Core Religious Values and Health Among Young Adult Seventh-Day Adventists

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Core Religious Values and Health among Young Adult Seventh-day Adventists

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A Thesis in the Field of Anthropology and Archaeology

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

This thesis explores, from a sociocultural anthropological perspective, the values and norms that are distinctive to the young adult population of Seventh-day Adventists. In doing so, this study has uncovered the ways in which the social and cultural standards of the young-adult Adventist population differ from the traditional standards, which are found to be more prevalent among older generation Adventists. Furthermore, through research conducted in two major Adventist communities in the United States, this study looks to uncover potential distinction between the norms and values of Adventists in Southeastern Tennessee and Southern California.

From its early beginnings, rooted in the brief but impactful Millerite Movement of the 1800s, Seventh-day Adventism has developed and grown exponentially, becoming a dominant global religious denomination, with its own unique social and religious standards, which in many ways, have direct ties to the past. In this thesis, I evaluate the role that the early church played in the development of current Adventist norms, as well as the impact of their prophetic history, especially in regards to Adventist prophet Ellen G. White. White was crucial in the development of Adventist social and health principals, many of which still play a key role in the social and religious norms of modern-day Adventists.

Additionally, to establish a baseline for my current research on the values of young-adult Adventists, I provide a review of past scholarly research that demonstrates the traditional, conservative norms of Adventism, as well as studies that provide insight into more liberal religious standards among modern-day Adventists. I also consult several
studies vis-à-vis Adventist health and the impact that the traditional Adventist lifestyle has played on the overall health and longevity of Seventh-day Adventists both in the United States and abroad, to better determine the main factors that have contributed to longevity among Adventists, as it relates to my study.

In order to understand the current norms and values among the young-adult population of Seventh-day Adventists, I spent several weeks in two cities that are known for their large Adventist populations. During this time, I conducted short-term participant observation to gain an understanding of the day-to-day lives of young-adult Adventists living in these communities. Additionally, I carried out structured interviews with 17-20 Adventists in each of the two locations, to obtain data regarding the value systems of both the younger and older generation Adventists. For the purpose of this study, I identified the younger generation as individuals age 18-29 and the older generation age 30 and above. Half of interviewees in each location were of the younger generation and the other half were of the older generation. Interview questions were asked regarding several different factors, including frequency of church attendance and attendance of other religious gatherings, diet, and consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine, as well as activities that individuals engage in during the Sabbath. Participants were also asked how often that they pray privately, how much they try to carry religion into all aspects of their lives, their main motivation behind their diet and exercise choices, as well as their opinion on the Adventist Church Fundamental Beliefs.

My hypotheses, that the younger-generation is less strict in carrying out the societal aspects of Seventh-day Adventism, and that the Tennessee Adventists are more conservative than the California Adventists, were supported by my research. Through
structured interviews with 18 Adventists of the younger generation and 20 of the older generation, I discovered a higher frequency among the older generation of regular church attendance, attending religious events outside of church, vegetarianism or veganism and abstaining from stimulants. However, the younger generation was found to have a higher prevalence of praying privately multiple times a day, interest in carrying religious values into all aspects of their life and acceptance of the Fundamental Beliefs. This data suggests that young-adult Adventists are not as externally conservative as the older generation, but that they may have a slightly stronger personal religious belief system. This interesting paradox suggests that outward religious behavior may not indicate one’s internal religious belief system and that although the younger generation is not as consistent in following traditional Adventist norms, that they may be just as invested, or even slightly more so, in their personal religiosity than the older generation.

Furthermore, I discovered that, especially among the older generation, Tennessee Adventists were significantly more conservative than California Adventists. All of the older generation Tennessee participants identified as being vegetarian, abstaining from all stimulants, observing the Sabbath in a strict manner and attending worship service and other religious gatherings regularly, whereas much more inconsistency in these factors was found among the California Adventists.
Dedication

To my wonderful parents, Jerry and Gina, for always believing in me and instilling in me the belief that I can do anything that I set my mind to.

To my beloved husband, Sam, for his constant support, encouragement and invaluable advice.
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Introduction

Seventh-day Adventists have a very unique and complex cultural structure based on their religious beliefs, which set them apart from many mainstream religions today. It is due to the distinctive elements of this religious denomination, that Adventists have been found to live significantly longer than the average United States population, by a variety of past research (Buettner 2008, Le and Sabate 2014, Fraser 2001). Although ample research has been completed to better understand why Adventists are living so long, there is limited information regarding the younger-generation Adventists, and if they are continuing to carry out the traditional cultural elements of the older generations. It is vital to gain an understanding of the differences and similarities between the older and younger Adventists, as this will help to determine if longevity will remain prevalent among Seventh-day Adventists in the future.

The extraordinary longevity of Seventh-day Adventists, both in the United States and abroad, has been mainly attributed to the strict, religiously derived standards observed by traditional Adventists. Some of the main factors that contribute to this longevity include a vegan or vegetarian diet, active lifestyle, and abstaining from alcohol and smoking, along with many other small elements that define the Adventist way of life. By shedding new light on the norms of younger-generation Adventists today, this study looks to potentially determine if the established longevity among Adventists will continue to be sustained. This will be done by interpreting how the younger-generation’s values coincide or differ from the unique principles that have traditionally defined
Seventh-day Adventism, as well as identifying potential distinctions between geographic subgroups of Adventists.

My first hypothesis is that young-adult Adventists in the United States still observe the core values of Adventism, but that within these core standards, that they have become less regimented in the cultural and religious aspects of life. My second hypothesis is that Adventists in Southeastern Tennessee are stricter in following the traditional norms and values of Adventism. The inconsistent or more lax participation of these traditional elements could potentially result in a decrease of longevity in the future, among the current population of Seventh-day Adventists.

To test my hypothesis, I consulted past research to better understand the historically documented lifestyle and traditional elements of Seventh-day Adventists. With my baseline established by this research, I spent several weeks conducting participant observation in Collegedale, Tennessee, and Riverside, California, two areas with large Adventist populations. This allowed me to experience firsthand the central norms and values of Adventism by immersing myself, as much as possible, into the common Adventist lifestyle within each of these communities. Along with participant observation, I also conducted 37 structured interviews with both younger and older generation Adventists in these two locations, which allowed me to obtain quantifiable data, to establish if my hypotheses are correct.

Along with evidence from my own research of young-adult Adventists norms, I also provide a literature review of the development of Adventism as a religious denomination, as I believe that this is essential to understand the origin of Adventist
traditions as they relate to current Adventist culture. I also include an analysis of past research on a variety of Adventist social and health topics, as it relates to this study.

The first two chapters provide a comprehensive look at Adventism, from the time of its formation to modern day. Through this review of past writings and research, one can have a well-rounded understanding of the distinctiveness that sets Seventh-day Adventism apart from other major Christian religious denominations, as well as the way that the unique characteristics of Adventism have developed throughout time. This review of Adventism lays the framework for my current research on discovering the dominant norms and values among young-adult Adventists today and helps to provide an understanding behind the traditional elements of Adventism and the impact that these elements have on Adventists who choose to live this lifestyle.
Chapter I.
The Foundation of Seventh-day Adventism

Seventh-day Adventism is a widespread Protestant-Christian religious denomination that has followers across the world (Damsteegt 1977, xiii). Although it is now a well-known and highly established religious sect, Seventh-day Adventism was formed from a popular and fleeting religious movement of the nineteenth century, known as the Millerite Movement (Knight 2004, 13). Followers of the Millerite Movement were fraught with distress and disenchantment in the form of an apocalyptic prediction that never came to fruition (Knight 2004, 25). However, it is through this failed prediction that a small group of Millerite followers decided to extensively explore the teachings of the Bible, and form their own opinions, which became the start of the successful and prominent religious denomination of Seventh-day Adventism (Spalding 1961, 136-137).
The Millerite Movement was established by a Baptist minister named William Miller, who believed that he had discovered that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ would occur between the years of 1843-1844 (Knight 2000, 50). The Millerites anxiously awaited the day when Jesus would return, but Miller’s prediction began to seem less probable, as spring 1844 came and went with no occurrence of a Second Coming. A Millerite preacher suggested that, based on his own interpretations of the Daniel prophecy, that the actual date of the Second Coming was October 22, 1844 (London 2009, 17). Many followers of the Miller Movement accepted this new date, but were devastated when the day came and went, with no fulfillment of the prophecy. When the Second Coming did not occur, this shattered the entire belief system of Millerism, which

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centered on the idea that Jesus’ return was approaching in the very near future. Miller did not give up hope and continued to preach of the ever-nearing return of Jesus Christ. Shortly before his death in 1849, Miller made one final appeal, “tell them [the brethren] we are right, —the coming of the Lord draweth nigh—but they must be patient, and wait for him” (Burt 2011, 126).

When the Second Coming, or “Second Advent,” did not occur, there was an extraordinary loss of hope for many Millerite individuals and this time became known as the Great Disappointment (Knight 2004, 25). Many abandoned the Millerite Movement after the Great Disappointment, establishing new churches and belief systems (Knight 2004, 28-29). However, some individuals still saw value in the traditions and principles of the Millerite Movement and began to research the Bible for answers as to why the Second Coming did not occur when Miller believed it would. After extensive study of the Bible, this former group of Millerites concluded that Miller was correct in his chronological prediction about when the event would take place, but that he had misinterpreted what the actual event would be (Seeman 2013, 11). While researching the Bible for these answers, this group of former Millerites also came across information regarding the Sabbath being observed on the seventh day of the week. “The seventh-day Sabbath had been kept by different groups and individuals since Creation, but now it was unearthed in the context of Christ’s second advent” (Seaman 2013, 11). In addition to their reawakening to the Biblical Sabbath, this group also believed that the significant date that Miller had found in the Bible was the beginning of “the investigation of the sins of God’s people in preparation for the end of the world,” rather than the actual Second Coming of Jesus Christ (Butler and Number 1993, 200). This acceptance of the
“cleansing of the sanctuary” meaning a heavenly preparation for the rapture, rather than the literal Second Coming, along with the belief, taken from the Millerite Movement, that the Second Coming was still ever approaching, created a basis for Seventh-day Adventist denomination (Knight 1993, 32).

The small group of individuals who continued to observe some Millerite teachings, while adopting their own beliefs and traditions, directly from their interpretations of the Bible, became known as the Sabbatarian Adventists. One of the founding members of this group was Joseph Bates, a former sea captain who had been a very active member of the Millerite Movement. After the Great Disappointment, Bates read an article about the true Biblical Sabbath being on Saturday, not Sunday, written by a Free-Will Baptist minister, whom Bates compared to Biblical scripture and deemed to be true (Knight 2004, 79). Bates shared his newfound belief in the Sabbath with other previous Millerites, who were already in the process of extensively studying the Bible for answers and a deeper understanding of the scriptural messages, as well as joined in meetings with those who had already accepted this Sabbath. “Thus, by late 1845 or early 1846, a small group of Adventist believers began to form around the United doctrines of the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and the binding nature of seventh-day Sabbath” (Knight 1993, 40).

Bates began to spread his message of Sabbath-keeping through public speeches and the writing of a pamphlet, called “The Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign, From the Beginning to the Entering Into the Gates of the Holy City, According to the Commandment,” (1847) in which he emphasized the importance of keeping the seventh day holy, as it is commanded upon in the Bible. This pamphlet was eventually read by a
young, newlywed couple, James and Ellen White, who did their own biblical research on
the topic and ended up accepting the seventh-day Sabbath. “By reading that ‘little
pamphlet.’ James writes, ‘I was established upon the Sabbath and began to teach it.’
Ellen White, while not mentioning Bates’ book, recalls ‘in the autumn of 1864 we began
to observe the Bible Sabbath, and to teach and defend it’ (Knight 2004, 96).

Figure 2. James and Ellen White, two of the Seventh-day Adventist Church founders.²

After their acceptance of the Sabbath, the Whites went on to become instrumental
in the development of Seventh-day Adventism as a structured religious denomination.
The Whites quickly came to realize that Sabbatarian Adventists were sporadic
geo graphically, with no true organization in place to unify those with this shared belief.
James White took the first step of unification, with his establishment of the first

Sabbatarian Adventist journal. Andrew Mustard, in his document “Seventh-day Adventist Polity: Its Historical Development” identified these periodicals as “the most significant unifying factor among the scattered believers during those early days. James White’s involvement with this work provided him with the perspective to recognize earlier and more clearly than anyone else the need for some form of church order to foster unity” (Mustard, 7). Once Seventh-day Adventism became an established entity, it expanded greatly both within the United States and abroad, through Adventists sharing their urgent message of the Sabbath and the ever-nearing Second Coming.

During the early stages of the Seventh-day Adventist church, co-founder Ellen G. White (1827-1915) began receiving divine visions, which greatly impacted the development of the social and cultural aspects of Adventism. The prophetic history of Adventism still plays an important role in the lives of Adventists today, especially regarding Ellen White’s messages and teachings, which both expanded upon portions of the Bible itself, as well as offered guidance on how to live a life that best serves God.

Although Ellen White, through her many visions, played a very crucial role in the formation of Seventh-day Adventism, it is important to note that she did not have a significant impact on the Adventist doctrines, which had a purely Biblical foundation. However, many of the doctrines established by the early Sabbatarian Adventists through their extensive study of the Bible were confirmed to be true through White’s visions. “Thus, we can best view her role in doctrinal formation as one of confirmation rather than irrigation” (Knight 2015, 22). Although White did not establish the Adventist doctrines, she did play a highly influential role in developing elements of the Adventist lifestyle.
Through her vast number of published periodicals and books, White advised on many different subjects. One aspect that White took special attention to address was that of living a healthy lifestyle. In her book, Ministry of Healing (1909, 127), White wrote: “pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in the divine power – these are the true remedies.” These became known as the “Eight Laws of Health” and have continued to hold great importance to Adventists, even into the present. White was also passionate about vegetarianism, which she advised is crucial to maintaining proper health. In reference to eating meat, White proclaimed “in a country such as this, where there are fruits, grains, and nuts in abundance, how can one think he

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must eat the flesh of dead animals?” (White 1938, 310). Although Adventist doctrine only directly advises against eating unclean meat, many Adventists began following White’s teaching about vegetarianism. For the believers of Ellen White’s divine inspiration, following her guidance about health and other lifestyle factors were greatly important, as they allowed individuals to live the way God intended them to.

Ellen White faced criticism, both during her and after her life, with some individuals believing that her gift of prophecy was falsified. However, the belief in Ellen White as a true prophet holds great prominence in the foundation and traditions of Adventism, with many of her teachings still being followed today. The central belief system of Adventism is exemplified through the “28 Fundamental Beliefs” established by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The eighteenth Fundamental Belief identifies the church’s position regarding prophecy, in which it states, “The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested” (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2015, 8).

Though the Seventh-day Adventist Church directly acknowledges Ellen White’s gift of prophecy, both White and the church have been adamant that her word should not be taken in place of the Bible but simply is there to serve as a way to better understand elements already found within the Scripture. “One of the unfortunate aspects of Adventist history is that some church members have too often abused Ellen White’s gift by giving it more prominence than the Bible. Both of the Whites and the other founders of Adventism
rejected that non-biblical position. The gift of prophecy is a blessing to God’s church, but true Adventism has always uplifted the primacy Scripture” (Knight 2005, 38-39).

The teachings of Ellen White, and many other early Sabbatarian principles, have continued to play an impactful role in modern-day Adventist society. From its early beginnings, Seventh-day Adventism has developed and grown exponentially and as of 2016, the Seventh-day Adventist church has over 19 million members throughout the United States and abroad (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2017). Despite this great expansion of the church throughout time, the Adventist World Church has continued to be committed to maintaining specific values on many aspects of life including, diet, exercise and Sabbath-keeping. It is these values, which were developed in the formative years of the Adventist church, that have resulted in longevity among Adventists in modern times. Today, Adventists still put an exponential effort into spreading their message through everything from literature evangelism to participating in missionary efforts around the world, which allow them to continue to expand their church, while maintaining the vital standards that were established during its formation.
Chapter II.

Adventist Social and Health Principles

Seventh-day Adventism is identified primarily as a religious denomination, however, through the unique societal and cultural aspects that encompass it, Adventism has become more than just a denomination, but an actual way of life for many who identify as Adventist. “Vegetarian diet, established patterns of Sabbath-keeping, an insider language, Adventist schools, the Pathfinder Club instead of Scouting, a proliferation of Adventist organizations and a pronounced sense of being different all are artifacts of an Adventist culture” (Sahlin, 2016). Especially for those who have been raised Adventist, their self-identity can be closely tied to their religious affiliation, as many of their experiences, not only religiously but socially as well, are centered on Adventism and communal engagement with other Adventists. Evans (2006, 26) identified in her study of Adventist culture, that Adventism does not consist simply of weekly church services, but that for Adventists, “it is possible for a person to grow up in the church, be schooled by the church, and work for the church, thereby building her entire life around the church, and being solely exposed to things through an Adventist filter.” Through the connectedness of the Adventist community, a unique culture has formed with its own distinctive values and norms that have come to define Adventism.
There are many religiously derived societal norms followed by Seventh-day Adventists, which collectively create the traditional Adventist lifestyle. For example, in the observance of Sabbath, on Saturday, Adventists traditionally do not take part in normal day-to-day activities such as working, shopping, or going out to eat, and they only participate in uplifting forms of entertainment. Seventh-day Adventists place a significant emphasis on God and the teachings of the Bible, so they attempt to refrain, as much as possible, from any worldly elements that could stray them away from their virtues. This means that traditionally, many Adventists avoid watching television shows or movies that are not biblically based.

Additionally, for Adventist women, an emphasis is placed on being physically conservative, which includes dressing modestly and not wearing any makeup or jewelry, including a wedding or engagement ring. However, this has become a contested issue, especially for younger church members who perceive these concepts as being outdated. Braun (1996, 92) stated that “Seventh-day Adventists have been collecting and establishing traditions for 150 years. Part of that cultural baggage has taught us to avoid using adornment and jewelry. The time has come, and perhaps is even past, for us to re-evaluate the previous meaning of those traditions and discern if they still carry the same value for us today.”

Adventist health and diet standards also have direct ties to the past but are still widely accepted by Adventists today and play a significant role in the Adventist way of life. Although not all Adventists are currently vegetarian or vegan, a significant number of members still practice this form of diet, especially within North American. The Adventist Health Study 2 found that of 96,194 North American Adventists, age 30 and
older, that 28% are lacto-ovo vegetarian, and 8% are vegan. Although vegetarianism is encouraged by the Adventist Church, Adventist doctrine is more focused specifically on refraining from unclean meat, thus this form of diet is more universally subscribed to by Adventists, than vegetarianism (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. 2015). Adventists also place significance on being physically active and abstaining from anything that could be viewed as having harmful effects to the body. Traditionally, Adventists have been found to not only refrain from alcohol and tobacco use but also to avoid anything that could be considered a stimulant, such as caffeine or pepper as this is considered to cloud one’s connection to God. Many of these prevalent dietary norms in Adventism can be directly traced back to Biblical principles and teachings of the Adventist prophet, Ellen G. White.

Since the development of Adventism as a religious denomination, Adventists have highly valued community and are drawn to living near key institutions, such as Adventist universities and hospitals, where they can practice their beliefs and maintain shared values and standards in a communal environment. Aside from traditional weekly worship services, Adventists regularly meet for other activities as well, such as Sabbath lunches, biblical game nights and to participate in community outreach programs, which support social cohesion with others who share their unique value system. This social interconnectedness of Adventism often results in Adventists developing close relationships predominantly with individuals in their own religious community.

When it comes to dating, Adventists have been found to be conservative in their courtships and are strongly encouraged to pursue relationships with other Adventists rather than looking for romantic relationships with those outside of Adventist
communities. Vance (1999, 132) noted that “most Adventists (72.7 percent) are married and those, the majority (75 percent) are married to other Adventists. Endogamy is important to SDAs, 40 percent of whom met their spouses at Adventist educational institutions. Though Adventist endogamy is not as rigorously enforced as it was in the past, marriage to non-Adventists is believed to dilute the member’s spiritual commitment and is strongly and regularly discouraged.” Marriage between two Adventists also supports the continuation of Adventist traditions. Adventists value the nuclear family and see great importance in passing down Adventist principles and traditions to children in a home environment. A study by Dudley and Dudley (1986, 13) on the transmission of Adventist values from parents to children found that “youth tend, as would be expected by social learning theory, to resemble their parents’ religious values held. Parental modeling and reinforcement have facilitated the internalization of these principals by the child, and even the independence of adolescence cannot usually obliterate these values completely.”

Another study by Dudley (1986, 38-50) evaluated Adventist individuals from youth to young adulthood to determine the level of social attachment to the church among young-adult Adventists in the United States. This study discovered that out of the participants, “only 31% to 38% reported often experiencing the feeling that older adults or their peer group in their local congregation cared about them,” and “only 17% to 20% often participated in church social events or took leadership roles in congregational activities, and around half never did so” (Dudley 1996, 38-50). These findings suggest that young-adult Adventists would be less motivated to continue the traditions of the older-generation Adventists if many do not feel cared about or connected to their
predecessors. Additionally, the lack of involvement in societal aspects of the church could lead to a decline of the socio-cultural elements of Adventism within the younger generation.

Although many of the dominant Seventh-day Adventist values are directly displayed through the 28 Fundamental Beliefs (1988), like any religious group, the unwritten norms of Adventism are continually developing and changing. There are still those who identify with all of the traditional Adventist beliefs and live their lives accordingly, however, there are many who currently identify as Adventist, but have a more liberal belief system. A study conducted by Barna Group of 488 Adventists, age 18-29 (2013, 49) compared Adventist millennials that are currently active church members to those who no longer see personal value in attending church. In reference to millennial perceptions of traditional Adventist values and doctrine, the study stated that even those who perceive themselves as “strong” church members “have no trouble picking and choosing what they will subscribe to (though they may also keep it to themselves at their local congregation). In some cases, they mention going to the Bible, and when they can’t find certain teachings (movies, jewelry), they decide to disregard that part of Church teaching” (Barna Group 2013, 49). This study also identified that although Adventism places importance on adhering to outward behaviors that reflect traditional Adventist standards, that these behaviors are actually a poor indicator of an individual’s true commitment to God (Barna Group 2013, 8). This suggests that although the more progressive Adventists may have abandoned some of the traditional social norms, that their religious commitment may be just as strong as those who are more externally conservative.
Another subgroup of Adventists, which have been identified as “cultural Adventists,” are individuals primarily interested in the societal aspects of Adventism. Many individuals identified as cultural Adventists were raised in the Adventist community and still follow some of the cultural traditions and participate in social Adventist functions, but no longer subscribe to the religious principles of Adventism. "For the most part, cultural Adventists find comfort in Adventism because they either grew up in an Adventist environment or discovered it at some point in life--usually at a time when their personal world was in disarray due to death, divorce, illness, unemployment, a major move (immigration is the classic) or a vast array of other socially and emotionally unsettling situations. It wasn't the doctrines that attracted them primarily. It was the friendship, support and safety they encountered” (Coffin 2011, 11). Cultural Adventists value the Adventist lifestyle; not due to its religious basis, but because of the social support that Adventist communities offer. Especially for those who grew up Adventist, but strayed away from religion later in life, living as a cultural Adventist can provide a way to avoid abandoning Adventism all together, but instead allows them to live out the aspects from their Adventist upbringing that they currently identify with.

Although the Adventist church prides itself on having distinct values that create a universal identity for Adventism, both in the United States and abroad, outside social and cultural factors create distinctions between the common norms and value systems of Adventists in different communities. Evans (2006, 36) studied Adventist universities both in the United States and abroad and observed that “each community, although they are all Seventh-day Adventist, had its own unique moral codes and social expectations. This influenced everything from the type of worships offered and/or required, the educational
requirements and classes offered, the ideas inherent in the classrooms, the rules in the student handbooks, the right way to dress, and so on.” This suggests that social norms in Adventist communities are somewhat dependent, not just on Adventist doctrine, but on the geographical culture that they are a part of.

Adventists put significant emphasis on their humanitarian and missionary efforts, which has resulted in Adventism being present in more than 200 countries as of 2013 (Ball 2014, viii). Due to the geographical vastness of the Adventist World Church, each individual Adventist church and university has its own social and cultural distinctions which sets it apart from others. Columnist Dr. Alvin Masarira (2016), who grew up in Zimbabwe wrote an article about the unique aspects of African Adventists, stating “in Africa, Adventists generally spend almost the entire Sabbath daylight hours with the church family. It is common practice for us to spend Sabbath at church or in church activities (morning Sabbath school and worship services, lunch at church with fellow believers, afternoon program until Sabbath vespers at sunset). This is how Adventists in Africa understand and practice the concept of family and community: the Adventist family is a close unit that has an intricate role to play during moments of joy as well as times of sorrow.” This is a clear distinction from most Adventists within the United States, who do not tend to spend a full day at church on Sabbath. Throughout other parts of the world, and even within the United States, there are countless different Adventist communities, each adhering to Adventist traditions and principals through the lens of their own dominant culture and experience. The Adventist World Church is continuing to balance the unification of Adventism, while also allowing enough flexibility so that
different sub-groups are able to practice Adventism in a way that makes sense for their cultural community.

Various studies have been conducted to better understand the impact that the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle has on individuals, both in the United States and abroad. These studies have determined that Seventh-day Adventists have a lower occurrence of many major health issues, and are overall more likely to live longer, healthier lives than non-Adventists. This has been attributed to key factors of the Adventist lifestyle; including diet, exercise, refraining from alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco, as well as traditional Sabbath-keeping.

A large-scale study was conducted at the Loma Linda University of Public Health, from the years of 1976 to 1988, in which 34,000 Adventist individuals living in California were studied to determine what the potential correlation was between the Adventist lifestyle and longevity. The study discovered that “California Adventists live years longer than non-Adventist Californians: 7.3 years longer for men, 4.4 years for women” (Fraser, 2001). Furthermore, “Adventist males in California appear to have a 40 percent reduction in cancer risk; for women the reduction is about 25 percent” (Fraser, 2001).

Another study, conducted in 2004, aimed at observing the effect that joining the Adventist church had on adult male mortality rate. The mortality rate of males, who had joined the church as adults, was also compared to males who had been lifelong members. This twelve-year study of 29,871 Seventh-day Adventist church members concluded that there was a notable drop in the relative mortality rate of men who entered the Seventh-day Adventist church at age 50 and remained a member for ten years. There was also a
link discovered that connected the age of joining and the length of attendance in the Adventist church to a decrease in male mortality, which was concluded to be the potential result of the Adventist way of life (Heuch, Jacobsen and Fraser 2005, 83-90).

One of the specific elements commonly found among the Adventist population is a vegan or vegetarian diet. A review by Le and Sabate (2014) of three major Adventist health studies emphasizes the positive impact that veganism and vegetarianism have on the overall health and longevity of individuals. “Vegetarians have consistently shown to have lower risks for cardiometabolic outcomes and some cancers across all three prospective cohorts of Adventists. Beyond meatless diets, further avoidance of eggs and dairy products may offer a mild additional benefit. Compared to lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets, vegan diets seem to provide some added protection against obesity, hypertension, type-2 diabetes and cardiovascular mortality” (Le and Sabate 2014). This review indicates that a non-meat diet is one of the major factors for increased longevity among the Adventist population; however, it also acknowledges that there are other main factors found in conjunction with this form of diet, which may also contribute to the prevalence of longevity found among Adventists.

A study on life expectancy and mortality within the Adventist population in the Netherlands hailed similar findings to that of studies conducted within the United States, which demonstrates that Adventists within the United States are not the only ones who have above average longevity and overall better health. This ten-year study of Dutch Adventists concluded that the mean death-age of both male and female Seventh-day Adventists was remarkably higher than the general Dutch population. It was also determined through the study of Dutch Adventists that “abstinence from cigarette
smoking is the main factor explaining the low mortality from ischemic heart diseases among SDAs, while presumably an appropriate (prudent) diet confers additional benefit, for example on colon cancer mortality” (Berkel and Waard 1983, 455-459).

Aside from the established connection between longevity and the traditional Adventist views on diet and exercise, another religiously derived cultural aspect that has been considered to have an impact on the lifespan of Seventh-day Adventists, is their traditional observance of the Sabbath. Dan Buettner, an established author, and Fellow for National Geographic deemed Loma Linda, CA, a city that has a large Adventist population and influence, as one of the world’s Blue Zones, or top places for extraordinary longevity. Buettner referenced the importance of observing the Sabbath, in which Seventh-day Adventists keep as a literal day of rest. During this time, they abstain from any type of work, as well as physical or mental labor. Instead, they focus on reviving themselves from the week, worshipping, and spending communal time with others doing activities such as hiking, with the intent of becoming closer to God and nature.

The Sabbath is a way that Adventists habitually decrease the stress in their lives, which Buettner asserts is one of the keys to their longevity, as decreasing stress has been found to have the potential to reduce chronic inflammation throughout the body. Although a limited amount of inflammation can impact health in a positive way, chronic inflammation has been found to have a variety of negative effects on the body. Therefore Adventists, who, through the Sabbath, have a specific and regular way to decrease stress, are essentially facilitating the prevention of a multitude of illnesses (Buettner 2008, 143-164).
Due to the conservative nature of traditional Adventism, alcohol consumption and drug use have not been commonly found among Adventists, which has positively impacted the overall health of the Adventist population. However, a potential shift to more liberal norms among youth and young-adult Adventists may result in an increase of substance abuse among Adventists. A study by Dudley, Mutch, and Cruise, (1987) found an interesting link between participation in activities not approved by the church and an increase in alcohol consumption and drug use. Participants of this study were aged 12-24 and were studied to better understand substance abuse in the young Adventist population.

It was discovered that “Seventh-day Adventist young people as a group report considerably less frequency in the usage of alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana than is found in a comparably-aged high school population” (Dudley, Mutch and Cruise 1987, 230). However, it was also revealed that for those individuals who participate in drug and alcohol use, watching R-rated movies and listening to hard metal rock music, two activities discouraged by the Adventist church, were direct indicators of substance abuse. If young-adult Adventists are abstaining less from activities that have been historically considered taboo within the Adventist culture, this study indicates that these individuals are more likely to also be less healthy, by engaging in drug and alcohol use.

The variety of published literature regarding Adventist health has established that Seventh-day Adventists do live longer than the average population, and are overall healthier individuals, which has been directly related to the array of elements that make up the traditional Adventist lifestyle. These studies demonstrate that Adventists have what would be defined by the Durkheimian Social Theory, as a “collective conscience” or, “the totality of beliefs or sentiments common to the average members of society
which forms a determinate system” (Durkheim 2014, 39). In the case of Seventh-day Adventists, this determinate system or unifying force has been derived from their core religious beliefs. However, a potential decline in the prevalence of norms and values related to this core belief system could result in a decrease of longevity within the Adventist population. Thus, it is essential that the fundamental norms of Adventism are consistently maintained for this established prevalence of longevity to continue.
Chapter III.
Research Methods

Initially, I conducted bibliographical research to obtain a baseline of the core Adventist values that have already been established through prior studies of traditional Seventh-day Adventism. I also reviewed traditional Adventist literature, such as the writings of Adventist prophet, Ellen G. White, as these works exemplify many of the traditions and values of Adventists. After establishing the central values that have customarily defined Adventism, I spent several weeks conducting ethnographic research in Collegedale, Tennessee and the La Sierra area of Riverside, California, two communities with large Adventist populations and influence, due to the major Adventist universities that have been established in these communities.

During my research, I conducted short-term participant observation, in which I immersed myself as much as possible into the customary lifestyle of Adventist individuals living in Collegedale and La Sierra. This included attending church services, participating in social activities, such as Sabbath potlucks, as well as simply spending time with different Adventists to better understand what living an Adventist lifestyle truly entails. This allowed me to make observations of the current norms and values among Seventh-day Adventists, as well as observe certain distinctions between subcultures of Adventists in different geographical locations.

Along with my qualitative ethnographic research, I also conducted 37 structured interviews with Adventists living in La Sierra and Collegedale as well as their
surrounding areas. This allowed me to obtain measurable results regarding each participant’s experience as an Adventist, as well as to discern distinctions between younger and older generation Adventists. For the purpose of this study, I identified the younger generation as individuals age 18-29 and the older generation, aged 30 and older. Seventeen of the interviewees were of the younger generation and twenty were of the older generation.

Although participants were selected specifically from those currently living in Southeastern Tennessee and Southern California, many grew up in different states and even different countries, which allowed for a diversity of early life experiences among participants. Additionally, although participants came from a variety of social backgrounds, the majority of participants had attended college to some extent. Furthermore, most of the individuals interviewed had been raised in an Adventist household.

During the interviews, I asked individuals a variety of questions to assess both their outward commitment to Seventh-day Adventism, as well as their personal, inner commitment to their faith. To assess participant’s external commitment to Adventism, I asked participants how often they attend church services, and how often they attend other church events or religious gatherings outside of church, based on a scale of several times a week, once a week, 2-3 times a month, around once or twice a year, or never. Participants were also what activities they commonly engage in during the Sabbath, from a list of common activities, including, shopping, watching television or movies, going out to eat, reading religious books and reading secular books or magazines. To determine the level of commitment to Adventist health principles, participants were asked what specific
dietary habits are influenced by them being Adventist and if they use tobacco or consume alcohol or caffeine.

Additionally, interviewees were asked several questions to determine their inner commitment to Adventism. This included, asking how often they pray privately, outside of church and other religious gatherings, on a scale of, several times a week, once a week, once a month, around once or twice a year, or never. Participants were also asked how much they try to carry religion into all aspects of their everyday life, on a scale of a great deal, quite a bit, some, a little or not at all. Interviewees were questioned as to if they agree with all the Fundamental Beliefs, or have reservations against some, as well what the main motivation behind their health choice is. I asked the participants to answer most questions by selecting from specific responses so that the results could be accurately measured and compared. However, I also asked the interviewees to freely share what they believed the values of Adventism to be, and how well they believed that they followed those values, which allowed them to openly offer information about their own experience being Adventist and share the values which resonated with them the most.

This research allowed me to achieve a deeper understanding of the value system and current standards of Adventists, from their own perspective. Through the information I obtained, both from the interviews and participant observation, I was able to accurately interpret the way in which current norms within the young adult Adventist population correlates and differs from the traditional standards of the older-generation Adventists. This research also gave me insight into differences between the sub-cultures of Adventists in the La Sierra and Collegedale areas.
Chapter IV.

Findings

Figure 4. Demographic Information

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This sample (n=37) includes Seventh-Day Adventist church members who currently reside in Southeastern Tennessee and Southern California and are 18 years of age or older.
Through my research of Seventh-day Adventism, I was able to obtain a distinct understanding of certain marked differences between the geographic sub-groups of Adventists that were studied, as well as distinctions between the younger and older generation Adventists as a whole. Additionally, I was able to discover certain elements of Adventism that appear to be universal to the Adventist culture. Through participant observation, I came to discover the strong social cohesion of Adventism. I was surprised by the interconnections of Adventists who know one another, not only specifically within each community but between different communities as well. This appears to be attributed to many Adventists attending Adventist schools and universities together, as well as going to yearly religious conferences where they can connect with other Adventists. One specific example of this is an annual young-adult Adventist conference, called Generation of Youth for Christ, which in 2016 had “3,956 people from 56 countries and 49 of the 50 U.S.” register to attend (Shaffer, 2016). Through conferences such as this, Adventist from all over the world are able to connect and build relationships, which I observed has resulted in the Adventist community as a whole to become rather tight knit, despite being a large, global religious denomination.

Regarding the common, Adventist vegetarian diet, I was surprised at the availability of vegetarian and vegan options offered at local restaurants in Collegedale and La Sierra. Many restaurants that I personally visited actually had a separate menu page specifically for vegetarians, which makes food options readily accessible for vegetarian Adventists living in these areas. Although caffeine is discouraged by the Adventist Church, I found that there were coffee shops and other stores in these areas that sold caffeinated beverages. Although I did encounter some Adventists who drank
caffeine, I did not personally witness any Adventists drinking alcohol, or smoking, which are also against Adventist doctrine. Through the interview portion of my research, I was able to ask individuals specifically about their dietary habits, in addition to their consumption of caffeine and alcohol as well as tobacco use.

Figures 5-6 Interview Question: What specific dietary habits are influenced by your being Adventist?

![Diagram](image-url)
Figures 5-6 indicate that 100% of the older generation participants from Tennessee and 80% of the older generation participants from California are vegan or vegetarian. Whereas 71% of the younger generation participants from Tennessee and 51.4% from California identify as vegan or vegetarian. None of the interview participants identified that they have no dietary restrictions.
Figures 7-8 Interview question: Do you use tobacco, or consume alcohol or caffeine?

Figures 7-8 identify that out of the sample population, the younger generation has a higher prevalence of both alcohol and caffeine consumption than the older generation. No
participants of either age group or location uses tobacco, and none of the older-generation Adventists from Tennessee said that they drink alcohol or caffeine.

During participant observation, I attended Adventist church services at the university churches in both La Sierra and Collegedale, in which I observed some marked differences between these two sub-groups of Adventists. At the church in La Sierra, I was surprised to observe that despite it being a university church, only a small percentage of the congregation were young adults. The majority of individuals were middle-aged adults with children or senior adults. Despite the lack of younger generation Adventists, it was clear that the church was making an effort to cater to the young adult population. There were screens in several places that give directions on how to make a church donation through an app, rather than through a traditional offering passed around during the service. Additionally, the pastors appeared to choose topics for their sermons that would be more relevant to young adults, with one particular sermon even talking about current mainstream pop singers. Through various elements of the services, it was clear that this church was taking steps to get the younger generation interested and involved, despite the limited amount of younger generation individuals in attendance.

In Collegedale, the university church also appeared to be making efforts to support involvement and attendance among younger generation Adventists. The services themselves were more traditional than at the La Sierra church, but they did offer a specific student-led service each week, which included elements, such as a youth choir singing more current religious music. At the Collegedale church, I observed more young
adults in attendance than at the Riverside church, however, there were still not as many as I initially anticipated there to be in a university setting.

Figures 9-10 Interview Question: How often do you attend church services?
Figures 9-10 indicate that of the total sample size, 75% of the older generation and 58.8% of the younger generation attends church services once a week. Additionally, a higher prevalence of regular church attendance was found among Tennessee Adventists with 80% of the older generation and 60% of the younger generation attending church weekly, compared to 70% of older generation and 57.1% of the younger generation in California.

Along with attending church services, I was also invited to have lunch with Adventists after church, and to go on hikes during Sabbath. I found that eating together in a home environment, spending time in nature and just simply resting and relaxing were common Sabbath activities among the Adventists that I spent time with.
Figures 11-12 Interview question: Aside from attending church services, how often do you participate in other activities at church, or go to religious gatherings outside of church?

### Tennessee Adventists

- **Several times a week**: 5
- **Once a week**: 2
- **Once a month**: 4
- **Around once or twice a year**: 3
- **Never**: 2

### California Adventists

- **Several times a week**: 3
- **Once a week**: 2
- **Once a month**: 3
- **Around once or twice a year**: 2
- **Never**: 2
Figures 11-12 indicate that overall, 40% of the total older generation attend religious gatherings other than church services multiple times a week, whereas only 23.5% of the total younger generation attends religious gatherings several times a week. Of the older generation Adventists, attendance of religious gatherings was higher among Tennessee participants, with 50% of them attending these type of functions multiple times a week, compared to 30% of California participants. However, of the younger generation, 42.9% of California participants attended religious gatherings multiple times a week, compared to only 10% of Tennessee participants.

Figure 13-14 Interview Question: What activities do you normally engage in during the Sabbath?
Figures 13-14 indicate that overall, the younger generation is more likely to engage in secular activities on the Sabbath than the older generation. 50% of the total younger generation said that they would go out to eat during the Sabbath, whereas only 16.7% of the older generation expressed that they would go out to eat on the Sabbath. The older generation Tennessee Adventists were identified as the most conservative sub-group, with 100% of interviewees saying that they will not engage in any of the activities listed, on the Sabbath, except for reading religious books.

During interviews, participants were asked what they believe the lifestyle values of Adventism to be and how well they adhere to them, as well as how their adherence has changed over time. Overall, 80% of the 20 participants from Tennessee and 64% of the 17 participants from California directly brought up health as one of the main lifestyle factors of Adventism and shared their own experience on how well they followed the
health guidelines and other principals. One of the traditional Adventist concepts regarding health is that proper diet and exercise would allow the mind to more openly connect with God. Some of the interviewees shared this concept while answering these questions. I have selected several responses from interviewees that shared their own perspectives on this topic. Interviewee one is a 27-year-old female from California and interviewee two is a 22-year-old male, from Tennessee. Both participants were raised Adventist. Around half of the interviewees from Tennessee and a little over 20% of the California interviewees shared similar sentiments when asked the same question.

What do you understand the lifestyle choices of Adventism to be?

**Interviewee 1:** “To follow a healthy diet in order to best fit our bodies for sound decision making and a closer walk with God, enabling us to better further his work than we’d otherwise be able to do.”

**Interviewee 2:** “The lifestyle choices are in harmony with scripture that we should take care of our bodies as we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. What we put in our bodies and minds affects us spiritually. There is scientific evidence that our gut bacteria have some relationships with our neural networks. So, what we eat affects our mind, and our spiritual discernment is dependent on the state of our minds.”
Figures 15-16 Interview Question: What is the main motivation behind your diet and overall health choices?
Figures 15-16 identify that both the older and younger generation participants are more interested in keeping physically healthy than maintaining a strong connection with God when it comes to their health choices. Also, these findings show that overall 70% of the older generation California participants and 71.4% of the younger generation identify maintaining physical health as their main motivation behind their diet and health choices, compared to 50% of both the younger and older generation Tennessee participants.

In addition to assessing Adventist social and cultural practices that can be observed by others, interview participants were also asked several questions to identify their personal value system. Participants were asked how often they pray privately, how much they try to carry religion into all aspects of their lives, and if they believe in all the Fundamental Beliefs, or if they have reservations against some. These questions were asked to help discover if the interviewees’ outward behavior, such as diet and church attendance, matched their personal value system, which cannot be directly observed by someone else.
Figures 17-18 Interview Question: How often do you pray privately, outside of church, or other religious gatherings?

Tennessee Adventists

California Adventists

42
Figures 17-18 indicate that 70% of the total older generation and 82.4% of the younger generation pray privately several times a day. There is more a more diverse frequency of praying among the older generation participants, in comparison to the 90% of older generation Tennessee participants who pray multiple times a day. Among the younger generation, 80% of the Tennessee participants pray multiple times a day, compared to 85.7% of the California participants.

Figures 19-20 Interview Question: How much do you try to carry religion into all aspects of your everyday life?
Figures 19-20 indicate that, of the total participants, 76.5% of the younger generation and 70% of the older generation attempt to carry religion into all aspects of their everyday lives. Although 90% of the older generation participants from Tennessee said they try a great deal to carry religion into all aspects of their lives, only 50% of the older generation from California identified this way. Within the younger generation, 70% of the Tennessee participants and 85.7% of the California participants said they try a great deal to carry religion into all aspects of their lives.
Figures 21-22: Do you agree with all of the Fundamental Beliefs, or do you have reservations against some?
Figures 21-22 identify that 76.5% of the younger generation and 70% of the older generation agree with all of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church. 100% of the older generation from Tennessee said they agree with all of the Fundamental Beliefs, compared to 40% of the older generation in California. Of the younger generation, 70% of Tennessee participants and 85.7% of California participants agree with all of the Fundamental beliefs.

Figures 5-16 identify that in terms of outward behavior, younger generation Adventists tend to be less strict in following traditional social and cultural practices, such as regular church attendance, traditional Sabbath-keeping, as well as a vegetarian or vegan diet and the consumption of caffeine and alcohol. However, figures 17-22, which identify the internal value system, such as frequency of praying privately, how much one tries to carry religion into all aspects of their life, and acceptance of the Fundamental Beliefs, demonstrates that the younger generation is actually slightly more committed, on a personal level, to their religious values than the older generation. Additionally, all of the figures identify the older generation from Tennessee as the most conservation and traditional sub-group in this study.
Chapter V
Research Limitations

Some of the past research consulted in this study, although the best sources available for this information, were published twenty years ago, or more. Although much of the central information in these studies still holds relevance today, the patterns identified within them, especially regarding the patterns of younger-generation Adventists, may have changed from the time of their publication.

In terms of conducting ethnographic research and interviews, I was somewhat limited in the amount of time that I was able to spend in each location, due to the timeframe of this study. My research efforts were focused on two regions within the United States, so the results are based on the dominant norms of Adventists in these areas specifically, rather than the entire United States, or abroad. The two locations that I selected to conduct my research are areas with significant Adventist populations and influence, so the dominant norms within these communities may not be consistent with Adventists who do not live within large communities of other Adventists. Additionally, due to my small sample size, further research would need to be conducted to determine the generalization of the results I obtained, to all Seventh-day Adventists in these locations.

Furthermore, the majority of Adventists selected for this research were raised in an Adventist home and have completed higher education. Further research would need to be done to determine potential difference in norms between those raised Adventist and
those who became Adventist later in life, as well as the impact that level of education has on individuals, as it relates to following Adventist norms and values.
Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that there is a clear distinction between the values and norms of the younger and older generation Adventists, as well as a difference between the norm of Southern California and Southeastern Tennessee Adventists. Younger generation Adventists have been found to be less strict in following the traditional social and cultural norms of Adventism. This suggests that the younger generation is more likely to select specific standards that they follow and are willing to let go of traditional elements that they do not see as being relevant to their modern religious experience. This includes less consistency regarding a vegetarian diet, abstaining from certain stimulants, such as caffeine, as well as regular church attendance, and refraining from secular activities on the Sabbath.

In relation to diet, this study shows that the younger generation in both Tennessee and California have a lower occurrence of vegetarianism, compared to the older generation Adventists in these locations. All of the older-generation participants from Tennessee identified as being vegetarian, compared to 80% of the older generation in California. There was a higher prevalence of vegetarianism found among the younger-generation Adventists in Tennessee, at 71% compared to 51.4% in California. These findings support my hypothesis, in suggesting that the older generation has slightly more strict values regarding health and other social and cultural factors related to Adventism. It also suggests, that, in terms of diet, Tennessee Adventists may follow a vegetarian diet more consistently than California Adventists. The percentage of vegetarianism found in
this study, among both the older and younger generation Adventists is higher than previous studies have indicated. One example is the Adventist Health Study-2, which found that of 96,194 North American Adventists, age 30 and older, 28% identified as lacto-ovo vegetarians and 8% identified as vegan (Orlich et al., 2013). However, this could potentially be due to the fact that all of the participants in my study reside in large Adventist communities where vegetarian and vegan options are readily accessible, which is not universally the case, for the vast amount of individuals not living in areas with a condensed Adventist population.

Another aspect related to health, that is explored in this study, is the prevalence of tobacco use, as well as alcohol and caffeine consumption. Of the total sample size (n=37), none of the participants identified as a tobacco user. Additionally, none of the older generation participants from Tennessee said that they drink alcohol or caffeine. Only a small percentage of the remaining sub-groups said that they drink alcohol, which included one of the younger generation participants from both Tennessee and California, and one participant from the older generation in California. These findings correlate with other research, such as the Adventist Health Study 2, which found that of 96,194 North American adult Adventists, only 1.1% are smokers and 6.6% drink alcohol (Orlich et al., 2013). About half of the younger generation in both California and Tennessee and the older generation Californians said that they drink caffeine. Although, caffeine, like tobacco and alcohol, is discouraged by the Seventh-day Adventist church, this study suggests that caffeine consumption may be more common among Adventists than other stimulants.
The results regarding diet and the consumption of alcohol and caffeine suggest that Adventists within Tennessee are following some of the main Adventist health principles in a stricter manner, than Adventists in California. Additionally, these results also show that, overall, the younger generation may be slightly more likely to not follow the major Adventist health principles as consistently as the older generation Adventists.

Another factor looked at in this study, is the attendance of worship services and other religious gatherings. The findings from this topic showed that the most regular attendance was found to be of the older generation Adventists in Tennessee, suggesting that, especially among the older generation, that the Tennessee Adventists may be more interested in attending weekly religious events, compared to the California Adventists. Additionally, the younger generation was discovered to have less consistent church attendance overall, compared to the older generation, with 75% of the total older generation and 58.8% of the younger generation attending weekly church services.

My observations and data collected from interviews regarding church attendance correlate with several studies about young adult church involvement. A five year study of a national sample of Adventists by Barna Group (2006) found that “twentysomethings were nearly 70% more likely than older adults to strongly assert that if they ‘cannot find a local church that will help them become more like Christ, then they will find people and groups that will, and connect with them instead of a local church.’ They are also significantly less likely to believe that ‘a person’s faith in God is meant to be developed by involvement in a local church.’” Dudley (1999, 35), found in a ten-year longitudinal study of high-school students, that “at least 40 percent to 50 percent of Seventh-day Adventist teenagers in North America are essentially leaving the church by their middle
Although there is a clear decrease in church involvement among young adults, that is not to say that young adult Adventists have abandoned religion altogether, as some may have found other outlets to continue their religious commitment, such as watching sermons via a live stream on church websites or participating in small group Bible studies outside of church.

Another aspect considered to be very important in Adventism, and a contributing factor to longevity among Adventists, is strict observance of the Sabbath (Buettner, 2008). This study discovered that the younger generation is more likely to participate in secular activities during the Sabbath, than the older generation. All of the older generation participants from Tennessee said they would not engage in any secular activities on the Sabbath and all of them identified that they would read religious books during the Sabbath. In contrast, the older-generation California participants, as well as the younger-generation participants from both locations, said that they would participant in certain secular activities on the Sabbath, such as going out to eat, or going shopping. Overall, a higher prevalence of secular activity on Sabbath was discovered among the younger generation. The lack of strict Sabbath-Keeping among the younger generation, may be linked to the infrequent church attendance found among the younger generation, as individuals may be less likely to abstain from secular activities on the Sabbath, when they are not going to church, or participating in other Sabbath related communal events.

Although the younger generation has been found to be less strict in terms of societal Adventists norms, their personal belief system and their commitment to expanding religious values into other areas of their lives were actually found to be slightly stronger than that of the older generation. This includes acceptance of all of the
Fundamental Beliefs, praying multiple times a day and trying to carry religion into all facets of life. When asked how often they pray privately, 82.4% of the total younger generation said that they pray privately multiple times a day, compared to 70% of the older generation. However, the most consistent sub-group was the older-generation Tennessee participants, 90% of which pray multiple times a day, compared to 50% of the older-generation California participants. The younger generation in both locations were found to have similar results, with 80% from Tennessee and 85.5% from California sharing that they pray multiple times a day. The high prevalence of prayer multiple times a day, despite less consistency with other religious activities such as church attendance, suggest that the younger-generation may be just as interested as the older generation in having a relationship with God, but that they may value a personal religious experience, over one that occurs in a group environment.

Interviewees were also asked how much they try to carry religion into all aspects of their everyday life, and if they accept all of the Fundamental Beliefs, or have reservations against some. The results showed that overall, 76.5% of the younger generation and 70% of the older generation stated that they try a great deal to carry their religious beliefs into all aspects of their everyday lives. There was slightly more consistency among the results of the younger generation, with 70% of Tennessee participants and 85.7% California participants identifying a great deal of interest in bringing religion into aspects of their lives, compared to 90% of the older generation from Tennessee and only 50% of the older generation from California. The prevalent interest in carrying religion into all aspects of life, among the younger generation, continues to suggest that despite a decrease in some of the traditional elements of
Adventism, that the younger generation may be internally just as committed to Adventism as the older generation, or maybe even slightly more so.

When participants were asked if they believe in all of the Fundamental Beliefs, or if they have reservations against some, 76.5% of the younger generation and 70% of the older generation said that they agree with all of the Fundamental Beliefs. Although 100% percent of older generation participants from Tennessee agree with all of the Fundamental, only 40% of the older generation participants from California also shared that they have no reservations. This suggests that, specifically among the older generation, that the Tennessee Adventists may be more committed to traditional Adventist doctrine and value, than the California Adventists. Additionally, of the younger generation 70% of Tennessee participants and 85.7% of California participants agree with all of the Fundamental beliefs, which does indicate a strong personal commitment to traditional Adventist beliefs, among the younger generation.

Overall, this study has discovered that there is a clear distinction between Tennessee Adventists and California Adventists, especially among the older generation, with Tennessee Adventists being far more conservative and traditional than California Adventists. Additionally, the findings from this study suggest that despite a decrease in several of the traditional elements of Adventism, that members of the younger generation are internally invested in Adventism, possibly even slightly more than the older generation. This was portrayed through their high frequency of regular private prayer, interest in carrying religion into other aspects of their lives and acceptance of all of the Fundamental Beliefs. This suggests that, although the older generation tends to follow the traditional aspects of Adventism more stringently, that they may be following these
traditions habitually, due to the societal and cultural role that they play, rather than purely being due to their religious significance. These findings suggest that outward behavior and practice of religious traditions do not necessarily indicate a correlation to strong, personal religious commitment. A 2013 study by Barna Group of 448 Adventist millennials, made a similar discovery, in which they stated, “while Adventists seem to place great importance on outward behavior, such behavior is a poor predictor of their relationship with Christ.” Although the younger generation has been found to be less consistent in their participation of traditional Adventist practices, this study has found that they are still committed to Adventism but value a personal religious experience that makes sense to them, rather than instinctively following traditions that may lack relevance in current society. However, the inconsistency within the younger generation, of following some of the traditional aspects of Adventism, suggests that there is the potential for a decline in longevity among Adventists in the future, if the core social and cultural traditions, such as those regarding diet, consumption of alcohol and caffeine, as well as Sabbath-keeping continue to be less strictly observed by the current, younger generation Adventists.
Appendix

Interview Guide

1. How often do you attend church services? Several times a week, once a week, 2-3 times a month, around once or twice a year, or never?

2. Aside from attending church services, how often do you participate in other activities at church, or go to religious gatherings outside of church? Several times a week, once a week, once a month, around once or twice a year, or never?

3. How often do you pray privately, outside of church or other religious gatherings? Several times a day, once a day, once a week, 2-3 times a month, several times a year, or never?

4. How much do you try carry your religion into all aspects of your everyday life? A great deal, quite a bit, some, a little, or not at all?

5. What activities do you normally engage in during the Sabbath? Would you go shopping? Watch television or movies? Go out to eat? Read religious books? Read secular books or magazines?

6. Do you agree with all of the Fundamental Beliefs, or do you have reservations against some?

7. What do you understand the lifestyle choices of Adventism to be? How well do you adhere to them? Has your adherence changed overtime?

8. What specific dietary habits are influenced by your being Adventist? Are you a vegetarian or vegan? Do you eat unclean meat? Do you use tobacco or consume alcohol or caffeine?

9. What is the main motivation behind your diet and overall health choices? Keeping physically healthy, maintaining a strong spiritual connection with God, or both?

10. Were you raised Adventist, or did you become an Adventist later in life?
Demographic questions

1. What is your highest level of education?

2. What city/state did you grow up in?

3. What is your age?
References


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