicts, we conducted the interviews using Skype video chat software. The study employed a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix I). Interviews ranged in length from 40 to 60 minutes. The face-to-face and video interviews allowed me to capture non-verbal communication that gave deeper meaning to the words expressed. The non-verbal cues displayed by a participant are referred to by Moustakas as tacit knowledge (1990) and were important in creating a full picture of the experiences. I

audiotaped the in-person interviews and videotaped the Skype interviews, taking notes regarding tacit indicators that could not be captured on an audio recording. After the interview was complete I transcribed the interviews verbatim to written format.

Information from the demographic survey and notes regarding tacit indicators were used to create a biographical narrative of the participant.

### **Data Analysis and Verification**

Moustakas (1994) describes six steps essential to the analysis of the experiences of the participants. I incorporated part of his analysis methodology into the analysis of the data, and mixed it with traditional phenomenological methods of analysis. I followed his encouragement of immersing myself in the experience and capitalizing on my own experience in the Seventh-day Adventist church to gain a deeper understanding of what the students shared with me.

In the first step of the analysis, I transcribed each interview from the audio format into a written document. I read and reviewed each transcript until I reached an understanding of the experience. After developing an understanding of the experience, I developed an individual narrative for each transcription. Per the Moustakas method, each narrative was sent to the participants to determine if the narrative was an accurate reflection of their experience based on what they shared with me in the interview.

In the second step of the analysis, I pulled out significant statements from each transcription that reflected relevant experiences pertinent to the phenomenon being studied. After listing all the significant statements, I used a two-fold test to set aside and revisit experiences that on first glance did not seem valid. The first part of the test was to evaluate if the experience was necessary for understanding the phenomenon. The second

part of the test was to evaluate if the experience could be defined abstractly and labeled as such.

The third step in the analysis of the experiences was to group the experiences using abstract labels, or themes, that I developed from each individual narrative. The fourth step required me to compare the themes and their associated experiences with the complete narrative from the interviews to determine if the themes were expressed and compatible with the narrative.

The fifth step was to examine each individual transcript and pull out quotes that were linked to the themes developed from the narratives. Each time a theme appeared in a participant's transcript it was noted on a grid under the theme. Once all themes and quotes linked to themes were developed, I examined the grid to see which themes were most prevalent among the entire group of students interviewed. Some themes overlapped and were able to be combined with each other. This second round of reduction led to the final themes discussed in the results section. Once the themes were created, I developed a composite textural description of each theme using the quotes from the participants. Once I was satisfied that a proper textural depiction for each theme had been created, the final step involved me constructing a composite structural depiction for each of the narratives. A structural depiction, as defined by Moustakas, focuses on the "underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes and qualities that account for the 'how' feelings and thoughts connected" to the phenomenon (1994, p. 135).

Once I felt that a sufficient structural depiction had been created for each of the themes, the final step was to compare the textural depictions against the themes developed to ensure congruency between the themes that appeared to emerge and the

supporting information from the interviews. The themes serve to help develop universal meaning related to the experience of committed Seventh-day Adventist students at secular universities and colleges in order to link those findings to professional outcomes and directions for research.

### **The Researcher**

I am a member of the Seventh-day Adventist church. This membership is one of the primary reasons Moustakas' heuristic approach was chosen for the study. I have experience in the public university setting as a student matriculating while experiencing my faith, and following the heuristic research paradigm it will be absolutely essential that those experiences be evaluated as the data is analyzed in order to provide an objective analysis and interpretation of the data collected during this study. Some of the bias that may be present is reduced by the fact that my experience as a student in a public university setting has occurred at the graduate level. Graduate level student experiences tend to differ from traditional age undergraduate student experiences due to factors such as work and family, which impact how a student engages in the overall campus experience. There is a certain level of campus engagement expected of an undergraduate student that is not expected of a graduate student, which lends itself to a different experience. I am committed to presenting a holistic view of the student experience in the secular university setting and interested in discovering what those experiences are without presupposition.

I work in student affairs at a public university in Virginia and have worked in student affairs for over 15 years. I currently work at the George Mason University in the Housing and Residence Life department. At the time of data collection, I worked at the

State University of New York (SUNY) at Oswego in the Residence Life and Housing department. SUNY Oswego has a two-year residency requirement, and my position put me in a place of power over many of the students. My role at Oswego prevented me from selecting it as an interview site in order to avoid a conflict of interest. My position and work in the university setting provides an understanding of college life that along with membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church will help me build rapport during the interview. I served as an advisor to the Adventist student fellowship group at Grand Valley State University in Michigan, and also worked in residence life and housing at that institution. Those two roles presented a conflict of interest, so I chose not to seek out participants at Grand Valley State University as a result.

I have an educational background in counseling and psychology. The educational base and skills I gained during my masters program assisted me in the interview process with a reluctant or less than eloquent participant. This training helped me to develop rapport with the student and take advantage of the natural silences which sometimes occur during interviews to make visual observations regarding the reaction of the student to the information being shared.

### **Limitations**

As Marshall and Rossman (2006) indicate, there are no perfect research designs. Every study contains limitations, no matter how thorough or complicated the design and regardless of the care taken to account for every variable. Dealing with human research automatically creates a subjective overview of the phenomenon being studied. People cannot be contained in a lab and every potentiality controlled for.

The purpose of this study was to discover how students who identify as Seventh-day Adventists experience secular institutions of higher education. It was not designed to prove that one institution is better for a religiously oriented student to matriculate at compared to another. It was not designed to prove that students who adhere to a doctrine of organized religion suffer from the lack of what is perceived to be a well-rounded student experience at public institutions. The sole purpose of this study was to describe an experience of a student population that has heretofore not been studied in the past.

There were a few limitations to this study. Participating students, in the interest of counteracting some of the negative connotations associated with the Adventist church (Bull & Lockhart, 1989), may have painted a less than authentic picture of their experiences. Another limitation to the study regarding the sites selected is the fact that cultural differences across the nation, as well as critical masses of Adventist support depending on the home school of the students selected, may have influenced the experiences shared.

An additional limitation I ran into with regards to this study was gathering the desired number of participants as indicated in the original research proposal. I spent several months reaching out to various constituencies in the church, regional support organizations, and educational organizations. Many of the students who responded were outside of the age range of the parameters of the study. I eventually determined that nine students was a sufficient sample due to a repeated pattern of experiences among the participant interviews.

The population of students who responded who fit the criteria did not accurately reflect the demographic of the Adventist church. There were seven female participants

and two male participants. Four of the nine students were born in the United States or a United States territory. Five students identified as Black, two identified as Hispanic, and two identified as Asian/Pacific Islander. There were no White students represented in the sample. The White students who volunteered to participate in the project were outside of the age parameters of the study. The demographic profile represented in this study will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students at secular universities. I used a heuristically grounded phenomenological study to discover the experiences of these students. This involved engaging in open-ended interviews with the students regarding aspects of their experience on secular college campuses. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. The participants were college students between the ages of 19 and 24 attending secular universities in the Midwest and Northeast regions of the United States. Participants were asked to review their individual narratives for member checking purposes to ensure accuracy of the themes being developed from the interviews. The findings were validated through member checks, thick rich descriptions of the data, and clarification of researcher bias.

#### **Participants**

Eleven individuals were recruited for the study. These individuals were contacted via outreach methods to the regional Adventist youth organizations, emails to pastors of churches near to secular universities, and emails to Adventist student groups on university campuses. Of the eleven individuals who volunteered, nine completed the interview process. Seven were women and two were men. Four were born in the United States or a United States territory. The other five emigrated to the United States with their families as young children. Two participants identified as Hispanic, five identified as Black, and two identified as Southeast Asian. The racial category of Black is used



here as opposed to African American due to the immigration status of three of the students and the manner in which the other two students identified themselves. Two of the participants were baptized in college. The other seven participants were raised in Adventist homes and were baptized as children. There were students who were White who volunteered to participate in the study but they did not meet the age criteria set for the study.

Throughout the wide range of diverse identities that could have manifested themselves in this group of participants, the participants' faith identities presented as most salient across their experiences. For the students who emigrated here as children, their experiences in their homelands were expressed as a function of their faith identity. The adjustment to culture in the United States was most jarring in the area of faith expression and how that faith expression manifested itself in the relationships between teachers and students. What follows is a brief description of the participants of the study. The names used were pseudonyms selected by the participants to ensure confidentiality.

### **Jessica**

Jessica is a 19 year-old junior majoring in psychology and German at a public university in Michigan. Jessica was born in Mexico and emigrated to the United States when she was six years old. It was at this time that Jessica's family joined the Seventh-day Adventist church. Jessica accepted baptism when she was 13, stating that after the inquiry, she realized she believed in the teachings of the church. Jessica's educational background includes a mixture of home schooling, Adventist schooling, and public school attendance. She indicated that she and her brother had a voice in their educational ventures, asking to be home schooled, and later asking to attend high school in a regular

school setting, which their mother allowed. Jessica considered attending a Seventh-day Adventist university, but decided to go to a public university in order to avoid being sheltered within her faith. “I did consider Andrews later on as I was considering college, but then decided I didn’t want to be too sheltered. I felt like at least for my undergrad, I didn’t want to be.” Describing it as an “Adventist bubble,” Jessica decided she wanted to be challenged in her faith.

### **John**

John is a 19 year-old Bahamian junior majoring in computer engineering at a secular private university in the New York. John grew up in the Bahamas and attended school there until his family emigrated to the United States while he was in high school. John describes the experience as a culture shock. “It was assumed you were Christian-prayer was held in the classroom.” John was born to Adventist parents and was baptized at the age of 13. John states that he remembered praying because he was struggling with God about at what point he should take the next step in his faith. The following Sabbath, the sermon and the appeal or call to join spoke to his experience.

God was moving in a very interesting way. I was very shy and for some reason a bunch of kids at that time had stood up for the appeal, and it gave me some courage to stand at that point. From that point it’s been a really life changing experience.

John came to his current institution because he had mistaken it for another prestigious technologically focused institution. He stated that he was initially drawn to the school because of its academic reputation around his intended major and it’s affordability.

### **Kevin**

Kevin is a 20 year-old African American junior majoring in marketing at a secular private institution in the New York. Kevin transferred to his current institution from a Seventh-day Adventist college. Kevin was born to Catholic parents. When he was six years old his mother remarried a Seventh-day Adventist and converted to the faith. Kevin was baptized at ten years old, but chose to be rebaptized at the age of 19. According to Kevin, “I had fallen away, like it was time to recommit my life to God.” Kevin describes his “falling away” as a lack of focus on his faith and a lack of execution of his faith. Kevin began attending a Seventh-day Adventist college due to cost. After his step-father took a position at his current institution, Kevin transferred there because of the tuition benefit that came from being the child of an employee.

### **Linda**

Linda is a 22 year-old senior political science and philosophy, politics, and law major attending a public university in New York. Linda transferred to her current university from a community college. Linda was born to Adventist parents. Her family immigrated from Kenya when she was ten years old. Linda also experienced a cultural shift in the educational setting when she came to the United States.

Christianity was included as a subject called Christian Religious Education. In the beginning of my third grade year the school started a new system in which they would separate us by denomination where Catholics and Protestants would hold separate services. All in all, we would learn about Christianity.

Linda was baptized when she was ten years old. Linda states “I guess just from a young age, I understood what it meant and that it was something I was looking forward to.” Linda went to public schools growing up, and was used to being the only Seventh-day Adventist in her class and having to explain what that meant for her. It was an explanation she had to explain even more when she began participating in sports. Even in middle and high school, she was committed to her faith enough to opt out of weekend sporting events that interfered with her ability to keep the Sabbath.

Back in Kenya, sunset was always at 6 p.m., over here it varied depending on the season. However, on Saturdays, I was certain I would not be able to make practices or games and my teammates and coaches were aware.

Linda originally considered attending a Seventh-day Adventist college but decided it was more than she was willing to pay and too far from home. After completing community college she transferred to her current institution.

### **Lisa**

Lisa is a 19 year-old Indonesian senior studying English at a public university in Michigan. Lisa grew up in an Adventist family and was baptized at the age of 13. She went to Adventist middle school, but attending public school the rest of the time. She graduated from high school at the age of 16 and started college right after. Lisa applied to three Ivy League institutions and her current institution, which she describes as her “safety school.” She wound up at her current institution after being denied admission to the other three institutions. However, the transition as a young 16 year old to the college environment was a little unsettling.

It was a big culture shock for me. I've never been asked out on a Friday night or a Sabbath before. It was a bit uncomfortable at first, but over time and with the help of the older Adventist students it's not that much of a shock anymore

### **Marta**

Marta is a 21 year-old Haitian senior at a public university in Michigan studying political theory and constitutional democracy. Marta was born into a Seventh-day Adventist family and was baptized at the age of ten. She spent her formative educational years in public schools, but did spend a year and a half at an Adventist school growing up. While the town she grew up in was familiar with the Seventh-day Adventist church and doctrine, she found the public school sector to be unwelcoming to her faith beliefs. In Marta's words, "living in that environment habituated me with people coming out and saying 'We think you're nuts for believing in a literal creation.'"

Marta chose her current university due to familiarity with the institution and the quick response she received after applying. Marta states that there was never a distinction in her mind between attending a private university and a public university. "It was never really an important decision to me."

### **Mary**

Mary is a 22 year-old Korean senior attending a public university in New York studying chemistry. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was four. Mary was born into a Seventh-day Adventist family and was baptized when she was 13. She attended Adventist school from kindergarten through eighth grade. The decision for baptism was due to her conviction that the faith was the true doctrine of God, but also a step to help strengthen her in preparation for attending a public high school. According

to Mary, since she was going into a situation where she would be surrounded by non-Adventists, she needed the spiritual protection provided by committing to God through baptism.

Mary applied to Ivy League institutions and her current institution was her “safety school.” She did not get into the other institutions and decided to matriculate at her current university.

### **Olivia**

Olivia is a 24 year-old Hispanic graduate student at a public university in Michigan studying environmental engineering. Olivia grew up in Puerto Rico and went to undergraduate at a public university in Puerto Rico. Olivia was raised by Catholic parents. Olivia stated that she “came to the truth” at the public university she attended as an undergraduate and was introduced to the faith by the Adventist student group on campus there. She began attending group meetings as a guest during her fourth year at the invitation of a classmate. At a conference in January of 2009 she “made the decision on my own to give my life to God.” She felt after her first meeting with the Adventist student group that she was where she was supposed to be from a spiritual standpoint. “I saw a whole bunch of young people enthusiastic about reading the bible. I don’t know, the presence was there, so I kept going.” Olivia accepted baptism in March of 2010, and began graduate school at her current university in the Fall of 2011.

### **Tara**

Tara is a 21 year-old African American junior attending a public university in Michigan studying food industry management. Tara did not grow up in a Seventh-day Adventist home and was introduced to the doctrine while on campus at her current

institution. She began bible studies with a student and a bible worker from a nearby church through a cold call. According to Tara, a group of missionaries came to campus knocking on doors, taking religious surveys and offering bible studies. When she agreed the young lady relayed that information to the local church, who got in touch with her. “We met about once a week, then it turned into twice a week. I was going to some of the group bible studies and prayer meetings.”

When asked why of all the Christian organizations she chose the Adventist group to study with, Tara says:

I think it started off with God choosing me. When I first came here I had this intention of going to bible studies and I didn't really go searching because there is so much out here, and who knows what I would have found? Instead, they came to my door, and at the time they didn't mention that they were Adventist. Even as we were doing studies I didn't know they were Adventist, I just knew that they were really into the bible and that everything they taught me was from the bible. I really liked that, so eventually when I started going to the church and heard the name, I wondered, ‘What is Adventism?’

By this time, Tara says she was already experiencing the Sabbath, so she was hooked. For her, “there was no need to go searching anywhere else.” Tara says their reliance solely on the bible drew her to the faith. Tara accepted baptism into the church in 2011.

Tara transferred to her current institution from a community college after one year. She states that she did not want to go to private school because she knew it would be more expensive.

## Themes

During the course of data analysis, 41 themes were identified from the interviews of the nine participants. Those themes were reduced through two rounds of examination to six overarching themes evident in the participants' experiences. The themes are (a) challenges encountered in the secular environment lead to a need for self-advocacy in the academic and work environment regarding maintaining faith beliefs, (b) serving as a representative of God in academic settings, (c) the Adventist student group and church membership as a critical source of friendship and support during the college experience, (d) personal relationships and social group membership as a form of ministry, (e) a sense of divine placement or guidance as a persistence factor, and (f) the secular college experience as an opportunity for continued spiritual growth. Five of the six themes applied to all the participants. One of the themes only partially connected to Jessica. Jessica did not connect with the Adventist student group at her institution, but did remain connected to her church home as a source of support during her collegiate experience.

**Theme One: Challenges encountered in the secular environment lead to a need for self-advocacy in the academic and work environment regarding maintaining faith beliefs.**

All of the participants describe various challenges they encountered in the secular college environment that were potential hindrances to their ability to exercise their faith beliefs. These challenges led to the need to advocate for themselves with professors, employers, or peers regarding discussions, requirements or requests that conflicted with their ability to keep the Sabbath and adhere to their faith doctrine. Sometimes this advocacy took the form of developing a sense of balance that allowed them to complete academic or work requirements without asking for exceptions or accommodations. At



other times, the advocacy involved interacting with professors, employers, or administrators to ensure that they could keep the Sabbath and still complete their academic and vocational requirements. The students in the study expressed a wide variety of experiences that required them to engage in self-advocacy. The need to advocate for themselves was born out of unique challenges to their faith based on the natural setting of the secular college environment.

Kevin and Linda mentioned challenges with conflicts between study groups with peers and Sabbath keeping. Kevin discusses the advantage that exists for non-Adventist students regarding weekend study.

Most people have the opportunity to study on the weekends, and students from my group, we go to our meeting, and basically give up studying and doing what we can, but we are here worshipping or reading the bible, or talking to each other and singing and then going to church. I guess keeping the Sabbath. That was challenging.

Linda also mentions the study group and study time as a challenge, but states that she felt it helped her become a better steward of her time.

I learned to manage my time. Keeping the Sabbath and just being able to manage time and work, and seeing everyone else working through the weekends...was a challenge, but I guess I learned that I received a better resource, because even if I rushed to get it in by Friday, I may get the same grade, because if I stopped working on it, even if I'm not thinking on it, I can come back the next day and work on it, and my mind is a little refreshed and I can focus on it better and I can get a better grade than if I hadn't observed the Sabbath. That was a big lesson and

I believe that this last year, my senior year, I never took the chance to work on a Friday night. My Friday night was dedicated to the group and doing what we had to do and getting everyone together. Clearing my thought process from homework for that time was beneficial and relaxing and made me feel better. It made me work better with other things to come.

Lisa discussed a situation where her class schedule directly conflicted with her ability to keep the Sabbath and how she had to speak up for herself with her professors and peers.

I think last year or two years ago, all my physics exams fell on Friday evening from seven to nine and every time we had an exam come up I had to go to the student services office and tell them and explain my situation. They are pretty understanding. And when I would have to work on group projects I had to explain to my friends. They want to study on a Saturday or work on a project on the Sabbath, and I had to explain to them that it's not that I don't want to but can we move it to another time. They were pretty understanding so it hasn't been too much of a problem.

Olivia describes a situation where she was the only hold out in a class where students wanted to move the test to a Saturday, and the professor agreed only to do it if the entire class agreed. The pressure from her fellow classmates was heavy, and as a newer Adventist it was a challenge to deal with.

The only time I had an issue was in my undergrad. They asked the professor to move the test for another day I guess to have more time to study, and the day they were asking for was a Saturday. And the professor said 'Well, if everyone signs

the sheet for it I'll do it.' Of course, I was the only one who didn't sign it. The students were trashing on me, trying to force me to sign it, and I said I was going to talk to the professor first, so yeah, the students were on me that I needed to sign it and stuff. Once I spoke to the professor he was really understanding and gave me the test at a different time.

Mary discussed some of the pushback she received in the classroom from both professors and students. Mary describes a situation in a humanities course regarding a philosophical discussion that involved sacrificing one person for the sake of another. The discussion involved an individual killing one person to save another individual or a group of people. She was in a vocal minority of students who disagreed with the concept, citing her faith beliefs as a central reason for her opposition. She received a lot of resistance for her point of view, but Mary saw it as a chance to share her faith and her beliefs with her fellow students.

While speaking up for themselves in order to maintain their faith beliefs and be successful at school was something the students were prepared to do, Marta and Tara expressed some concern regarding the stance some professors took as it related material that conflicted with their faith in the classroom. The stance of their professors created an internal conflict for the students. As Marta explains,

Professors, they try to teach their point of view as if it's fact, more so than I'm used to. For example, right now I have a class that's on evolution, and the professor teaches it, and she'll say 'This is just a fact, and it's unarguable.' I just can't believe my ears when she says that. I feel like she knows but...it kind of changes my educational experience because it makes me distrustful of what they

are teaching me, and makes me see it as ‘Okay, you know these are viewpoints I need to know to get along in society, but not necessarily information that is real education.’

Tara’s reaction to similar situations was stronger. She found herself feeling sympathy for her professors and “irritated” by what she viewed as the hypocrisy of the public school atmosphere. In her words,

I start to feel bad for my professor because I know he’s really into it and I’m looking at it like I wish he’d do something else. The actual irritation is this. What irritates me is that public schools tell you not to speak about Christianity. You are not really allowed to force your opinion on anyone and I agree with that, but they will force their views on you, for example in science. So why do you get to force that upon me but I can’t force anything upon you?

Mary’s statement encapsulates the general trend amongst the participants in terms of their mindset regarding maintaining their faith doctrine when it conflicted with academic requirements. Mary did not describe having challenges, but also admits her mindset coming to college was a reason she can’t recall or describe any conflicts that she had. Her commitment to her faith overrode any other concerns she might face at a public institution, and she feels she came prepared to deal with those conflicts based on her spiritual convictions.

I haven’t found that many challenges. I think it’s because of the way I came to college. I knew graduation would probably be on Sabbath, I’m not going to go. If I get a job and they ask me to come to work on Sabbath, I’m not going to do it, I’ll just lose the job. If my test is on Sabbath and they can’t accommodate, I’ll

flunk the test. That was my mentality coming in. With that, like everything else, it's not really an obstacle, you're just going to flunk the test. So it, emotionally, I haven't had any turmoil about keeping the Sabbath, I just take the hit if I have to.

In the work realm, self-advocacy often involved conflicts with work schedules or work requirements that were incongruent with their personal beliefs. Students often made arrangements with employers to work alternate schedules and did not encounter resistance. They did find themselves explaining what their beliefs were to their employers, and at times had to remind their employers of their faith requirements. For Mary and Marta, growth in their faith began to cause internal conflict with their work on campus, leading them to decide to walk away from their positions. As Marta explains,

I've been working since freshman year at a cafeteria and I just recently quit this past semester. At the cafeteria that was a bit more challenging to keep the Sabbath because they'll schedule people for the weekend and the food situation. They wanted us to taste test. By the time I left, I was a supervisor, I was required to taste the food. It would be an awkward situation where they'd want me to taste the meat, and of course I'm vegetarian so I don't eat meat. But you know God worked it out for me and eventually our cafeteria was renovated and we now have a vegetarian station and I was able to run that station as opposed to other stations.

Mary's epiphany regarding her position was greater. She found it difficult to resolve her work in the cafeteria with expectations in her faith doctrine regarding work and the impact of the work on the ability of others to live in a way that is healthy. As Mary explains it,

I had gone canvassing in the summers, lots of different training with bible studies and campus ministries. Coming back, I felt convicted that I shouldn't be working in the dining hall anymore and doing the same thing...the reason was because I felt really uncomfortable serving unclean food. It was very unhealthy...this is not in line with the health message and how am I serving this food, and is it right that I am? I know in our baptismal vows it says we shouldn't be involved in any process of tobacco, or alcohol, selling distribution, or serving, so that would mean you can't be a waitress who serves alcohol or a bartender, or as a cashier with cigarettes. Well, if that's the case, then what is it about pork, it's forbidden as well... I was really struggling a lot with that because I knew that my boss was expecting me to come back as a supervisor, and I was trying to justify it, saying I didn't have to serve it, but I supervise those who do and there are times when they can't do it when I would have to, and I was like, this isn't going to work.

While Mary was able to step down as supervisor and man a vegetarian station that she pitched to the staff, the station was eventually shut down due to budget restrictions, leading Mary to resign from her position in the cafeteria.

The need for the students to advocate for themselves in the collegiate environment presented opportunities for them to share their faith with others. The manner in which they advocated for themselves was often non-confrontational and led to the students developing a sense of balance between their academic requirements and their faith requirements. The need for advocacy was present in both the academic setting and the work setting. The conflicts between the students and peers had a different tone than the conflicts between students and their professors. With professors, the students found

received more insight to the workings of institutional policy around accommodations. With peers, the students found themselves explaining their faith to individuals who were not always accepting.

### **Theme Two: Serving as a representative of God in the academic setting**

An aspect of their faith identity which manifested in the students' descriptions of their experiences including serving as a representative of God and what Seventh-day Adventists call "The Remnant Church." The Remnant Church refers to the Seventh-day Adventist church's view of itself as the group that

has been called out to keep the commands of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. (Ministerial Association, 1988, p. 152)

This included sharing the doctrine of the faith with other students, faculty, and staff in the academic environment, as well as clarifying misunderstood faith doctrine. The students in the study experienced very similar situations that led to them viewing themselves as representatives of God in their college environments. John, Kevin, Mary, and Marta described situations that most strongly represented and reflected the experience of the participants in the study.

John and Kevin were very aware of the importance of how they presented themselves to others as a reflection on God. John was very aware of his group membership and the potential for witnessing in those environments. As such, he was more aware of how his natural personality may have interfered with his ability to be an effective representative of God. As John explains,

I'm generally an outgoing kind of guy, but my issue is I can focus on something meaningful, so if I go to something without purpose, I can be distracting. I'll joke around. It's clean, but at the end of the day, people wouldn't take me seriously. I'd just be the guy who jokes around all the time, and I don't know, I wasn't really comfortable with that. I joke with others, but not as much, because when it comes time to witness, I need them to take me seriously.

Kevin sees his interactions and his ministry work on campus as crucial to helping other people understand his faith and God.

We are definitely driven by the Three Angels' message and I would say the biggest way we are helping is by being an example for others, because sometimes the biggest way you can share your faith is by being who you are and other people seeing that there is something different about you. Especially when I interact with others I really try to think twice about if I'm representing God in the right way that would make them want to ask questions about my faith.

There were situations the students experienced where other students challenged the nature of God or commented about Christianity in a way that made them uncomfortable. The situations across the student experience were very similar. The overriding theme among all of the students is that these situations spurred them to act to clear up what they saw as confusion or misconceptions about the nature of God. As John explains, his approach is to "have a dialogue as to why they would have said that and try to see where it would go from there. And possibly use that as an opportunity to witness to them about what I do believe."

Mary found herself clarifying the nature of God in her humanities courses.



Different people were like ‘I can’t see how God is fair, if He would allow this, you know, those kinds of questions, and I really found myself navigating through that trying to make my point of this is how the Bible portrays the character of God, here is how a lot of people have misunderstood it, and really trying to share the perspective through my classroom discussions or through my essays to the professor.

Marta discussed how students challenged her during one of her student group events regarding their perception of Christianity and God. She does not see it as a personal attack but as an opportunity to explain God and clear up misunderstandings.

We’ve never had an outright yelling, but people can become uncomfortable. They’ll avoid the table, or they’ll frown, or complain to each other. I’ll have friends or people in class that turn to me and say ‘I can’t believe Christians are like that, that they believe that stuff, that’s ridiculous.’ But as far as a direct attack or affront towards me, I’ve never had that, but an affront towards God, I’ve had that. When that happens I do my best to understand where they are coming from and say ‘Hey, that’s not always true. Christians don’t believe they are better than everyone else.’ I try to live my lifestyle in a way that is not compromising but not offensive by trampling on other people. At the end of the day I try to be really prayerful about and befriend people and try to show them what we are really about.

In their role as Seventh-day Adventists, the students found themselves exercising their roles as representatives of God. This role informed the way in which they presented themselves to others as well as the nature and quality of their interactions with their

peers, faculty, and staff members. The students were committed to representing themselves in a way that reflected positively on God and their faith, taking on the role of educator in regards to the nature of God with those they felt didn't understand what Christianity was about.

**Theme Three: Adventist student group and church membership as a critical source of friendship and support during the college experience**

The Adventist student group on campus served as a constant for eight of the nine participants. The eight who were involved with the Adventist student group were heavily involved and saw the group as not only a social organization, but as a vehicle of faith expression and a source of support and friendship. Olivia describes how it was the Adventist student group at her campus that drew her in and made her experience in college more enjoyable.

The thing is for me, personally, especially in my undergrad, before I had joined the Adventist Student Fellowship group, I didn't have friends, just people I studied and associated with. I remember, like my first three or four years I just wanted to finish real quick and get out of there, but after I started going to the group, I found real friends, people that were really interested in you and not just using you to get a better grade or whatever. That's when I started taking it slower and that's why it took me six years to finish my undergrad.

In addition to the friendships she formed, she credits the Adventist Student Fellowship group with being one of the reasons she came to her current institution.

"One of the reasons why I made the choice to come here was the Adventist group.

This was the group, you know that support it can be very tough without it, and I

know that's an experience for kids when I go home where my parents live, my family is not Adventist so in terms of keeping the Sabbath it can sometimes be a burden to do at home. If you do have the support like this and how I had it here and in my undergrad, the Lord changes you. It changes you, transforms you, so you will be used to his will."

The participants discussed feeling somewhat socially isolated based on their faith beliefs and the lives of the students they interacted with. For Jessica, who chose to connect with other faith-based groups, this created a feeling of uncertainty about her beliefs. While she continued to go to her home church, which was close to her college, her connection to her Christian friends at times left her feeling like the odd man out. The lack of connection to other Adventist students on campus may have intensified this feeling.

All my good friends are Christian, but none of them are Adventist, so they do certain things on Saturday that I wasn't sure if I should do those things. When I explain they understand and are fine with it, but I think, it's hard for me to decide what I can and can't do on the Sabbath.

Marta wondered briefly upon her arrival at school if she would be able to connect, until she found a church in the area and began participating in the Adventist student group.

There was a point in freshman year where I thought maybe it might be harder to make friends, and what not, and so I was feeling a bit isolated because I didn't have that many friends, but that didn't last long. It was maybe one week. I went to church, and by the second week I ran into friends there. I became a part of the

Adventist Student Fellowship so my life was sucked into that right off the bat.

And so that thought faded away, and then it just became a matter of losing friends because they are not willing to accept my lifestyle.

Mary had an experience with her roommate that created a feeling of isolation, or what she calls “distance,” when her growing faith appeared to conflict with her roommate’s lifestyle. She describes how her roommate their first year participated in campus parties, and how the roommate would invite Mary to go along. Mary would always refuse, and at times would ask the roommate and her friends to watch their language in her presence as it made her uncomfortable. She describes that after a while, they stopped asking her out because they knew she would say no. She said the divide grew bigger during her sophomore year, as their lifestyles grew further and further apart.

Mary discusses how her roommate screamed at her for saying “Thank God I passed a test,” declaring that Mary shouldn’t thank God for Mary’s hard work. Mary was taken aback because she didn’t understand where the exclamation came from. “Her lifestyle really started drifting far away from mine and I guess she thought I was condemning her, even though I had not really said anything but just the fact that there were things I wouldn’t do.” When Mary started her junior year, she made a deliberate effort to “surround myself with people who would at least be able to support me.” At this time she started getting more involved with growing the Adventist Student Fellowship group at her campus. She considers them a support network that is an important part of her support system.

Kevin found that his connection with his friends from the Adventist Student Fellowship really helped him remain faithful to his beliefs.

Really, just staying connected with other Adventists here, it does help that two of my roommates are Adventist. So, having them as like, examples of people who I can talk to, that's been really nice. It's kind of tough to come in at one or two in the morning and feel good about it when you know there are other people who will call you out on it if they know that's what you are doing. They've kept me on my toes and challenged me when I needed to be challenged, but also really just pray for me and help push me in the right direction when I need it.

Lisa's experience as a young college student caused a connection to church and the Adventist student group on campus to be a crucial part of what helped her adjust to college and kept her grounded. As Lisa explains, coming to college

It was a big culture shock for me. I've never been asked out on a Friday night or Sabbath before. It was a bit uncomfortable at first, but over time and with the help of the older Adventist students it's not that much of a shock anymore. I have a really strong community. It's great, they come over and we hang out a lot and I go to the overnights. It's like a self-support group.

Lisa also credits the Adventist group with providing her support, mentorship, and guidance.

Without this Adventist group, and these mentors, I wouldn't have been so strong in my faith. Because at 16 as the introvert that I was, I would have easily followed the crowd, so maybe I wouldn't be where I am without them right now.

Tara speaks to how the church friends are the soul source of her social world. "I was never one of those people who got involved a lot. The only thing I'm currently

involved in is the Adventist Student Fellowship. Most of my time if not all is spent with my friends from church.”

The students found that socializing with other Adventist students provided a source of support, comfort, and connection to their faith and to the institution. The students found that carrying out their mission as Seventh-day Adventists as well their ability to persist in college was linked to this social network.

#### **Theme Four: Personal relationships and group memberships as a form of ministry**

While some were not able to articulate it, the faith beliefs of the participants appeared to have an impact on the types of social organizations they participated in. The participants were drawn to faith based groups and groups associated with their academic majors. While some participated in multicultural and service oriented groups, all used their group membership as an opportunity to share their faith.

Jessica did not participate in an Adventist student group, but instead opted to participate in other ecumenical Christian campus groups. While she found some conflicted with the expression of faith in the group and did not agree with all of their teachings, she states “I agreed to be in it because I felt it was the only way to share my faith.”

Lisa indicated that her faith had a direct influence on the organizations she chose to be involved in. She participates in a global health organization and a student group raising awareness of cancer. “Adventists want to show the love of Christ to everyone, and I feel like this is how I can show the love of Christ best through these organizations.”

Marta joined several different organizations, including the Caribbean Student organization and the Black Caucus. She scaled back her membership to the Adventist student group due to her leadership role in that group. The main goal of her membership in campus groups was to share her faith with others.

When I participated in those, I did it as a way to make friends with people who shared similar interests as opposed to, it was good networking. Primarily my focus is meeting new friends and reaching them for the Lord.

Tara uses the Adventist Student Group as a vehicle for sharing her faith. She participates in the information booths that provide bible studies that she has taken part in. She also states “I witness by people I know. It comes up somehow about the church I go to, or I’ll invite them to a bible study.” She participates in door knocking, handing out fliers, and bringing bible studies to others who are interested.

John discusses how his faith directly impacted his decision to avoid certain groups, including fraternities and sororities. For John, special interest groups tended to be less productive, and in his estimation, they “meet for the sake of meeting.” Although the groups were focused on a special interest, he didn’t see it as an opportunity for his faith to grow. According to John,

As far as my faith was concerned if I go, it wouldn’t really help me to grow in any way, and it’s not a good outlet for witnessing because of the nature of the group. In fact, I don’t really understand what they do. It’s just that they meet. It’s kind of hard to witness in those groups in terms of my personality I’ve found. So I’ve tried to stay away if I can’t do something useful there.

Mary reached out to her professors in situations where she felt uncomfortable with conversations and conflicts between course material and her faith. She saw the conflict as “misconceptions about what in the world an Adventist is, or even what a Christian is.” In addition to talking to professors in one-on-one settings about the conflict and her viewpoint, she used the connection as a way to witness regarding her faith to her professors.

A lot of my professors at the end of the semester, got some Spirit of Prophecy book from me, whether it was Desire of Ages, Steps to Christ, or The Great Controversy. The majority of the chemistry professors have gotten one book from me at least.

Linda sought out genuine friendships and connections with others through her outreach efforts in the Adventist student group, using those connections as a way to invite people to share in her faith.

First I ask about choir. When we sing at the local church I get some of the members who like to be a part of the choir and some who don't attend the meetings to come. It actually worked out pretty well. Some people will not come to a meeting but they will come to a choir practice or a praise dance practice, so it was to get them in there somewhere.

Linda states that her social life was getting to know people, which provided many opportunities for her to share her faith. Her social interests were about meeting people and sharing her faith that way. “It’s a funny experience, but I guess, being a Seventh-day Adventist in public school has been a real witnessing experience without me knowing.”



All of the participants' experiences can be summarized by Lisa's statement. Lisa worked on developing personal relationships that were genuine in order to share her faith.

I believe in witnessing through Christ's method. Mingling and sympathizing with them. Instead of treating people like projects or keeping a tally, but really wanting to be their friend and being their friend. As you win their confidence you can bid them come.

The students selected to participate in organizations that allowed them to share their faith. Their faith also impacted organizations they chose not to be involved in. The goal of their participation in these organizations was to develop friendships in order that they could share their faith with others.

#### **Theme Five: Sense of divine placement at institution as a persistence factor**

Literature cites a sense of connection to their institution as one of the reasons students persist in college. The students in this study cited a sense of connection as well, but less to the college specifically and more to their purpose for being at their institution. While some transferred from community college and Adventist institutions for financial reasons, others began at their institutions due to a sense of comfort and familiarity with the institution. When asked why they continue to stay at their institutions, many cited divine guidance as a reason for remaining. Many shared very similar experiences in terms of their understanding as to why they were still at their secular institutions. For some, their involvement in Adventist student groups was seen as part of an important mission field assigned to them by God. John explains it this way:

If you'd ask me at the beginning of my first year, I would have said [his institution's] engineering program, but now I think this, for me, right now...is

where God has called me to be. This has been a really good growing experience, an opportunity to share and touch a mission field that isn't commonly touched, a lot of opportunities to share and minister to others who may otherwise not be reached. Since I've been here I've seen a couple of people's lives change, and I think about it, God has definitely put me and some other people here just for the purpose of changing one or more people's lives.

Kevin feels his transfer happened for a specific reason above and beyond having received a tuition benefit:

I feel like there's a reason I'm here, that God wants me here. Things happened the way they did for a reason and this may sound weird, but I feel like if I'm here now then I'm needed here more than at Andrews. There are far more people here who don't know anything about God and are struggling. Not saying I can help everyone but even if I could just talk to a few people, help a few people make that commitment to Christ, then it will be far more effective than me being at Andrews where people...they already have that truth. I feel like there is a greater need for God at secular schools.

Tara describes feeling as though coming to her current institution was God's way of introducing her to the Adventist faith. She came with the intention to reconnect to her spirituality, and feels that God had a hand in connecting her to Seventh-day Adventists.

I think it started off with God choosing me. When I first came here I had this intention of going to bible studies and I didn't really go searching because there is so much out here and who knows what I would have found? Instead, they came to my door.

Mary saw her presence at her current institution as God's way of helping her to grow her faith and reach others through the Adventist student group. Starting the group was the ministry God had placed on her. As she explains,

During my sophomore year I really felt like God had placed me on this campus for a reason. Especially after going to the ANEW (Addressing the Now in Exercising the Will) conference where I was like I think that God wanted me here for my own spirituality and also to start something on this campus.

Linda described her presence at a public university as part of a divine purpose that she didn't necessarily understand, but implicitly trusted.

I just knew where I went is what God has for me, so I never questioned where I'm going, I just knew where I'm going is where God wanted me to be. Even not attending a Seventh-day Adventist school, I just knew, there is a purpose for everything, and that wherever I am, or I am going, or will go, happens for a reason.

The students found themselves at their secular institutions by a variety of means. The thread among all of them is the feeling of divine placement in their current institution. The students view their presence at their secular institutions as a means of sharing their faith with individuals who may not be exposed to it under other circumstances.

### **Theme Six: Secular college experience as an opportunity for continued spiritual growth**

The separation of church and state creates institutions that are secular in nature and where, as the participants indicated, spiritual doctrine and information are often

discouraged in academic discourse. While divine placement was discussed as a reason for persistence at their secular institutions, another factor that contributed to their persistence was their own personal spiritual growth and faith development. John, Lisa, Mary, and Linda's statements were inclusive of the experiences of the participants.

John indicates that his ability to share his faith has caused him to seek answers more in order to stop being an obstacle to himself in sharing his faith.

The greatest obstacle for me is myself. Struggling back and forth myself and also not understanding all of the things I should. That's what I want to do this summer is review our beliefs as an Adventist so I'm more snappy with that stuff. If someone asks me I can give them an answer immediately.

Lisa felt her time at her institution is preparing her for life in the medical field. I really liked the people there, the program there was great, I was learning about the world and things I didn't know about before, and I know that if I'm going to work in the medical field in the future these are things I need to know, like how to relate to people. Before coming to college, I was really an introvert, really shy. This institution really increased my faith, challenged my faith, and helped me grow in my faith, and I wouldn't trade this experience for another school or experience.

Mary credits her experience at a public institution, combined with her involvement with ANEW, as factors that have encouraged her to remain at her current institution.

I started to realize that 'oh my goodness, God really has me here for a reason.' I started to have a real devotional life. Before I would read the Bible for 10-15

minutes, but not really digest it because I should. But then after I went to the ANEW conference...I was like 'man, I really need to start having devotion.' So I came back, started having active devotions, started having bible study, started leading out in bible study, even though I had no idea what I was doing. Inviting people, having events here on campus, things like that, and then inviting my roommate out. I would definitely say with personal spiritual growth, I've grown a lot. And then, just learning how to do ministry, ministry growth has been a blessing.

Linda sees her institution as an opportunity to further carry out the tenets of her faith that require the sharing the Seventh-day Adventist faith with others.

I felt like a public university would be more of a ministry, mission, for people who may not be reached otherwise. Most people are not in any kind of church, so the weekend is just a weekend. And it's just like a vehicle where we are going through the motions of the weekend. Church is the last thing on someone's mind, and when you bring up the subject of Christ or church it's like a foreign thing. I just realized being at a public university was something I was supposed to be in and I guess it just worked out.

The students found purpose in their experiences in the secular college environment. They were able to continue to grow in their faith as a result of their experience in the secular environment. These factors were cited as the reason they continued on at their secular institutions instead of transferring to Seventh-day Adventist institutions.

## Summary

For the committed Seventh-day Adventist students in this study, their faith identity emerges as their most salient identity while navigating the college environment. Regardless of how they came to be Adventists, students were determined to maintain their faith beliefs and practices, and advocated on their own behalf in order ensure that they could do so while matriculating successfully. While some faced occasional hostility from professors, they found their peers pushed back more when they expressed their faith.

The students in this study recognize that their faith beliefs and practice often set them apart from their peers and run the risk of creating distance between them and other students. To that end, their connection with a church home and other Adventist students becomes a source of support and a grounding mechanism for their experiences at secular institutions. Interactions in social organizations are seen as vehicles to enhance ministry, but the students' approach to ministry is rooted in the development of authentic personal relationships with others. These relationships are not restricted to their peers, but include their employers and their professors.

The Seventh-day Adventist students in this study persist at secular institutions for a variety of reasons. The theme that is constant among these students was the sense of divine placement at secular institutions for the purpose of advancing the mission of the church. Students felt the need for their presence as representatives of God was greater than the need at an Adventist institution. Finally, the Seventh-day Adventist students in this study grew stronger in their faith through their secular school experiences. The need to share their faith in a real and authentic way led to the students studying their own faith

doctrine more as well as networking with students in other regions through church organizations in order to grow more knowledgeable about their beliefs. This increased spiritual growth led to the students sharing their faith with others more.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to discover, describe, and understand the experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students at secular universities. The goal of this study was to help researchers and administrators understand how distinct groups of students who adhere to a specific religious faith, in this case a non-traditional faith, navigate the secular university environment and the impact of their faith on their experience. The research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What is the essence of the Seventh-day Adventist student experience:
  - a. ...In relation to campus life at a secular university?
  - b. ...In relation to academic life at a secular university?
2. How do Seventh-day Adventist students negotiate the higher education environment while maintaining their distinct spiritual beliefs and practices?

#### **Comparative Analysis of Findings with Literature**

The literature linked to the topic of spirituality in higher education has often discussed the importance of organizational and individual support in the spiritual development of students in higher education. Allen and Kellom (2001) found that support from faculty and staff was crucial to students being able to develop the spiritual aspect of their lives. Students in this study reflected on a general lack of opposition and hostility from faculty and staff, but no outright support from faculty and staff, with the exception of Kevin. Kevin noted that his manager on campus is a Seventh-day Adventist



who attends the same church. Kevin feels individually supported in his work environment in a way the other students did not express.

Often students found themselves needing to navigate the environment regarding academic requirements. Students in this study who attended the same institution expressed different methods of having their faith needs accommodated. Some were able to work directly with their professors, while others were referred to a student services division to work out accommodations. This leads to a belief that there may be a lack of organizational policies in place, or a lack of knowledge of those policies when it comes to making faith based accommodations for students. This is not surprising, given Clark's description of campus environments that may, through their insistence of acknowledging spirituality in a comprehensive way, be uninformed of policies within institutions that protect the right of students, faculty, and staff to have constitutional protection around their expression of faith (2001).

While Small (2009) indicated in her study that social acceptance of religion was an indicator of how much a person felt he or she grew spiritually, students in this study developed spiritually in spite of social acceptance. Some of the students stated that they were told in some of their humanities classes that, in spite of the assignment, they were not allowed to use faith-based materials in support of their arguments. The students completed the assignments, but indicated that it changed their perception of their teachers as experts in their fields.

For some, the challenges to their faith and their experiences inspired them to study the doctrine of their faith deeper to help them better share their faith with others. It also led Kevin and Marta to make a decision to be rebaptized while in college. Kevin

talks about feeling as if he had fallen away and made poor choices while in high school and at the beginning of his college career. His church attendance, and a specific sermon, spoke to his need to reevaluate his priorities and recommit his life to his faith.

Love and Talbot (1999) state that failing to address the spiritual development of students could lead to a “general narrowness of perspective and an inability or unwillingness to think critically, explore value-related issues, and question authorities” (p. 363). The students in this study continue to explore these issues and question the authorities in their collegiate environments, in spite of the failure of their institutions to do so. Jessica expressed doubts and concerns as it related to her own faith development and the doctrine of her church based on what she had been exposed to in her college environment. While she indicated a desire to reconnect to her faith by attending a Seventh-day Adventist university for graduate school, her perspective continued to grow in terms of how she chose to deal with others, particularly those who lived in ways that were incongruent with her faith but who she viewed as good people.

Marta indicated how she continued to develop in her faith even as she found some of her professors unwilling to explore issues of spirituality. Mary shared her concern and the manner in which she continued to reach out to her professors even when they seemed somewhat hostile towards the concept of spirituality and faith. Other students in the study also expressed a deepening of their faith and a more critical study of their church’s doctrine as well as their educational experience.

Astin (1999) defined student involvement as the “amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). The definition includes time spent in study, involvement in campus activities, and interaction

with faculty, staff, and other students. While the theories focus on the educators, Astin suggests focusing on what the students are doing. Students in this study were actively engaging in growing and sharing their faith. The students were engaged in college in a way that was meaningful for them and linked to the development of their faith identity and faith practice. Their engagement ranged from developing Adventist student groups from scratch, to growing and extending the reach and influence of currently existing groups. The students were also committed to their academic pursuits. The importance of their academics reflected in their choice of organizations. Many chose to be involved in academically linked or service based organizations outside of the classroom. All chose to be a part of a faith based organization in addition to their other extracurricular activities. These Seventh-day Adventist students were engaged in their college environment while maintaining distinctive faith identities that sometimes led to feelings of social isolation.

Fowler's theory of faith development (1981) described six stages of faith development along an age continuum, beginning with a fantasy based intuitive faith and ending with a universalization of faith that involves an integration of faith with a motivation to effect change on a global scale. Small (2008) identifies college students as usually starting school in the conventional faith level, where the worldview includes school, peer relationships, media, and societal influences. Beliefs and values are formed, but there is no conscious awareness that an ideology exists.

Small indicates that some students move to the fourth stage of development, reflective faith. In the reflective faith stage, individuals take responsibility for their own commitments, lifestyles, beliefs, and behaviors, and begin to critically examine tensions between being individuals and being a part of a group. This is the beginning of self-

actualization (Fowler, 1981). Daloz-Parks theorized that the collegiate experience breaks down absolute forms of knowing, which allows students to engage in critical thinking and reasoning skills surrounding issues of faith (Daloz-Parks as cited in Love, 2001).

The students in this study reflected on their faith more upon their entry to college. Their faith requires a willingness to reason and critically reflect on their beliefs and how they apply to the real world. As such, their collegiate experience did not pave the way for more critical thinking skills, but further reinforced the critical thinking and reasoning skills they had begun to develop as a function of their faith experiences. At the same time, the college experience reinforced their belief in the absolute nature of God and the doctrine of the church. While theorists would posit that these two states would create conflict within the student, the students in this study seemed to exist in these states with a sense of understanding. Their critical thinking surrounded the deciphering of information shared with them from their institution as well as from their church, but their belief in the doctrine of their church and God remained static.

In Chapter One, I discussed the conceptual framework that this study was based on. I referenced the challenges the world Adventist church is facing regarding issues of inclusion and equity for traditionally underrepresented groups such as women, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals. I discussed how one committed individual may have a very different way of expressing their faith in the college environment compared to another. In this study, Jessica's expression of her faith differed from the other students. While she stayed connected to her home church, she chose to engage in the university setting by immersing in the experience to avoid what she described as an "Adventist bubble." She felt by immersing in this manner she could get a

better understanding of others as well as have an opportunity to share her faith with those who would not normally come into contact with Adventists. The wide diversity of the church coupled with the unique experience of college students led me to believe that the framework of intersectionality would help us to understand which identity was most relevant in the experience of the Seventh-day Adventist college student.

The Adventist students in this study reflected largely on the impact of their faith on their college experience. For them, their faith identity was the most salient aspect of their experience in college. In spite of their varied backgrounds, introduction to American society, and gender norms, Adventism was a defining characteristic of their experiences. It impacted their choices of employment, social group participation, and even their future career focus. Tara, who was baptized halfway through her college experience, plans to take a year off from school and pursue social work or counseling as a potential career choice. She credits this choice to her growing understanding and acceptance of her faith.

Seventh-day Adventist students in this study are committed to living out and executing their faith in line with the doctrine of their church. This manifested itself in many ways, including joining non-Adventist faith groups as a way of bringing their beliefs to others, creating and joining Adventist groups, ministering to their peers, teachers, and employers, and remaining connected to their church environments. The nature of their faith seems to prepare them for isolation from their peers in a way that renders them unable to identify it as isolation. They create safe spaces that allow them to grow and cultivate their faith, which helps them to successfully navigate the college environment. These safe spaces are supported and at times, generated by local Adventist

church communities who reach out to the students after their arrival to campus. Lisa discussed how she contacted a church on a Thursday night, and by Friday she had been invited to a spaghetti dinner with a family from the church. The local church community plays a vital role in helping the students connect and ground themselves in their new environments.

### **Summary of Research Questions**

#### **Research Question One: What is the essence of the Seventh-day Adventist student experience in relation to campus and academic life at a secular university?**

The students in this study experienced college transitions that mirrored those of their non-Adventist peers. They encountered situations that challenged their upbringing and their sense of the world around them. It would appear that for the students in this study, the transition to college was less jarring than what their peers face based in large part to their connection to their faith. Adventist students in this study immediately sought connection to a church upon their arrival on campus. The church connection created a support network for the students that they relied on during the course of their college experiences.

The students in the study experienced their religious identity as the most salient in their college experience. When describing their academic experiences, they view themselves as representatives of God. Although they often experienced classroom situations that seemed intolerable or hostile to the concepts of God and Christianity, they did not take them as a personal affront. Instead, they viewed them as an affront to God. The depth of their connection to their faith inspired them to speak up and clarify what they viewed as the nature of God to those they felt did not understand. The students in

the study did not do this out of a sense of bitterness and did not express weariness in their advocacy for God. They appeared to take great joy in sharing their faith, attributing the misunderstanding of others to poor experiences in previous church environments. It almost appeared as the students wanted to help others heal whatever hurts past church environments had caused them.

Academically, the students in this study had to engage in self-advocacy to ensure that they were able to live out the requirements of their faith while completing the academic requirements of the collegiate environment. There appeared to be confusion even at the same institution about policies regarding providing allowances for students to engage in their faith practices without being penalized at the institutional level. One student was able to work with her professor to take a test early to avoid violating the Sabbath. Another student was directed to the student services office to gain similar permission. While the two students are studying in different departments, institutional policy should be consistent in regards to providing such allowances for students.

In engaging in self-advocacy in the academic environment, the students expressed facing peer pressure to conform to the will of the class in regards to rescheduling academic events for the weekend. In the face of the pressure, the students stood firm in their faith beliefs and worked out alternate arrangements with their professors as necessary. They also found themselves explaining their concept of Christianity when challenged by other students who found expressions of faith doctrine in class material objectionable. Mary discussed how some of her peers had what she saw as a skewed view of God and Christians based on reading material, and how she found herself providing clarification on the issues.

The students in this study developed a campus experience for themselves that was congruent with their faith beliefs and the expectations of their faith doctrine. They gravitated towards academic and service oriented social organizations in addition to being active in faith-based student organizations. The students viewed their participation in campus life as an extension of their own ministry, using their interactions as opportunities to share their faith with others. Their involvement in faith based organizations, which were often Adventist student groups, provided both a source of support and a platform from which to share their beliefs with others. Their social interactions were infused with opportunities taken to share their faith with others, often in the hopes of helping others come to the understanding of the Adventist doctrine and accept Jesus Christ as their savior. Matriculating in a campus environment provided a challenge to their faith that caused them to study the beliefs of the Adventist church in a deeper, more meaningful way. The students expressed feeling as though the experience helped strengthen their faith and helped bring them to a better understanding of faith compared to the exposure they were provided as children.

In the experiences of these students, religious and spiritual discussions continued to be ignored or avoided in the academic environment, which is congruent with the findings of Allen and Kellom (2001), Rogers and Dantly (2001), and VanZanten Gallagher (2007). The students in this study experienced varying levels of ridicule around issues of spirituality as well as disregard in the forms of pushing other theories of creation as absolute truth. Allen and Kellom (2001), and Lee (2000) indicate that an environment where dialogue is encouraged, openness is valued, and individuals feel free to express themselves without fear of reprisal contributes to the spiritual development of



students and helps resolve the dissonance they experience. The students in this study do not appear to have had a college environment that was open and friendly to religious expression. The students continued to express their faith in spite of the less than welcome and open environment.

Small (2009) described religion as a way to develop a stronger sense of self, but also indicated that students who felt marginalized at times developed an ambiguous identity. The students describe experiences that could be viewed as marginalization, but did not characterize them as such. Instead of causing confusion regarding their beliefs, the challenges they faced strengthened their faith and their determination to adhere to their beliefs.

**Research Question Two: How do Seventh-day Adventist students negotiate the higher education environment while maintaining their distinct spiritual beliefs and practices?**

Rogers and Dantly (2001) observed that higher education avoids a discussion of spirituality as a holistic concept. Spirituality is broken down into a discussion of various concepts that constitute the spiritual journey. The concepts include community building, civic engagement, citizenship, character education, and service learning. The college environments described by the students in this study were places where the discussion of spirituality is still fragmented. Their faith allowed them to engage in the various building blocks of spirituality as part of a cohesive whole. In addition, they developed a community of faith that allowed them to move forward in their collegiate ventures.

The students in this study indicated that connection to a church environment, the support of fellow Adventists on campus, and a consistent spiritual connection helped in navigating their higher education environment. Many indicated that connection to the

Adventist student group and a church were critical pieces in helping them stay grounded in their faith. Their view of their environment as a ministry field in which they can share their faith and spread the message of the church helps students in their experience in higher education.

The students in the study indicate that they felt divinely placed at their institutions. With a few exceptions, the secular schools that the students are attending were not their first choice. Interestingly, an Adventist institution also was not their first choice with the exception of Kevin, who spent time at an Adventist college prior to transferring to his current institution. When asked why they did not transfer to an Adventist institution, the students indicated that they found purpose in being at a secular school. Mary, John, Kevin, and Linda explain that being at an Adventist school wouldn't be advantageous because "they know the truth at an Adventist institution." In their estimation, there is a greater need for their presence at a secular school, because there are many more individuals they come into contact with that do not have a true understanding of God or Christianity. Given that the mission of the Adventist church is to spread the gospel message of Jesus, a secular institution gives these students an opportunity to carry out their faith in a way that is meaningful and impactful.

The students in this study indicated that attending a secular institution presented challenges to their faith both in and out of the classroom. These challenges were embraced as opportunities for spiritual growth. They continued to compare information presented in and outside of the classroom against the teachings of the Bible. For the sake of finishing school, they completed homework assignments as needed, but accepted the information they receive that did not line up with their faith beliefs with a grain of salt.

As Marta explained, she viewed some classroom information as necessary to “get along in society, but not necessarily information that is real education.” The students’ view of contrary information did not cause major discomfort for the students. The Adventist view of their church as the “Remnant Church” appears to have prepared them for exposure to information that ran contrary to the teachings of the church. Additionally, the experiences that the students had in their formative years with public school education also appears to have prepared them for exposure to teachings contrary to church doctrine.

In studies of other religious minorities, the students viewed themselves in a variety of ways. Muslim students felt that their faith prepared them for living a religious life in a secular world (Small, 2009). This is very similar to the experience of Adventist students, whose faith practices and upbringing prepared them for life in a secular world. Their self-perception as a member of a religious minority caused them to think critically about their faith identity. Unlike Muslim students, who viewed their religious lives and their public lives as separate (Small, 2009), Adventist students attempt to live an integrated life where their faith informs their interactions within secular environments. Unlike some of the Jewish students in Small’s study (2008), the Adventist students did not place their faith on hold during their college years. They did, however, express a similar feeling of cultural distance from the rest of their college peers (Small, 2008).

Similar to the Evangelical Christians in Lulofs’ (1994) study, Adventist students did return to the doctrine of their faith for spiritual and psychological safety, but in a manner somewhat different than the individuals in the Lulofs study. Lulofs described the pattern in Evangelical Christians as a retreat to dogma for spiritual and psychological

safety, implying that the students shut others out and socialized amongst those who shared their dogma and doctrine. The Adventist students in this study did not retreat, as Lulofs described it, but returned to their faith and the Bible to prepare themselves to share a better understanding of their faith with others. Moran and Curtis (2004) indicated that, when Christianity was mocked, Evangelical Christians retreated into silence. Seventh-day Adventist students did not retreat, but took it upon themselves to advocate for Christianity, and specifically for the character of God. They appointed themselves ambassadors charged with helping others gain a clearer understanding of the nature of God and the Bible.

Fox (2008) described a sense of isolation and alienation experienced among Evangelical Christians in college environments. These feelings were more recognized and directly defined compared to the Seventh-day Adventist students in this study. The students did not necessarily recognize it as alienation in a way that they could articulate. Fox also described a loss of relationships. The Evangelical Christians in his study attributed it to a lack of moral character. The Seventh-day Adventist students viewed the loss of relationships and isolation as a mission field to be approached. They attributed the differences in personality and the discomfort some students expressed at their faith beliefs as a lack of understanding of the nature of God. This mindset inspired them to find ways to connect with others and explain God in a way that was less threatening. All the students described their methods as relationship evangelism.

The students in this study view themselves as Adventist first and foremost. This aspect of their identity informed many of the choices they made in their college environment. It influenced their choice of social interactions, the academic majors they

pursued, the career paths they plan to embark on, their experience in the classroom, and their experiences with other college students. Seeing their college environment as their mission field helped frame their experience in a way that provided purpose and direction for their interactions with fellow students, faculty, and staff members. The students in this study generally had a positive view of their college experience and were actively engaged in their environments, despite the challenges they faced.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study shed light on a phenomenon that had not been studied before: the experiences of students who worship in non-traditional faith practices in the college environment. There have been no studies on Seventh-day Adventist college students in secular environments. Many of the studies that exist about Seventh-day Adventist students focus on K-12 school experiences. The students in this study matriculated primarily through public school settings. While some attended Adventist K-12 institutions briefly, the bulk of their experience seems to have helped prepare them for attending a secular university. A study of Seventh-day Adventist students who matriculate through K-12 Adventist institutions and their experiences at a secular college setting would shed additional light on the experiences of Adventist students at public universities. The students in this study grew up primarily in public school environments. An argument could be made that their experiences in these K-12 environments were building blocks to prepare them for the experience of being an Adventist in a secular school environment. A study of Seventh-day Adventist students and their retention rates who attended Adventist K-12 institutions would provide information about the preparedness for the secular environment that the faith provides.

This study was limited by the demographic profile of the participants compared to the demographic profile of the Seventh-day Adventist church in North America. The membership of the North American Division of the Adventist church is 39% immigrant and 61% native born. In this study, 66% of the students were immigrant, and 34% were native born, a reversal of the national church profile. Fifty percent of the North American Division of the church is White, 27% are Black, 12% are Hispanic, 7% are Asian, and 4% identified as other. In this study, 55% of the students identified as Black, 22% were Hispanic, and 22% were Asian. There were no White students represented in this study. The lack of voices from White Adventist students may have impacted the results of the study. An area of research should be examining those voices. In order to recruit those students, it would be necessary to expand the age range of participants, and consider asking them to reflect back on their experiences as Seventh-day Adventists in a secular environment.

Another area for study would be the participation of the high number of underrepresented students in this study. Given the challenges that face international students and students of color, it is possible that the students in this study selected to participate because they have experience speaking out for themselves in regards to being viewed as a minority. While there were White students who volunteered to participate, they were older and as a result outside of the age range of the study. Older students of any racial or ethnic background may feel more comfortable speaking on their experiences in the college environment because they have had an opportunity to reflect on them. Students of color may find themselves needing to process the experience of being in the

minority in the moment. An area to explore is whether or not this leads to greater participation in faith-based activities by Seventh-day Adventist students of color.

This study examined a small population of Adventist students. A study examining a larger pool of students in a quantitative manner based on some of the themes developed here may provide deeper insight into the Adventist student experience. The students in this study were retained and persisted through their own determination, the development of their own communities, and connection to their faith communities. The college environment, while not viewed in a negative light by the students, was not inclusive and in some instances was openly hostile. A study of a larger pool of students would determine if this experience can be generalized to the Adventist student population matriculating in secular environments. The theme of self-advocacy in the academic environment could be an area of deeper research not only in regards to Adventist students, but students of other faith beliefs who are navigating the college environment. While we want students to grow to a place to advocate for themselves, we should examine if there are unnecessary roadblocks that do not need to exist.

An examination of graduation rates and retention of students who adhere to faith beliefs is another area of research that should be explored. Colleges have not changed from the cultural institutions that value mainstream Christianity above other religious backgrounds. This means that the challenges that religious minorities have faced still remain. Discovering if students are continuing to persist would be important in order to gain a better understanding of direction colleges can take to provide support and change operating practices in a way that is inclusive of all.

Finally, the concept of developing students holistically by attending to spiritual needs requires further research if the experiences of the students in this study are any indication. Specifically an assessment of campus practices in this area will point out the need for future action and steps that can be taken to rectify the continuing lack of progress we make in this area. The students in this study expressed a general lack of support for their spiritual endeavors. While accommodations were made for students to adhere to their faith beliefs, it was often not without question.

### **Recommendations for Future Practice**

Professors, faculty, and staff still seem reluctant to address matters of spirituality where students are concerned. Campus cultures remain Christian-oriented, and students in this study experienced their professors telling them that they could not use spiritual material to support their arguments in class. Organizational support still appears to be lacking, particularly in areas of information and education around accommodations for students who need to be excused to honor their faith beliefs. In addition, students who choose to develop student organizations around spiritual practices run into resistance when arranging for meeting places. There is also resistance from professional staff who may not understand the need for students to worship according to their own faith practice as opposed to joining a non-denominational group.

To strengthen institutional support for students, policies must be made clear regarding the process by which a student who needs accommodations may go about securing them. While the students in this study developed the skills to advocate for themselves, the universities could have provided more assistance in this area as well by making policies clear. These policies need to be a part of new employee orientation for



faculty, staff, and auxiliary employers. The policies also need to be accessible to students seeking the information. Professors can include a line in their syllabus indicating how students go about requesting such accommodations.

In their study, Schlosser and Sedlacek (2001) described practices at a secular campus as creating a Christian culture at the institution due to their origins and operating practices. These practices include operating on academic calendars designed around traditional Christian observances, as well as not requiring an explanation from Christian students regarding the need for absences to observe traditional religious rituals. While Seventh-day Adventism is a denomination of Christianity, the students in this study had their faith observances questioned and at times critically examined by others who did not understand why they simply didn't join with other denominations of Christianity in their practices.

Ongoing inclusion training would also assist higher education administrators in understanding the requirements of secular university employers regarding the acknowledgement of student faith beliefs. In addition, inclusion training would help faculty and staff develop respect for differing beliefs instead of trying to force students to assimilate. Administrators still seem reluctant to acknowledge or deal with faith matters for fear of blurring the lines between church and state. In addition, they continue to question students who do not practice faith beliefs in ways that are traditional to Christianity. The students in this study noted that comments would be made by students in class that bordered on intolerant of faith beliefs, comments that were not addressed by their professors. This can create an environment where students who do adhere to faith beliefs feel uncomfortable or unsafe expressing themselves. Training for both faculty

and staff would assist and empower them to address these issues in a way that keeps the learning environment healthy and inclusive.

Another recommendation for practice is for institutions to create a system by which all student organizations that seek recognition are treated equitably. Students in this study indicated that they met resistance in procuring space for their meetings. Some organizations indicated that they were not funded in the same manner as other campus organizations. Additional requirements for faith-based organizations can be viewed as prejudiced. If a faith-based organization has met the requirements to be officially recognized on campus, it should be afforded the same rights and privileges that other organizations on campus, including funding.

Many of the issues listed may seem trivial to administrators who believe that their campuses are open and welcoming. This notion may be due to retention numbers. Seventh-day Adventist students do persist at institutions, but if this study is any indicator, it is not because the campuses themselves are open, inclusive and welcoming. It is in spite of it. While Seventh-day Adventist students appear to come to college prepared to meet these challenges, the research of Small (2008, 2009), Nasir and Al-Amin (2006), Rangoonwala (2009) and Speck (1997) indicate that students who feel their faith beliefs are not welcome or who believe that the campus environment is hostile towards their faith expression struggle with identity and connection to campus, which can result in the loss of the students at the institution. If higher education administrators are committed to serving all students, then they need to work to create more inclusive and welcoming environments.

The students in this study were faced with hostility towards their faith in the classroom from peers who did not understand, and faculty who did not choose to guide a true discussion of issues. They were met with disdain from organizational advisors questioning the necessity of a group they developed to provide community and support for one another. They were not provided with clear guidance on getting necessary accommodations so that they could adhere to their faith and complete their work. They persist in their college environments not because of the support institutions say will be provided for students, but because of the personal development that overcoming these hurdles and challenges sparked. These students are not the success story of their respective institutions. College administrator interactions with them did not help them succeed. Their faith preparation prior to coming to college helped them to be successful in spite of challenges that would have caused other students their age to give up and transfer elsewhere.

If higher education administrators are truly committed to developing a holistic student who we retain through graduation, more focus needs to be placed on ensuring the campus environments are as open to all as universities claim them to be. Efforts should be placed on recruiting and retaining faculty and staff who are open to learning more about creating inclusive environments. Policies around providing accommodations for students should be clear and consistent across academic departments. Universities must create environments where students can discuss divergent opinions in a respectful manner. Faculty should be empowered to steer discussions in the right direction when opinions are expressed inappropriately. While these measures may not stop students who identify as religious minorities from feeling completely marginalized by their beliefs, it is

a start in letting them recognize that they have allies in the administration that are committed to their success.

### **Conclusion**

The students in this study truly enjoy their experiences on campus. They expressed a feeling of connection to their campuses and plan to finish out their collegiate careers at the institutions they are currently attending. Through the academic environment that the secular institution has provided them, they have developed a purpose that is congruently linked to their faith beliefs, as well as determined the course for their future career goals. Their transition to college was not as challenging as some students, due in part to their faith beliefs, the community that their faith provides, and the transition of that faith community to college environment. Their church body provides outreach in a way not necessarily seen in other faith practices.

The nature of their faith coupled with their exposure to secular college environments helped these students develop skills that will transfer to successful post-college careers. In many ways, these students defied what student development theory states should be their path of development and persisted in the face of opposition that might have caused another student to leave college.

That being said, many of the issues and concerns around faith expression in college students and college environments expressed in the literature remain today. Our practices and environments are still not as conducive as they could be for healthy faith expression and a true exploration of spirituality. If our commitment to developing holistic students is true, we must take more active steps as higher education administrators to correct our environments.

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## APPENDIX A

Western Michigan University HSIRB Approval Letter

# WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: May 1, 2012

To: Donna Talbot, Principal Investigator  
LaShonda Anthony, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 11-09-14

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project titled "Committed Seventh-Day Adventist Students at Public Universities" requested in your memo dated February 28, 2012 (Modify inclusion criteria to include attendance at secular institutions, public or private; revise recruitment and consent material to reflect this change) have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: September 27, 2012

## APPENDIX B

### Recruitment Flyer



## APPENDIX C

### Letter Requesting Permission to Visit Site

My name is LaShonda Anthony and I am a Community Development Specialist at the State University of New York at Oswego and a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at Western Michigan University. I am engaging in a study of committed Seventh-day Adventist students matriculating at public universities. The chair for my dissertation committee is Dr. Donna Talbot, Professor in the Educational Leadership, Research, and Technology Department at Western Michigan University. I would like to invite you to participate in this study, which is part of the requirement to complete my dissertation. It is my hope that this study that will lead to a better understanding of the experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students and the impact of their faith practices on their college experience. As a Seventh-day Adventist, I understand how the tenets of our faith may create a unique experience for college students who are trying to navigate their college environment while maintaining their faith.

I am writing to ask if I can visit your Adventist Student Fellowship/Church Service in order to present my research proposal and seek potential participants for interviews to assist with this research. I am seeking to interview college students ages 19-24, who are sophomore standing or above, who have attended a public university for at least one semester and who are Adventist students in good standing with the church. If you agree, I will need to know when the best day and time is for me to come and visit your group/church. I can be reached via email at [lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu](mailto:lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu) or by phone at 616-295-2316.

I look forward to hearing from your group.

Sincerely,

LaShonda R. Anthony  
Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University  
616-295-2316  
[lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu](mailto:lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu)

## APPENDIX D

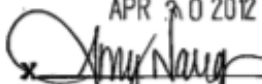
### Informed Consent Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

H. S. I. R. B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

APR 30 2012

  
HSIRB Chair

Western Michigan University  
College of Education

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Donna Talbot, Professor, Western Michigan University  
**Student Investigator:** LaShonda Anthony  
**Title of Study:** Committed Seventh-day Adventist Students at Secular Universities

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "*Committed Seventh-day Adventist Students at Secular Universities*." This project will serve as LaShonda Anthony's dissertation for the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership-Higher Education. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Seventh-day Adventist students as they successfully navigate the secular university environment. I am looking to study these experiences in order to provide higher education administrators a base of knowledge from which to work in providing services for students who adhere to religious faiths in secular campus environments.

**Who can participate in this study**

I am looking to interview college students between the ages of 19 to 24 who are sophomore status or above in college who are in good standing in the Adventist Church and have attended a secular university for at least one semester. Good standing is defined as not disfellowshipped or currently censured at the church. Secular university is defined as an institution of higher education that is not religiously affiliated. This includes private institutions. Interviews will be conducted on site at the institution where the student is attending school or via Skype. A student's inclusion in this study will be based on their self-report of these criteria.

**Where will this study take place?**

The interview will take place on the university campus where the student is matriculating or via Skype software.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

The time commitment for your participation in this study would be approximately two to three hours. The first part of your participation would be in the form of an approximately 90 minute, audio recorded interview. The second part of your participation would require you to independently review a written transcript of the interview and analysis to ensure that I have captured the description of your experience accurately. The second part may take 30 minutes to an hour to complete. Verification of your experiences would be performed via email, and if necessary, through follow up phone calls.

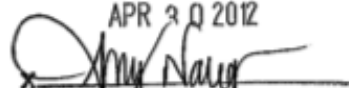


WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

H. S. I. R. B.

Approved for use for one year from this date:

APR 30 2012

  
HSIRB Chair

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

Your participation would be twofold. First, I would like to conduct an audio recorded interview, during which I would ask questions about your experiences in the public college setting as a Seventh-day Adventist. I will also take notes to supplement information shared via the audio recording. Second, I will send you my written analysis of the interview and ask you to review it to ensure that I have captured the description of your experience accurately. You will be given one week to review the narrative and verify the accuracy of it. Verification will be performed via email, and if necessary, through follow up phone calls.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

The study is designed to discover, describe, and understand the experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students at secular universities. The purpose of discovering and describing these experiences is to help higher education administrators understand these experiences and provide additional support where needed to students who are dealing with issues linked to attending at an institution that may not be aware of or understand their faith practices.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

There are risks involved in participating in this study. Because I will be asking you about your experiences at a secular university as it relates to the impact of your faith expression on your college life, you may experience some emotional discomfort as you recount your experiences. Aside from this potential risk, there are no other foreseen risks associated with participation. What you choose to disclose regarding your experiences is entirely at your discretion, and if at any point in the interview you would like to pass on a question or a topic, you may express that during the interview. As the researcher, I will make every effort to protect your confidentiality. Your name will never be linked to your interview. Prior to the start of the interview, you will select a pseudonym that will be used to identify your transcript and demographic survey data.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

One of the benefits of participating in this study is helping to shed light on the experiences of students who practice non-traditional forms of faith in the secular university setting. The information gained from this study can be used by higher education administrators to begin to develop strategies to assist students who may not capture their attention when developing services and programs for students.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**

There are no financial costs associated with participating in this interview. The review and return of the interview transcript will be done via email.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**

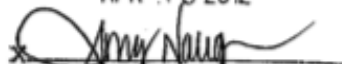
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**

The written transcripts of the interviews will be stored with the researcher in a locked file cabinet in their office for one year and at Western Michigan University in the office of the Primary Investigator for three years. The data will be delivered to the Primary Investigator on a flash

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
H. S. I. R. B.  
Approved for use for one year from this date:

APR 30 2012

  
HSIRB Chair

drive during the dissertation defense. The audio-recording of the interviews will be destroyed following verification of the narrative by the student. The results of the study may be presented at student affairs conferences and/or published in student affairs journals.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**

You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Dr. Donna Talbot at 269-387-5122 or donna.talbot@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

-----  
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Please Print Your Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX E  
Demographic Survey

## How Seventh-day Adventist Students Experience Public Institutions of Higher Education

The data in this survey is being collected to help frame the study of how Seventh-day Adventist students experience public institutions of higher education. All information contained within this survey is for general use in the study and will remain confidential.

**Do you identify as a Seventh-day Adventist student?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**If yes, are you in good standing with your church (i.e. not censored, not disfellowshipped)?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Are you actively involved in church related activities? (church attendance, mission work, involvement in student fellowship or bible study, etc)** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Year in School:** ☐ Freshman ☐ Sophomore ☐ Junior ☐ Senior

**How many semesters have you spent at your current public university?** \_\_\_\_\_  
semesters

**Are you a Transfer Student?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

**If you checked “yes,” what type of institution did you transfer from?**

☐ Community college ☐ Public University ☐ Private University

**If you are a transfer student, how many semesters did you spend/have you been attending your current public university?**

\_\_\_\_\_ semesters

**Race/Ethnic Group:**

☐ White (non-Hispanic)

☐ Hispanic

☐ Black/African American

☐ Asian/Pacific Islander

☐ Middle Eastern

☐ Native/Indigenous

☐ Multiracial

☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** ☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Transgender

## APPENDIX F

Email Not Inviting Student to Participate in Study-Do Not Fit Criteria

6/20/13

[First Name] [Last Name]

Dear [First Name]

Thank you for expressing interest in my study. Because of the criteria included in the protocol of my research, I will not be able to interview you for this study. My study focuses on Seventh-day Adventist students between the ages of 19 to 24 who are at sophomore level or higher and have spent at least one semester attending their current public university. Based on the demographic survey you returned, you do not fit one of these criteria. I appreciate your interest in participating in the study and wish you the best of luck in your academic pursuits.

Sincerely,

LaShonda R. Anthony

Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University

616-295-2316

[lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu](mailto:lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu)

## APPENDIX G

Email Not Inviting Student to Participate in Study-Too Many Volunteers

6/20/13

[First Name] [Last Name]

Dear [First Name]

Thank you for expressing interest in my study. Although you fit the criteria included in the protocol of my research, I had many volunteers for this study. Because my study calls for interviews with a small number of individuals and the high number of interested participants, I am not going to be able to interview you at this time. However, if someone drops out of the study I may be in touch with you in the future. I appreciate your interest in participating in the study and wish you luck with the rest of your school year.

Sincerely,

LaShonda R. Anthony

Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University

616-295-2316

[lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu](mailto:lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu)



## APPENDIX H

### Interview Confirmation Email

6/20/13

[First Name] [Last Name]

Dear [First Name]

Thank you for expressing interest in my study. Based on the demographic survey you returned, you fit the criteria for participation in the study. Please let me know what days and times you are available so that we can set up a time to meet for an interview. If you can return this information to me by email within three days, that would be greatly appreciated. I look forward to hearing from you.

\*Best days and times available for an interview approximately 90 minutes long:

---

Sincerely,

LaShonda R. Anthony

Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University

616-295-2316

[lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu](mailto:lashonda.r.anthony@wmich.edu)

## APPENDIX I

### Interview Protocol

Introduction: Hello, my name is LaShonda Anthony and I am a doctoral candidate at Western Michigan University. I am studying the experiences of committed Seventh-day Adventist students at public universities. My goal is to use this study to assist theorists and higher education administrators in understanding the experiences of individuals who hold on to their religious beliefs while successfully matriculating in a secular environment. Your participation will help us better understand how students who worship in non-traditional ways adapt to their university environment. If at any point in this process you feel uncomfortable or no longer wish to participate you may do so by letting me know either during the course of this interview or later on. In order to maintain confidentiality, I will now ask you to choose for yourself a pseudonym that will be assigned to your demographic survey and the transcript of this interview:

Pseudonym:

1. What is your major?
2. How did you go about choosing to attend a public university?
3. Tell me how you came into the Adventist church/faith.

Potential Prompts

- a. SDA K-12 experience?
- b. Baptism?
4. Describe your classroom experiences, as an Adventist student, at this institution.

Potential Prompts

- a. Are there ever challenges with keeping the Sabbath?
- b. Have you encountered challenges to your faith?

- c. If so, how do you face or deal with these challenges?
5. Describe your social or out-of-class experiences, as an Adventist student, at this institution.

Potential Prompts

- a. What types of organizations do you participate in?
  - b. Has your faith guided which organizations you choose to be involved with?
  - c. Do you work on campus? If so, are there challenges working around the Sabbath?
6. As an Adventist myself, I understand that there are certain expectations regarding the execution of our faith. What has been your experience in living out that component of our faith while studying at a public university?

Potential Prompts

- a. Do you find yourself able to engage in ministry activities on a public college campus?
  - b. What obstacles (if any) do you find in spreading the church's message, specifically in cases where it may conflict with the mission or vision of the institution?
7. What keeps you at a public university?

## APPENDIX J

### Email Accompanying Narrative for Verification

6/20/13

[First Name] [Last Name]

[Address]

Dear [First Name]

Thank you for your participation in my study. I have compiled the narrative of my understanding of our interview and the experiences you have had at a public university as a Seventh-day Adventist student. I have included it in this email to you. As indicted in the consent document you signed, I am asking that you review the narrative to make sure I have accurately captured our interview and your experiences. I will need to hear from you within seven days of this email. If I do not hear from you, I will assume that you find this narrative to be an accurate reflection of our interview and proceed to the next phase of my analysis. Upon completion of the research I will be more than happy to share the findings from the study with you. If you are interested in receiving this information, please feel free to contact me at my included information. Thank you once again for sharing your time and your experiences with me.

Sincerely,

LaShonda R. Anthony

Doctoral Candidate, Western Michigan University

616-295-2316

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